

Dick & Lynette's 1993 Alaska Road Trip



(Yukon River from the Dalton Highway)

Introduction August – 1997

The concept of actually visiting Alaska hit me when National Geographic put a map of Alaska in an issue sometime in the early 1990s. I am a map freak - I can spend hours with a map - nearly any map. Alaska wasn't so far away - from the looks of things on the map, it was just a little way north from the north end of Vancouver Island. In the early spring of 1992, I took my vacation accrual spread sheet and figured out how soon I could take five weeks off in a row if I stopped using a day here and a day there, and we decided to visit Alaska in the summer of 1993. I bought the book ALASKA-YUKON HANDBOOK at the Cal Poly bookstore, and took it on a short vacation trip to Death Valley in early April. I read it from cover to cover and started developing itineraries. The more we planned and talked about what we wanted to see, the more excited I got - I started ordering books and guides and tourist materials, and making everyone around me crazy because I talked of little else. I started counting backwards from the departure date almost a year in advance (! only 333 days to go!). LL Bean loved us that year - we bought new sleeping bags, a new tent, a new roof-top carrier for our new Jeep, new this and new that - they even sent us a Christmas card!

The whole trip seemed and still seems surreal - I know I was there, but I still can't believe it. After the pictures came back I thought many times about sitting down and writing a travelogue, but the inspiration never came until I discovered the travel writings of my web/e-mail pal Jim Schrempp. He has a list of places he wants to visit on his web-site - Alaska was way down around number 10. I wrote him and encouraged him to move that trip way up the list! His brother Mike had traveled to Alaska and Jim has Mike's trip notes posted on his web site as a visiting author. I sent Jim a note briefly (real brief - 1-2 sentences) describing our trip. Jim asked if he could post MY note in his visiting authors section. Well, that got me thinking - I have a LOT more to say about Alaska than just a sentence noting that we did a five week road trip in our Jeep Grand Cherokee, staying most nights in our tent! I brought my diaries, maps, books and reference materials to work and for the past month and a half, I've been doing what I should have done a long time ago, using my lunch hour to set our trip in writing.

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If
Mississippi
lent
Missouri
her
New Jersey
what
will
Delaware?
Idaho,
ALASKA!

-

"I'm a thousand miles from nowhere
Time don't matter to me
Cause I'm a thousand miles
from nowhere
and there's no place I'd rather be"

(slight paraphrase of Dwight Yokum's "Thousand Miles from Nowhere" - "THIS TIME" CD)

Itinerary:

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1993						7/31 Atascadero CA to Dunsmuir CA (460 miles)
8/1 Dunsmuir CA to Kelso Washington (426 miles)	8/2 Kelso WA to Hope British Columbia (290 miles)	8/3 Hope BC to Clinton BC (159 miles)	8/4 Clinton BC to Bear Lake BC (Crooked River Provincial Park) (296 miles)	8/5 Bear Lake to Dawson Creek BC (204 miles)	8/6 Dawson Creek BC to Fort Nelson BC (291 miles)	8/7 Fort Nelson BC to Watson Lake, Yukon Territory (324 miles)
8/8 Watson Lake YT to White Horse YT (276 miles)	8/9 White Horse YT to Dawson City YT (350 miles)	8/10 Dawson City YT to Eagle Alaska (143 miles)	8/11 Eagle AK (16 miles)	8/12 Eagle AK to Tok AK (172 miles)	8/13 Tok AK (6 miles)	8/14 Tok AK to Yukon River Crossing AK (335 miles)
8/15 Yukon River Crossing to Arctic Circle to Fairbanks AK (256 miles)	8/16 Fairbanks AK to Healy AK (152 miles)	8/17 Denali National Park (52 miles)	8/18 Healy AK to Gakona AK (254 miles)	8/19 Gakona AK to Silver Lake AK (74 miles)	8/20 Silver Lake AK (0 miles)	8/21 Silver Lake AK to Tok AK (215 miles)
8/22 Tok AK to Haines Junction YT (301 miles)	8/23 Haines Jct. YT to Skagway AK (208 miles)	8/24 Skagway AK to Haines AK and back to Skagway AK (0 miles)	8/25 Skagway AK (11 miles)	8/26 Skagway AK to Watson Lake YT (322 miles)	8/27 Watson Lake YT to Hyder AK (410 miles)	8/28 Hyder AK to Burns Lake BC (299 miles)
8/29 Burns Lake BC to Clinton BC (386 miles)	8/30 Clinton BC to Hope BC (182 miles)	8/31 Hope BC to Cottage Grove Oregon (468 miles)	9/1 Cottage Grove OR to Williams CA (391 miles)	9/2 Williams CA to Atascadero CA (309 miles)		

8038 total road miles: over 1000 on dirt roads

Synopsis:

The Short Version: The trip was fabulous. We would leave again today and do the exact same trip at the drop of a hat (well, mostly). We drove our Jeep Grand Cherokee a little over 8000 miles in 5 weeks, spending most nights in our tent. 1000 of the miles were on non-paved roads.

