

TRAVEL

Grey power on the historic Chilkoot Trail

By Ardis Kamra

The Chilkoot Pass straddles the mountainous border between Alaska and British Columbia. It became famous in 1898 when

Yukon-bound gold seekers discovered that this was the shortest route from the sea to the fabled Klondike gold fields.

Since the 1970s the Chilkoot Trail has been preserved as an international park. Each year about 6000 people, ranging in age from eight to eighty, trek in the footsteps of the gold seekers of 1898.

The subject of backpacking over the Chilkoot Trail came up one January evening as we relaxed after dinner with some friends. My husband Krish and I, both in our early sixties, had nev-

er backpacked before although we'd done some mountain hiking when we were young.

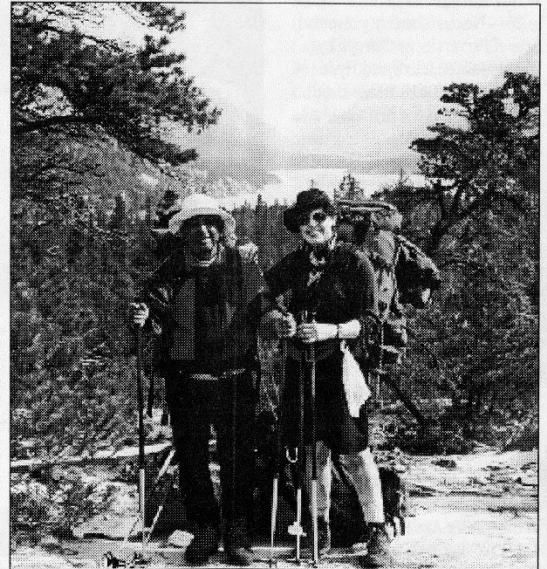
Krish said, "Let's do it!" And the next thing we knew we were making lists of clothing and equipment and making reservations.

Our only preparations for our five-day hike in mid-July were some fitness courses at our local "Y" and a weekend at Mount Assiniboine Lodge where we practised walking skills, tried out our backpacks and learned to use mountaineering poles.

Krish and I arrived in Skagway by ferry on a glorious 90° F July morning. We registered at the American Forestry Service Office where we were given trail maps.

The next day was as warm and cloudless as the day before. We left the trailhead at Dyea around noon and set out for Canyon City some seven and one-half miles ahead. The narrow trail rose steeply at first, but levelled off in a lush rain forest where the sun filtered down through spruce and fern, bathing us in golden green light. Surrounded by millions of hungry black flies, mosquitoes, deer flies and no-see-ums, we drenched ourselves with insect repellent, but the clouds of insects remained.

There is no electricity along the



Krish and Ardis Kamra challenge the Chilkoot Pass.

Photo courtesy of Ardis Kamra

garbage, not even a tiny shred of paper, can be left anywhere. Water must be collected, purified and disposed of with great care to avoid any negative impact on the environment.

When we reached the Canyon City area about 5 pm, we rushed to pitch our tent to escape from the clouds of bugs.

bugs away. After breakfast we crossed the Taiya River to visit the ruins of Canyon City. Once home to 1500, its aerial tramway had ferried supplies of the wealthier gold seekers over the pass.

The rain came down more heavily as we headed up the path towards Sheep Camp, our stop for the night. We caught brief

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trail. The only amenities are pit toilets and log cabin shelters. No

Next morning we awoke to a light rain which had driven the

glimpses of glaciers on the peaks across the river and waterfalls and canyon walls on our right.

Sheep Camp (Mile 13), once a bustling transient stop, is now occupied by a warm-up cabin and a US forestry station.

When we arrived in late afternoon, thirty campers from

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