



**PROJECT REPORT**  
**Alaska Volunteer Trip**  
**Juneau Ranger District, Tongass National Forest**  
**and Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park**  
**July 19-29, 2016**



**SUMMARY**

Fifteen ConservationVIP volunteers, including three trip leaders, traveled from the lower United States to Alaska to work on trails at two separate locations. On the Juneau Ranger District of the Tongass National Forest, they helped construct a new trail reroute at the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area. At the Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park near Skagway, they helped construct new interpretive trails within the historic townsite of Dyea. Other individuals joined us, including Forest Service and Park Service employees, as well as other agency partners and volunteers. All tools, materials and supplies were provided by the

respective agencies. ConservationVIP volunteers contributed over 307 hours at Mendenhall Glacier and 367 hours at Dyea.

## **SPECIFIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

### **Mendenhall Glacier, Tongass National Forest (near Juneau)**

Adjacent to the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center is a large wooded flat area with a network of waterways and heavily used trails. Beavers had dammed and raised one of the waterways, resulting in a flooded segment of one of the trails. As this had happened several times before, agency personnel decided to reroute that section of trail to get it further from the waterway, and therefore less prone to flooding. Our job was to work with a local nonprofit, Trail Mix, Inc., to construct the approximately 500-foot-long new trail.

After a very comprehensive "Working in Bear Country" safety orientation, we walked into the job site. When we arrived, the new trail had been cleared of trees and large bags of gravel had been flown in by helicopter to various locations along the trail. We conducted a project orientation and safety meeting, and commenced working, under the direction of the Trail Mix supervisor. Two Forest Service employees worked with us part time, as did an entire family related to one of the employees. We worked here three days.

Actual work activities included:

- Grubbing and removing vegetative material to mineral soil;
- removing stumps;
- moving the above material into the woods far enough that it wasn't visible from the trail;
- excavating and shaping/leveling the trail subgrade;
- installing culverts and rock drains;
- picking, hauling and placing rocks (some very large) for culvert headwalls and trail cut and fill slope embankment;
- camouflaging stumps too large to move out of sight, as well as the visible portions of the abandoned section of trail;
- placing filter cloth on the trail subgrade;
- placing and grading 4-6 inches of gravel on the subgrade; and
- placing moss on all disturbed areas adjacent to the trail, cut and fill slopes, and the staging areas.



### **Dyea townsite, Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park (near Skagway)**

Dyea literally sprang up overnight in 1897 after gold was discovered in the Yukon Territory of British Columbia. It lies at the end of the beautiful, ninety-mile-long Lynn Canal, about 90 miles north of Juneau. Dyea began as a tent city but quickly became a well-laid out city of about 8,000 people. However, the gold rush ended quickly, and people moved on, leaving a deserted town. Now all that remains is one store front and pilings for a pier out in to Lynn Canal, and a treasure trove of smaller remains.

Today the town site still piques the curiosity and imagination of visitors whose curiosity brings them to this remote location. Tourists wander the site, and Park Service and private interpreters give tours. Trails, however, are informal and of poor quality and location.

The Park Service has developed a comprehensive plan for a new interpretive trail system to replace the existing trails. The new trails are being constructed on the exact location of some of the original streets of Dyea, which will make for a much better interpretive experience. These trails will be six feet wide with a gravel surface. We worked here four days.

Prior to our arrival, the Park Service had surveyed the new trails and cut all trees within the right-of-way of the new trails. They also had a back hoe, Bobcat and gravel on site. Upon our arrival, we were oriented to the project, and conducted safety training. Two Park Service employees worked with us every day. In addition, six Student Conservation Corps (SCA) enrollees joined us, with their supervisor.

Work consisted of the following:

- Using an axe or the cutting end of a Pulaski, cutting through the vegetative mat and forest floor along both edges of the new trail and then pulling the mat back into the trail about 12-18 inches;
- digging around each stump, exposing the roots, so they could be pulled out with the back hoe;
- cutting the roots with hand saws, or Park Service personnel cutting them with a chain saw;
- using their heavy equipment, Park Service employees removed the tundra and the stumps, and leveled the subgrade;
- picking out all the roots and doing finish leveling of the subgrade;
- using the heavy equipment again, the Park Service put gravel on the subgrade, followed by volunteers doing the finish smoothing of the surface; and
- restoring all disturbed areas adjacent to the trail.

ConservationVIP volunteers, assisted by the SCA, completed all the work on two 520-foot-long segments of trail, including cutting the vegetative mat on both sides, prepping about 40 stumps for removal by the back hoe, and lots of finish work—leveling and picking roots from the subgrade, restoration and leveling gravel. In addition, they prepped about 10 stumps on a third segment of trail.



## GENERAL INFORMATION

The volunteers bonded quickly and everyone got along very well. ConservationVIP volunteers “adopted” the young SCA enrollees, and enjoyed working with Trail Mix, Forest Service and Park Service employees. Everyone was proud of their shared accomplishments.

In Juneau, we stayed in a University of Alaska dormitory, and they provided our initial dinner, and lunches and breakfasts. Dinner on day 2 was an outdoor salmon bake, while days 3 and 4 were off-the-menu in restaurants in Juneau. Transportation was by rental vans, which were newer and quite adequate. A two hour break was provided so the volunteers could enjoy the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center and adjacent sights.

We traveled from Juneau to Skagway via the Alaska State Ferry System. Upon arrival, we picked up two rental vans, again newer and quite adequate. We stayed at the Chilkoot Trail Outpost, a bed and breakfast establishment with small 2-person cabins and one larger dormitory style retreat building. They provided all meals except one dinner in Skagway. Volunteers commented about the limited breakfast menu and some stated they would have liked “heartier” dinners.

After four days of work in Dyea, volunteers were able to enjoy a half-day ride on the historic White Pass & Yukon Route Railroad, a narrow gauge railroad built in 1898 that now serves tourists and visitors. The route is spectacular and climbs nearly 3,000 feet in 20 miles. The next morning the volunteers caught an early catamaran to return from Skagway to Juneau, concluding the volunteer trip at the Juneau Airport.

## SUMMARY:

The trip was considered very successful. The volunteers worked and traveled safely with no accidents or other incidents. They had fun, and all the work the agency people hoped would get done was accomplished. With two exceptions, travel and all other logistics worked to perfection. When the ConservationVIP leaders arrived to pick up vans in Juneau, the rental company had mixed up the reservation and had no vans available; however, the supervisor "found" vans for us by the next day. The other issue was food quantity at the Chilkoot Trail Outpost.

Relationships were built with both the Park Service and the Forest Service, and both expressed hope we can return in the future.