Regrets: Mostly places we missed or didn't stay long enough

- Stone Mountain Provincial Park (didn't stay long enough)
- Fox Lake YT (ditto)
- Deadhorse AK (missed)
- Inuvik NWT (missed)
- Valdez AK (missed)
- Cassiar Highway Region (blazed through - shoulda stayed longer)

Destinations for next time:

- Vancouver Island (all the way up)
- Panhandle (via ferry)
- Kenai peninsula
- Nome
- Haines Road - Chilkat valley - bald eagles!
- All the places listed in "regrets" above!

Major League Recommendations:

- Gakona Lodge / Road House (907)822-3482 Box 284, Gakona AK 99586
- Watson Lake Sign Post Forest
- Diamond Tooth Gertie's (Dawson City, YT)
- SS Klondike Museum (Whitehorse, YT)
- The Arctic Circle
- Skagway, AK

Disappointments:

- Fog / Low clouds blocking visibility in Alaska Range, the Cassiar Highway region of British Columbia and Kluane National Park in the Yukon Territory. Would probably be better earlier in the year (July).
- Fairbanks

Stand-out Memories:

- Water - EVERYWHERE!
- Diversity of bridge designs
- The word "remote" given a whole new slant

Lessons:

- Take two spare tires
- MILEPOST is a must, but don't believe every word you read
- In Alaska, Spring is June, Summer is July, Autumn is August - then there's winter...

Daily Summaries

DAY 1: Saturday 7/31 ATASCADERO CA TO DUNSMUIR CA

Weather: HOT!

Road Conditions: California Freeways - what can I say

Miles Traveled: 460

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: The Salinas valley is gorgeous in the early morning - Bay area freeways suck - rural California re-emerges after Vacaville, then suddenly Mt. Shasta appears and is an ever-present companion for many, many miles. We stopped for the day in Dunsmuir - in the pines, but still real hot. We stayed in a nice campground called Rail Road Park. A lovely bone-chilling stream cuts through the camp ground, headed for the Sacramento River far below.



(Dick cooling off in the stream – Dunsmuir, CA)

DAY 2: Sunday 8/1 DUNSMUIR CA TO KELSO WASHINGTON

Weather: HOT!

Road Conditions: California / Oregon Freeway - I-5

Miles Traveled: 426

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: After Mount Shasta, California levels out into a gorgeous high desert plain. This is an area to re-visit! Yreka, Montague, Weed - then over the mountain and in to Oregon. Oregon seems to go on forever - pretty land, but rather nondescript. The intent of these first couple of days was to put as many miles behind us as possible, however, the first night camping served as a shake-down and we stopped in Roseburg, Oregon to stock up on some supplies we had not brought with us. Drove on and on and on through Oregon (yawn) -

over the Columbia River on the bypass freeway (not through down-town Portland). The weather was still clear and beautiful - lots of locals laying around on the shore soaking up sun (probably a rare occurrence!). By this time we were tired of driving, but were in the middle of urban sprawl that appears to continue most of the way to Seattle. We stopped for the night in a Comfort Inn in Kelso, Washington. We swam in the indoor pool (ick!) and watched Clint Eastwood movies on the motel TV (some kind of marathon). Hoping for an early start.

DAY 3: Monday 8/2 KELSO WA TO HOPE BRITISH COLUMBIA

Weather: Still HOT and clear and sunny - how strange!

Road Conditions: I-5 to Bellingham - then little back roads to Sumas / Huntingdon border crossing into British Columbia.

Miles Traveled: 290

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: If you ever go to Canada, don't go on the first Monday of August. It is a holiday (BC Day). Every person in British Columbia had crossed the border into the US for the weekend and was trying to get back across. The line at the border was miles long. It took forever and ever (amen) to get through. Finally - hot hours later, we crossed, and drove into Abbotsford to exchange our money. The books all say not to do this in the USA, and not to do it at a hotel - the best exchange rate is at a bank. Fine. All the banks were closed because of the HOLIDAY - so we were in Canada (finally) and had no cash. Thank goodness for VISA! The lower Fraser River valley is gorgeous - very steep high mountains with a wide fertile valley between. Orderly little towns and farms fill the landscape. I remembered the town of Hope from a previous trip to BC when I was a kid. That is also where we planned to leave the main drag (Canada Route 1) and head north towards Cache Creek. We found a lovely little private campground with lawns and flowers called Wild Rose Campground. Most people would think it too close to the Rail Road Tracks, but not us! We loved watching the trains! One train per hour at least - day and night. This is the main rail route into Vancouver from all over Canada -- both Canadian National and Canadian Pacific trains. Hope is also a haven for gliders. They take off from the airport, towed by noisy little air planes that circle higher and higher and higher, then release the gliders into the updrafts. In warm weather, particularly, they have wonderful winds in this region because of the steepness of the valley, its proximity to the ocean and the sheer cliff faces - we were mesmerized by the gliders! Toward evening, a young man on a BIG motor cycle rode in to the camp ground. In conversation, we learned that he was on his way home from a very similar trip to the one on which we are embarking. It was fun to hear the road stories -- the anticipation grows! We still had a feeling of being in civilization, though, and were anxious to get farther north!

DAY 4: Tuesday 8/3 HOPE BC TO CLINTON BC

Weather: HOT - what is this? We went to the cool NORTH for vacation!

