

New Park Stirs Stampeder Spirit Again

By Cpl. D. W. Levy

"The steamer Portland, headed out of St. Michael, Alaska, steamed down to Seattle this morning with a ton of gold aboard."

Before noon that day, every berth aboard the Portland was booked for the return trip to the North. Telegraph wires hummed with the details of the 68 miners who wrestled with their gear and jars of gold down the gangplank. The gold actually weighed more than two tons. The stampede to the Klondike fields was on.

Chilkoot Pass became the most popular of four major routes to the gold fields. Nearby White Pass was too swampy; the route from Seattle by ship to St. Michael, and then by steamboat up the Yukon River was too expensive and took a whole season; the all-Canadian passage from Edmonton down the Mackenzie River and across a mountain range to the Yukon River was too brutal.

The Chilkoot trail was the toughest on the stampede. The North West Mounted Police required that each person had to pack about a ton of gear into Canada. Each person was checked at the international boundary to ensure he had a year's supply of food and other supplies he would need to survive in the northern wilderness. Pack animals could not be used easily and, before the tramways were built, the massive load had to be carried on human backs. Many trips had to be made by the stampedeers up and down the rugged trail to bring all their gear with them.

The spirit of the Klondike gold rush is gripping hundreds of modern day stampedeers. Last summer more than 1,500 hikers trekked up the Chilkoot Pass Trail, the largest number since the gold rush days of '98. And with the official dedica-

tion of the Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park in Skagway, the number of hikers on the trail will likely increase every year. However, modern day hikers who follow the footsteps of the early prospectors don't have the burden of carrying a ton of goods with them, or crossing rivers without bridges. Thousands of hikers from all over the world have made the trek since the restoration of the trail from Dyea, Alaska, to Bennett, British Columbia.

The historical park in Skagway, which opened last year, is divided into four distinct units, each covering a certain aspect of the stampedeers' route on the way to the Klondike gold fields.

The gateway unit in Seattle, the departure point for the majority of stampedeers, consists of a building in Pioneer Square which will house an American National Park Visitor Centre with an auditorium for exhibits.

The Skagway Park encompasses an eight-block historical district in the business area. About 55 wooden structures have been designated for restoration, with an old train depot which will serve as a National Park Visitor Centre.

The White Pass Trail covers about 3,360 acres, a mile wide and five miles long, and extends from the historical site of White Pass City to the international boundary. The city's remains will be preserved and the upper part of White Pass Trail and Brackett Road will be restored. Right now, the trail can only be travelled by train.

The final unit of the historical park on the American side is a corridor of land