

# **The Chilkoot Trail National Historic Site: a Canadian cultural route management approach**

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**Guy Masson**

## **Introduction**

Canada's cultural itineraries, corridors or routes are testimony of epic journeys. They are dynamic linear spaces created through the movement of the people, places of meetings and exchanges, and cross-fertilisation of cultures and values. The Canadian's cultural routes are diverse in nature as they relate to the exploration of territory, cultural practices, trade and commercial routes, and exploitation of natural resources. They are a result of intimate human interaction within the geographical environment.

Gold !, exclaimed Skookum Jim Mason to his friends George Carmack and Tagish Charley along the Rabbit Creek, later named Bonanza Creek, on 22 August 1896. When the word 'discovery' reached the outside, the Klondike Gold Rush began. It captured the imagination of the world. No image better represents that historic event than the line of thousands of stampedeers struggling over the Chilkoot Pass during the winter of 1897-98.

Today, the Chilkoot Trail is a National Historic Site of Canada commemorating this extraordinary journey. A rich history of human interaction 'making tracks' on a 700-km corridor from the Chilkoot Pass to Dawson City, within the Yukon Territory's dramatic natural environment. This cultural route is rich in national historic sites and heritage rivers like the Chilkoot Trail, Yukon River, the SS Klondike National Historic Site (NHS), the Dredge No. 4 NHS and the Dawson City Historical Complex that attest to the determination and ingenuity of the gold seekers that transformed the natural landscape into a cultural landscape.

The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada declared the Chilkoot Trail a place of national significance in 1987. The management planning of a national historic site is based on its commemorative intent, a statement of what is nationally significant about the site. The Statement of Commemorative Intent for the site states that: 'The Chilkoot Trail was designated a national historic site for the role it played) in the mass movement of people to the Yukon during the Klondike Gold Rush.' The Chilkoot Trail NHS is administered by Parks Canada Agency whose mandate is to ensure the commemorative integrity as a priority in the administration and management of these sites.

Developing a management approach for a 700-km cultural route is a complex task. This case study is limited to the Chilkoot Trail National Historic Site, a 46-km trail of amazing natural landscape challenges, viewsapes and natural stops which became instant cities during the Gold Rush such as Lindeman City and Bennett City. Its management plan is based on Parks Canada National Historic Sites Guide to Management Planning and Cultural Resource Management policy and principles.

## **Goals of management planning**

A management plan is a strategic guide to future management of a national historic site like the Chilkoot Trail. It is the primary public accountability document for a national historic site. The management planning actions will define a framework for subsequent management decisions; sets long-range direction for the management of cultural and natural resources of the cultural corridor; establish appropriate activities; and ensure that good cultural resource management and practices are in place in all decisions. The goals of a national historic site management plan are to:

- 1) Ensure commemorative integrity of place on national significance;
- 1) Ensure protection and presentation of cultural resources;
- 3) Ensure application of Cultural Resources Management policy in all decisions that affect cultural resources.

### **Goal 1: Ensure commemorative integrity of place of national significance**

The commemorative integrity is a holistic approach describing the health and wholeness of a National Historic Site. The Chilkoot Trail, as a cultural corridor and national historic site, possesses commemorative integrity when:

- Resources that symbolize or represent the national importance are not impaired or under threat;
- Reason(s) for the site's national significance and its role in Canadian History are effectively communicated to the public;
- The site's heritage values are respected by all decisions or actions affect the site.

The first element of commemorative integrity is the resources that symbolize, or represent the cultural corridor. The following resources have been instrumental in the designation of the Chilkoot Trail national significance;

- 1) Historic Place: the route through the Chilkoot Pass and the natural stopping places;
- 2) Landscape Features: the setting of the trail, its viewsapes and the relic cultural landscape reflect the trail experience;
- 3) Built Resources: Building and landscape features related to the period. These features shaped the experience and subsequently defined the memories, stories and history of the gold rush travellers;
- 4) In-situ and Collectable Objects: in-situ resources and collected objects are resources identified for the Chilkoot Trail that must not be threatened or impaired.

The second element of commemorative integrity focuses on the effective communication of the reasons for the site's national historic significance. This forms an important component of the messages to be delivered. This means that visitors to the site must understand not only the significant role of the Chilkoot Trail cultural corridor as it relates to the mass movement of people into the Yukon, but also the

context of the Klondike Gold Rush as a social phenomenon that shaped the Yukon region over the last century and its significance as part of Canadian national history.

The third element of the commemorative integrity is that the site's other heritage values are respected by all decisions and actions affecting the site. Beyond the values of national historic significance, the heritage values associated with the Chilkoot Trail include:

- The character of the dynamic ecology of the natural environment in the corridor as an experience aspect of the traveller's experience;
- Continuing use of the trail as a First Nation hunting and berry picking area remains an important part of the heritage of the corridor;

## **Goal 2: Ensure the protection and presentation of cultural resources**

Ensuring the protection and presentation of the cultural resources symbolizing or representing the Chilkoot Trail. Seven strategic elements of the management planning process have been selected from the management plan for the purpose of this case study.

### 1) Establish a current situation analysis for the historic place

The purpose of the current situation analysis is to determine, reduce or eliminate visitor impacts on the relic landscape at or near historic stopping places. For instance, hikers have to check in at the 'Trail Centre' in order to pick up their permits, information package which includes information regarding the protection of artefacts, hazards on the trail, and advise of any closures due to bear activity. This information were given to the 3076 hikers who passed along the trail in 1999.