Road Conditions: pretty good - paved - 2 lane for the most part

Miles Traveled: 159

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: Turning north out of Hope we followed the Fraser River straight north. The river canyon narrowed and the walls got higher and higher. A few miles up the road is a tourist trap called Hell's Gate which is the narrowest spot on the Fraser River. Some enterprising corporation has built an aerial tram-way over the river. We stopped and looked but it was expensive and looked a little too "southern California" for the trip we were trying to take, so we just kept on going. At Lyton BC the Thompson River flows into the Fraser and the main route turns to follow the Thompson. We stopped for lunch at Goldpan Provincial Park and found a nice spot on the river to have our lunch.



(Fraser River and Railroad Tracks)

While we were eating we noted that there were railroad tracks on our side of the river up the canyon wall well above the road, and there were also tracks on the other side of the river. Hmmmm!!! While we watched, Canadian Pacific and Canadian National trains lumbered past (in opposite directions!). The Thompson River canyon is surprisingly arid with very little flora of any kind. At Cache Creek we picked up "Route 97", and a bunch more traffic. One cannot make much time on these roads! It was hot and crowded - something out of a kids cartoon - trucks & trailers & RVs & local farm vehicles --- sweat & heat & claustrophobia building --- then we rounded a bend in the road, and were met by a serene scene - a small lake with grassy sloping banks - and a camp ground. It was only 2:00 p.m.! Dick said "Gee, that looks inviting" - LET'S STOP! By then, of course we had driven past the entrance and had to drive several miles to find

a place where we could turn around without being killed by the great northern RV Migration... but we did it! We pitched the tent in the shade of lovely trees, set up camp, popped a beer, and kicked back for the afternoon. Another camper farther up the hill had a karaoke machine and was attempting to entertain the entire world from his site.



(Inviting campground at Clinton, BC)

**DAY 5: Wednesday 8/4 CLINTON BC TO BEAR LAKE BC
(CROOKED RIVER PROVINCIAL PARK)**

Weather: HOT!

Road Conditions: busy two-lane highways

Miles Traveled: 296

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: Left the Clinton campsite at about 10:15 a.m. - you just can't rush into these things, you know! We were heading into the Cariboo region - a wide fertile valley between the Rockies and the Coast Range. The towns have names that speak of earlier times - 70 Mile House - 100 Mile House - These towns were stops on the route of fur traders and gold seekers in earlier days. Now they are convenient gas stops for people like us seeking out the wonders of the north. Williams Lake is a good size town on a HUGE lake - it appears to be a place it would be nice to live. Looking through the MILEPOST, I found a notation about the Marguerite Reaction Ferry. Neither one of us had ever heard of a "reaction ferry" and wanted to know what it was. We went looking for it - it is an automobile ferry on cables strung from one river bank to the other, and powered entirely by the force of the river current. By this time, we had bent back around and were following the Fraser River again. Looking at the map, it appeared that there was a secondary road going up the other shore that connected back with the main road at Quesnel - LET'S DO IT!



(Marguerite Reaction Ferry)

It was really fun - knowing you're underway, but hearing no noise except the swish of the water against the side of the ferry. On the far shore, we found the secondary road was a graded road-base surface through very picturesque farms, aspen and spruce groves. We found the main road again in Quesnel just like the map said. Back into traffic - by now it was afternoon and we were careening toward Prince George - the main hub of north/central British Columbia. The major railroads all converge in Prince George, as do the major north/south and east/west highways. They even have a Costco! We considered seeking out the local trailer park / camp grounds, but decided we are so close to the Rockies, given our preference for wilderness over civilization, we just kept going. 45 minutes or so north of Prince George is the Crooked River Provincial Park - with Bear Lake right off the highway. There is a LARGE camp ground (several hundred spaces) in the trees on the shore of the lake. We found a nice site for the tent - there were LOTS of people here! We noticed that a lot of them seemed to be BC Residents - up from Vancouver for the week. For the first time there was very little road noise - just wind whispering in the pines.

DAY 6: Thursday 8/5 BEAR LAKE TO DAWSON CREEK BC

Weather: Guess what - HOT!

Road Conditions: paved, two-lane

Miles Traveled: 204

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: The Rockies are magnificent from any angle. That's the conclusion we were coming to - I've seen them in New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, farther south in BC (Banff, Jasper, etc.) - and now up much closer to the 60th parallel. Magnificent. Yep - that's the word. Through trees - past water - lakes, rivers, streams - every bend in the road brought a new gasp. On the eastern slope, the world melts away into fields of wheat, hay and