### 2) Establish a vision for the future Land Use Zoning

Based on the current situation analysis, the Chilkoot Trail NHS, envisioned as a relic cultural landscape, will be managed in accordance with the CIS and Parks Canada's Cultural Management Policy. The natural evolution of cultural and natural resources will be managed in a manner unimpaired by human impact. Land use zoning must reflect the vision, goals objectives and management actions to offer a unique opportunity for visitor to appreciate, enjoy, and understand the national significance of the site. For instance the land use zoning focuses on Historic Area and Visitor Activity; Historic protection, preservation; Natural Areas; and Services Nodes. Understanding the current situation of the historic place and establishing a vision and implementing land zoning, are three basic activities for identifying objectives and key actions.

### 3) Establish objectives and key actions for the historic place

The objectives are directly related to nationally significant cultural resources values, for example:

- Maintain the geographic character of the trail corridor which is characterized by the linearity of the route and the visual sense of containment in it s own valley;
- Maintain the relationship between the commemorated trail and the natural stopping places and the local topography;

One of the key actions is summarized as follows:

- Conduct environmental assessment and monitor impact on heritage values of the place.

#### 4) Establish current situation analysis of cultural landscape

Cultural features in the landscape are another physical expression of the values of the historic place. Through the modification of the site, people have left an imprint of their presence and a reflection of the social organisation developed to cope with the mass movement through the Chilkoot Pass during the Gold Rush. The protection of that imprint in the natural environment is valued. The following reflect the values of the Chilkoot Trail as landscape values:

- The historic foot trails, roadways and vestiges of the associated water routes of the Chilkoot that run from the summit of the Chilkoot Pass to Bennett City; (Slide:33) and
- The natural stopping point places along the trail. These tangible modifications to the place speak about the life and experience of those travelling through the pass during the gold rush.

#### 5) Establish objectives for the cultural landscape

The objectives and key actions are directly related to the nationally significant heritage values. For example:

- Maintain the location, orientation and character of the commemorated trail;
- Evaluate changes made for the protection of cultural resources and public safety and maintain character of these features;
- Monitor the erosion and visitor damages to these features through full heritage recording.

#### 6) Establish current situation analysis for built resources

The historic built resources at the site were recorded in accordance with conservation standards. Based on a monitoring program and field observations, Parks Canada staff have identified some concerns for the long-term structural integrity of the Presbyterian Church steeple, and threats such as wildfire and vandalism at the site. The church is the only tangible resource directly related to the designation of this national historic site.

#### 7) Establish objective and key action for built resources

The church has an important value as the sole surviving structure from the commemoration period. Used as an icon of the gold rush experience the heritage character defining features of the church are its location and orientation, massing, rustic cladding, and remaining original material. The methods of its construction, by volunteers during the rush, and its use as a centre of social activity in the community of Bennett, are also factors directly linking this structure to the commemorative intent. The objectives could be summarised as:

- Maintain the location and retain the appearance, defined by rustic cladding and architecture;
- Conserve the original building materials and cladding of the Church according to conservation standards.

### **Goal 3: Application of the Cultural Resources Management policy**

Parks Canada's Cultural Resource Management policy is an integrated and holistic approach to the management of cultural resources. The term cultural resource embraces the whole as well as the parts that make up the whole. The Chilkoot Trail NHS area is a part of what make up the whole 700-km cultural corridor. In managing cultural resources, Parks Canada adheres to the principles of value, public benefit, understanding, respect and integrity. The principles provide a means for determining the appropriateness of the management plan objectives and key actions affecting cultural resources. For example:

- Principle of value: relates to the Chilkoot Trail Historic Place, landscape features, built resources, in-situ and collectable objects that symbolize or represent the national significance and have historic value. It is for these values that cultural resources will be safeguarded and presented for public benefit.
- Principle of Public Benefit: public benefit of the Chilkoot trail cultural resources will be most appropriately achieved by the protection and presentation of cultural resources of national significance. The continuing public benefit will be assured through ongoing maintenance and care.
- Principle of Understanding: the care and presentation of cultural resources require knowledge, and understanding of the resources, the history they represent, and of the most effective means to communicate to the public, based on professional and technical skills and expertise, the history of the Chilkoot Trail as part of the Klondike Gold Rush.
- Principle of Respect: those who hold our heritage in trust are responsible for passing on that cultural corridor heritage in ways that maintain its potential for future understanding, appreciation and study. As an irreplaceable part of this heritage, the Chilkoot Trail cultural resources will be managed with continuous care and with respect for their historic value and character.
- Principle of Integrity: relates to the presentation of the past in a manner that accurately reflects the range and complexity of human history commemorated. Presentation and conservation activities are based on extensive knowledge, when they are carefully documented and recorded.

Applying the principles to the Chilkoot Trail cultural resources management will ensure its level of authenticity through the respect of natural resources evolution.

### **Conclusion**

The Chilkoot Trail National Historic Site of Canada management plan also raises issues related to land jurisdiction, other heritage places like the White Pass Railway, and public enjoyment issues. How to collaborate and foster a working relationship with the First Nations, Provincial Government, cultural tourism industry, and the local community as partners without compromising the commemorative integrity of the site, is a key action of responsible management. In other words, a cultural route is a place of stewardship and partnership.

Like several countries in the world, Canada's cultural corridors raise complex management issues such as ensuring the ecological integrity of natural resources, ensuring the commemorative integrity of national historic sites and the delivery of

national significant messages, and the management of space and cultural heritage between places of national significance. Preserving these natural and cultural resources, including landscape features, as a continuous link to maintain its wholeness of spirit, its authenticity and the overall character of a cultural route is a challenge and a universal concern for the International Committee on Cultural Routes.

## **References**

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