canola in full yellow bloom that stretch for a thousand miles into the interior of Canada's vast Prairie Provinces. We stopped for beer in a little burg in the mountains. Buying beer in Canada is not for the weak at heart. In the cities, there are government liquor stores. Beer is not sold cold in these stores - it's in cases in stacks on the floor and it's expensive. Usually somewhere nearby, there is a government-sanctioned package beer & wine store. The beer and wine are chilled - and twice as much money. We think the owners just go across the street to the government liquor store, buy the beer/wine, take it back across the street, put it in the cooler, and jack the price up double. Out in the little tiny towns, however, the government allows the local grocer to sell beer, but it is locked up in a cage and only sold during certain hours. The clerk must unlock the cage, retrieve what you want, ring it up on the government's cash register, lock everything back up, then go back to the store register to ring up the rest of your purchases. Interesting to have Molson and LaBatts cheaper than Budweiser! But I digress. Across the plains to Dawson Creek. This is MILEPOST 0 on the Alaska Highway, also known as the Alcan - short for Alaska/Canada Highway. This is a prairie town to be sure! Large grain elevators - a rail head - and a bunch of RV Parks - the whole town seems to be in a perpetually festive atmosphere, enjoying their role as the gateway to the Alcan. We arrived at about 1:30 in the afternoon - it was hot and sticky and buggy. We found an RV oriented camp ground that had an open empty field (no hook ups!) where they banished the tents. It was actually pretty nice to be away from the RV's! We pitched the tent up against the edge of the mowed area next to a hedge of local flora, separating the RV park from a canola field, then we went to town for a look around. We took pictures of all the tourist spots (the MILEPOST 0 cairn in the middle of town, the big sign that points to the Alaska highway) to the local museum, watched a locomotive switching in the train yard, then found a smoky bar and had a beer. Anticipation was growing - we had been gone nearly a week, and had seen a lot of beautiful scenery, but we both felt like tomorrow we would really start what we came to do.



(Beginning of the Alaska Highway – Dawson Creek BC)

DAY 7: Friday 8/6

DAWSON CREEK BC TO FORT NELSON BC

Weather: cloudy, cool - as though someone flipped a switch from yesterday.

Road Conditions: fairly good, two-lane paved. The MILEPOST says that all of the Alaska Highway between Dawson Creek BC and Fairbanks AK is asphalt-surfaced, but also mentions that repaving and highway improvements continue. What this REALLY means is LONG construction zones! It also says that surfacing of the Alaska Highway ranges from poor to excellent. That about covers it!

Miles Traveled: 291

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: We didn't know it yet, but what was to become a practice of the trip started out today. We got up early, broke camp, and headed up the road. An hour or two into the morning trip we found a little restaurant (the Shepherd's Inn) and stopped for breakfast. We had our first experience with bannock - a flat griddle cake from the old prospector days. Pretty good food, actually! We're winding through the Peace River country - flat prairie farmland of the far north - I can't help but wonder what it would be like here in the winter. Dawson Creek is right on the Alberta border and definitely out of the mountains. There is no coastal influence here, and it gets COLD. We continued NORTH through Wonowon, Pink Mountain, Sikanni Chief, Prophet River and in to Fort Nelson. We arrived at about 1:30 p.m. - not a real long day, but this is the gateway to the Rockies (again!) and a cool little town, so we decided to camp. It had been raining in Fort Nelson most of the day, and the campground was a little on the soggy side. We pitched our camp and did a little laundry, then went into town to look around and pick up a few items we needed. We got some mosquito coils - sort of like camper's incense! Actually, if you burn them in a semi-enclosed space, such as under a canopy, they work pretty well! Talked to some locals in a military surplus store - this is the first place we saw "bunny boots" - white plastic looking boots that are rated to 60 degrees below zero (F). We inquired if it actually gets that cold here - the answer was a resounding "YEP"! The weather was sort of squall-y - windy, clouds moving in and out, with rain off and on. We put a blue plastic tarp over our sun shade and turned the campsite picnic table into a cozy outdoor room. This was the first day that felt like Canada! Tomorrow - on into the mountains!

DAY 8: Saturday 8/7

FORT NELSON BC TO WATSON LAKE, YUKON TERRITORY

Weather: Cool, cloudy, a little rain

Road Conditions: fairly good, two-lane paved. In the mountains, there is no center line, which is a little disconcerting in the narrow spaces. Fortunately, there is VERY little traffic.

Miles Traveled: 324

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: We broke camp after breakfast and headed out of Fort Nelson. This day's scenery was breathtaking. The road headed generally west out of Fort Nelson through the Rockies, then turned north/north west across the plain. Stone Mountain Provincial Park contains wild rivers, craggy peaks, and long endless valleys. We were struck with how few people were on the road. The best place to get a picture of the river is from the middle of the bridge! So - STOP! Get out - lean over the rail and shoot. No worry about traffic - we didn't see any cars for a long long time! The rivers are glacial---which means they are a very unusual color!

They also have colorful names - Raspberry Creek, the Toad River, the Trout River - to name a few. There were animals up here. We saw a coyote (or something that looked like a coyote), two caribou, stone sheep and a bear. There are two provincial parks on the route today - Stone Mountain and Muncho Lake. The Muncho Lake Provincial Park is named for its most prominent physical feature (you guessed it - Muncho Lake!). This section of the highway required "considerable rock excavation" by the Army in 1942. The road hugs the cliffs - indeed has been blasted from the cliffs - about a foot above the water line (or so it seems). The lake is 7 miles long, a mile wide, and over 700 feet deep. This place was just too beautiful to fly by - so we had a tail-gate picnic at Strawberry Flat Campground - which today is a bleak little place, sitting in a wide spot on the road (an alluvial fan of some kind). The weather was still overcast and cool. Even without blue sky, Muncho Lake was a deep blue, attributed to copper oxide leaching into the lake. MILEPOST says "watch for bears" - so we watched, but to no avail.



(Muncho Lake)

We began experiencing a prevailing feeling that we wished we could stay longer here. We had this feeling almost everywhere we went from this point forward - but we did have a specified "end" to this trip, and we wanted to see a lot more before we went home! Onward! After Muncho Lake, the landscape drops down out of the mountains into the Liard River basin. The Liard River follows the highway from here to Watson Lake. We noted a short side-road to Smith River Falls - not recommended for RV's - that's for us! We hiked the short trail through surprisingly tropical foliage - ferns and flowers - to the falls. It was worth the walk! We knew we were in bear country, though - you can't help but wonder with absolutely no one around if there is going to be a bear around the next bend! We took my Romanian cow bell on the trip for just such an eventuality - I carried it down the path - raising hell in the forest - not wanting to sneak up on any bears!



(Smith River Falls)

By this time, it was late afternoon. We got back on the road and headed for the Yukon Territory. The road crosses back and forth between YT and BC seven times in about 40 miles. I couldn't stand it, and made Dick stop to take my picture next to the "Welcome to the Yukon" sign. I couldn't believe I was actually in the Yukon! At about 6:30 p.m. we pulled into Watson Lake - home of the sign post forest. This was a LONG driving day! The decision was almost instantaneous and definitely unanimous - that Watson Lake Hotel looked pretty inviting! We checked in to a nice, if ordinary, room in The Historic Watson Lake Hotel. Hunger. Restaurant. YES! While we were eating and listening to the same three Credence Clearwater Revival tunes playing over and over, we noticed a World War II-era tent pitched in the parking lot with a sign advertising a 1940s Canteen Show. Since we both love 40s music we hurried up with dinner and got in to the show (a little late). It was very entertaining - a live production slanted to the building of the Alcan during the war. After the show, we walked around the perimeter of the sign-post forest and looked at the displays of old WW-II military aircraft, checked out the little tourist boutiques, and the sign-post forest itself. Watson Lake was one of the stops on the lend-lease air route to Russia. Indeed, servicing these military posts was one of the major reasons the Alaska Highway was built in the first place. Legend has it that in 1942 during the construction of the highway a lonely soldier working on the highway planted a sign at Watson Lake, pointing to his home in Danville, IL. People have been adding their own signs ever since. There are over 20,000 signs in the forest. The city of Watson Lake encourages this by adding

posts to which folks can add signs of their own. We wished we had brought a sign with us to add our mark! The sun was setting - it was about 10:30 p.m. - we had a great time wandering around checking everything out and marveling at the very late sunset.



(Watson Lake Sign Post Forest)

DAY 9: Sunday 8/8 WATSON LAKE YT TO WHITEHORSE YT

Weather: Sunny - high clouds

Road Conditions: fairly good, two-lane paved

Miles Traveled: 276

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: Early out of bed today - we wanted to get gone! Stopped for gas at the "Signpost Services" Chevron station & market. Some local entrepreneur had devised a do-it-yourself sign kit containing a pre-drilled board (routed edges), a "Sharpie" permanent marker, and a couple of galvanized nails. This very nicely accommodated our desires to have a sign in the forest! We purchased a kit, made up our sign, and added it to the sign post forest:

Dick & Lynette Tibbetts
Atascadero, California
August 8, 1993



(our sign – second from the top, not counting the soda bottle...)

Leaving Watson Lake we continued along the Alaska Highway. At the risk of repeating myself - this is really gorgeous and remote country! We passed the intersection with the Stewart Cassiar Highway (we'll get back to that in a couple of weeks!) followed along the Rancheria River, crossed the continental divide (again!), and dropped down in to the Swift River valley. There we found the Swift River Lodge and decided to stop for breakfast. The restaurant interior was painted a pale mint green, and had a very bad list toward the creek. The booth seats and table were sloping seriously downhill. We wedged ourselves in so we wouldn't end up against the outside wall, and ate with our elbows on the table, and hoped it wouldn't slide into the creek while we were eating our bacon & eggs! I cannot imagine that this building is still standing - after a couple more winters of what has to be very heavy snow. Back on the road - adjectives escape me - this country is so beautiful, desolate, rugged, remote, lush, (OK, so the adjectives could go on escaping me for several more pages!) - You just have to have been there! On to Teslin - the next burg on the trail - This town is at the confluence of the Nisutlin River and Teslin Lake and is a predominately Native town.



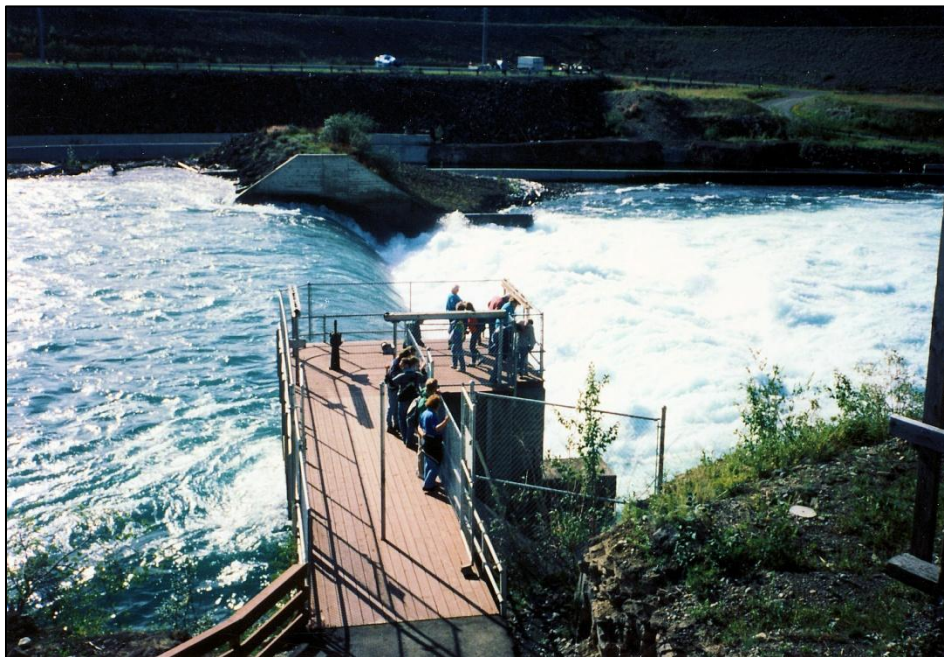
(Nisutlin River Bridge)

The lake is enormous - but in this part of the world, it is just another in a series. Pressing on toward Whitehorse! We stopped at a campground on the eastern outskirts of town called the Pioneer RV Park. We are finding that these RV parks have really nice tent areas separate from the RVs with their generators. The tent sites in the Pioneer are completely out of sight of the RVs. Just a lovely campsite in the trees in the wilderness. We pitched our tent, set up our camp, and left to check out town. Whitehorse is the capital of the Yukon Territory and is located on the Yukon River. This was our first real encounter with the Yukon River - we will see it many more times on the trip (in Dawson City, Eagle and on the Dalton Highway). The Yukon River starts in the coastal mountains south of Whitehorse, flows generally north until it reaches the Alaska border, then bisects the state of Alaska, flowing generally east to west into the Bering Sea. It is a mighty river that carries an enormous silt load through Alaska. However, here in Whitehorse, it is nearly clean and clear because of a hydroelectric generating dam just outside of town. We made our way to the riverside in a national historic area where the government has restored the SS Klondike. It is one of the grand old stern-wheelers that carried cargo and passengers between Whitehorse and Dawson City back in the days when there was no road between these two cities. It has been beautifully restored and Parks Canada conducts free tours.



(SS Klondike – Whitehorse)

Next stop was the fish ladders at the dam - they have turned this functional fish ladder into a great tourist display with underwater windows into the ladder itself, and great gang-way platforms out over the ladders. It was fascinating to watch the enormous king salmon make their way up river through the fish ladders.



(Fish Ladders – Whitehorse)

On to the transportation museum which boasts the world's largest weather vane - which is really a Douglas DC-3 mounted on a rotating pedestal pointing its nose into the wind.



(World's Largest Weather Vane – Whitehorse)

The museum itself was about to close (alas) - the young ladies who were running the place let us go on a 15 minute tour through old planes, boats, railroad rolling stock, vehicles, dog sleds, stagecoaches, and the sister ship of Lindbergh's Spirit of St. Louis, the Queen of the Yukon. Back to camp to contemplate yet another long, full, interesting day!!!

DAY 10: Monday 8/9 WHITE HORSE YT TO DAWSON CITY YT

Weather: sunny, warm, lovely!

Road Conditions: paved (mostly) - no center line - not in the best shape. You can really tell when you get off the "main road"!

Miles Traveled: 350

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: Today we learned to really despise the Holiday Ramblers. This is apparently a nation-wide travel group of people who own Holiday Rambler brand RVs. ICK. They travel in packs - clog up the highways - clog up the restaurants - clog up the gas stations - clog up the air waves (CB) - a general nuisance! I'm sure that by themselves they are upstanding fine citizens, but the gang mentality overtakes them when they get behind the wheels of their RVs. We discovered they had been staying in the very same RV park we had chosen, and that they were headed for Dawson. Just outside of Whitehorse, Yukon Route 2 heads north past Lake Laberge (the ghost of Robert Service is still lurking around here somewhere). This stretch of road is known as the Klondike Loop. We drove past Fox Lake - a real regret - this is a place we could have spent a week camping and just looking - but we don't have an unlimited amount of time (sigh.....) MILEPOST says not to miss the Braeburn Lodge Cinnamon Buns, so we decided that sounded like a great place for breakfast. As we were heading out we decided to monitor the CB and see if we could stay one jump ahead of the Holiday Ramblers (HRs) - horror of all horrors - they were planning on stopping for cinnamon buns! The CB crackles: "Mildred? Did

you read this here thing in MILEPOST about the cinnamon buns?" (oh god - how bad do we want these?) We decided that if they had already arrived we would just drive past. BUT! They HADN'T! We beat 'em to breakfast - but they started arriving as we were being served. We hurried up and got out of there before the invasion arrived in full force, taking our cinnamon buns with us! We stopped at an overlook to see the "Five Finger Rapids" a spot on the Yukon River that gave the stern wheelers particular trouble in the old days. The river splits into five separate channels created by rock pillars in the middle of the river.



(Five Finger Rapids – Yukon River)

Still feeling those HR's hot breath on the back of our necks, we jumped back in the Jeep and drove until we reached Stewart Crossing where the "Silver Trail" heads north east to Mayo & Keno. We wished we could go up all these little roads and check out whatever might be at the other end! All through the trip we had been debating whether to take the Dempster Highway north from here and cross the Arctic Circle in the Yukon Territory at Eagle Plains, or whether we should wait and go up the Dalton Highway in Alaska. We were determined to get to the Arctic Circle! At last, at the very junction, we decide to wait and "do it" in Alaska. We stopped and stretched our legs at the first sighting of the Klondike River - which we followed into Dawson City where it flows into the Yukon River. The Klondike River is a beautiful, rushing, clear, shallow river. More and more houses appeared along the road as we approached Dawson. The road comes in to Dawson City from the east. It looks like some of the real serious mining took place in this region - there are enormous heaped up piles of mine tailings all through this region. This land must be cheap because all the private campgrounds are just leveled off areas of mine tailings - not particularly scenic! Disappointment gripped us as we drove through these desolate, horrible little RV parks. The town itself looks like a movie set. The houses and buildings are classic western architecture - tall wooden facades, brightly painted exteriors, wooden sidewalks and dirt streets. The town is appealing and looked like a fun place, if we could find a decent campground! We found another RV park right down town, and (god help

us) the Holiday Ramblers were starting to converge on that! YIKES! Whip out the MILEPOST - a little further research indicated a government campground on the other side of the river! The only way over the river is by ferry. We drove down to the ferry landing and waited for the next crossing. The Yukon River here is wide and flows at a pretty good clip.



(Yukon River Ferry Crossing at Dawson City)

Across the river we found a beautiful, wooded campground right on the banks of the river. We found a lovely site and pitched our tent - being very very glad we hadn't settled for a campsite on a slag heap on the east side of town! That cool old town was calling our names - we love old western towns (Jerome, Arizona - Virginia City, Nevada, etc.) and couldn't wait to get back to Dawson! Over the river by ferry again to begin exploring.



(Dawson City, Yukon Territory)

We poked in and out of all the little shops, and had dinner at Klondike Kate's - a Bohemian little place that served beer and sandwiches. After dinner we decided to hit Diamond Tooth Gertie's Gambling Hall - the only place in Canada where gambling is legal. This establishment is run by the Klondike Visitors Association (a non-profit community organization) - and they do a bang up job. The employees are all dressed in 1890's period costumes and the place is well decorated in period motif. The cover charge admits you for the floor show, which is a great extravaganza of cancan dancers, singing, and a little history of the Gold Rush era of the Klondike.



(Dawson City, YT)

After the show and a couple of beers, Dick hit one of the slot machines for \$120 - being the financial conservatives that we are, we decided to go spend it in town, rather than plow it back into the slots! We found a cool little tourist trap called "Flora Dora" and spent all the money on a coon-skin hat for Dick, a pair of lace-up knee-high moccasin style boots for me, some books and post cards. We're shameless souvenir hunters, and this was a great spot for us! We found another cool bar in an old hotel and had another beer, then found another cool bar and had another beer - party! At about 10:30 p.m. I took a picture of our shadows on the ground as the sun was lowering in the western sky. We went back across the river on a late ferry (still very light twilight!) and called it a day. Somewhere about 3 a.m. we awoke and poked our heads out of the tent to discover that dawn was breaking.

DAY 11: Tuesday 8/10 DAWSON CITY YT TO EAGLE ALASKA

Weather: Cool, cloudy, some rain

Road Conditions: dirt

Miles Traveled: 143

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: We left the campground at about 8:30 this morning and drove up up up from the elevation of the river onto the Top of the World. We saw our last pavement for a few days yesterday before we got to Dawson. The Top of the World Highway, which is very aptly named, runs from Dawson City to Jack Wade Junction - where it intersects with the Taylor Highway. It is fairly well graded dirt / gravel / road-base.



(Top of the World Highway – Canadian Customs)

If we thought some of the other places we had been were isolated and remote - this wins the prize, hands-down, for the most remote place we went. Many places along the Top of the World we stopped and looked north and east to the Ogilvie Mountains and marveled at how

the landscape is absolutely unchanged from 5000 years ago. miles and miles of miles and miles ... !



(Ogilvie Mountains – from the Top of the World Highway)

At about 10:30 we arrived at the Canadian / US Border Crossing.



It was COLD (about 41 degrees Fahrenheit). Neither customs agent seemed anxious to stand out in the cold and quiz us about our intentions! It was the quickest border crossing of the whole trip! We had an excellent lesson in the shortcomings of MILEPOST - the advertisement for Boundary Alaska was enticing - there is supposed to be a bar, restaurant, gas station, camp

ground, hotel, etc.--- and as we drove toward the spot we were thinking how nice it would be to have breakfast at this nice rustic little resort on the Top of the World. Well... they did have gas (thank goodness), and coffee, but the only food in sight was some packaged peanuts that had probably been hanging on the rack longer than I care to think. I bought a tee shirt because I couldn't help myself, but there was no sign of the bar or restaurant, and the "hotel" had been condemned. From this point forward, we learned to take the entries in MILEPOST with a grain or two of salt! One still could not discount the absolutely magnificent scenery! At Jack Wade Junction, we turned north on the Taylor Highway and headed for Eagle. Everything we had read indicated that this is a very historic town on the very edge of Alaska. The road gets worse - narrower and more winding - we were surprised to see air planes parked along side of the road here and there. The road is used as an air strip, and the air planes have the right-of-way!



(Parked along the Taylor Highway – Alaska)

The scenery continues to get more rugged as we proceed. From Jack Wade Junction to Eagle is about 60 miles. We found out too late that we were driving much too fast. About 12 miles outside of Eagle the right rear tire ceased to exist. And to add to the festive atmosphere, it started to rain. We hadn't seen another vehicle for hours. With panic rising, we dug down to the level of the spare tire and proceeded to attempt the tire change. While in the throes of this endeavor, two different vehicles approached, stopped, and asked if we needed help. The etiquette of the road is to stop and assist - there is no "law" - the cellular phone had said "no service" for about 10 days - the closest AAA is probably in Anchorage (several hundred miles from here) - we're in the boon docks! By this time, Dick had discovered that the jack was not going to sink into the mud, the spare contains air, and we're not going to die. We thanked our would-be benefactors and waved them on.

We drove much slower into Eagle.



It is a wonderful little town! It has a population of about 150 people. The end of the road is the Yukon River (again!).



We had lunch at the Eagle Trading Post, and inquired about the possibility of procuring a new tire. The selection wasn't great, but they had a very used tire that would hold air and fit on our rim. This suited us - Dick was not happy about the prospect of having to drive the 160 miles from Eagle to Tok on the same road that ate the first tire with no spare! Much relaxed, we attempted to buy a beer. No beer. Eagle is a dry town. They have found that it is easier to keep the peace without alcohol in the equation. Hmmm ... well, we can live for a few days with no beer! We asked directions to the Bureau of Land Management campground on the outskirts of town. It is a primitive, free, lovely campground in the woods at the edge of Fort Egbert - an Army post from the early days. Our intention was to stay here a couple of days - the first time we had stayed two nights in the same place since leaving home. After we settled in, we drove

around the area a little. Stopped in at a "shop" way out on one of the local roads - the sign out front said "Yukon Ron's" - not knowing what to expect, we drove up the drive.



(Yukon Ron's – Eagle, AK)

I suspect this is Ron's home where he and Mrs. Ron are probably subsistence residents who supplement their income by having a show room for tourists. As it turns out, Ron is a jeweler and craftsman. I bought a little ring - silver with a gold nugget - and a book called Eagle Tales (volume 1) by Cassalona Rhea Richter. The book (really a booklet) is a collection of Short Stories, Published Articles, Essays, Odes & Poems (see recommended reading at the beginning of this volume). I was intrigued by the idea of reading something by a local author, and proceeded back to the camp site and read the book through from cover to cover.

DAY 12: Wednesday 8/11 EAGLE AK

Weather: Cool, cloudy

Road Conditions: dirt

Miles Traveled: 16

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: We awoke early to scuffling sounds outside the tent. It didn't sound like anything real big, so we just blew it off. Later when we awoke again and found the courage to get out of the warmth of our sleeping bags and tent, we discovered that one of our towels, which had been left hanging to dry, had been chewed off in several places near the ground. Hopefully the holes in our towel provided some warm nesting material for some little critter! We had breakfast and drove down to the community well house where the walking tour starts. There is a good well with wonderful water that is operated by the town - most of the available water is not potable. Over half of the Eagle residents haul their drinking water from this central point, either by truck (in summer) or dog sled (in winter).



(Community Water Pump House – Eagle, AK)

They have running water in their homes primarily as a convenience for flushing toilets, to be boiled for doing dishes, etc. The tour guide du jour was a BLM employee named Steve who we had seen the previous evening driving through our camp ground checking to be sure all was well. We had an insightful visit with him - he and his family live in Eagle year-around, even though the road is not maintained in winter (closed roughly October through May). As soon as they can drive out in the spring, they drive to Anchorage and go to Costco (about 450 miles) and stock up on everything they think they'll need until they go again late in their fall (October) when they make another trip to Costco to stock up for the winter. I tried to relate this to my own experience. I live 50 miles from Costco and only go every other month or so - generously supplementing our expendable rations by trips to the local grocery stores in between Costco trips. Even then, my Jeep is very full coming back from Costco. The Eagle residents view the local "grocery store" as an extravagance, and according to Steve, rarely shop there. That means that they shop only twice a year for absolutely everything they use. Dick enjoyed pointing out that there isn't a truck big enough to haul everything I would need to buy if I only shopped twice a year! There are two things I find particularly intriguing about this concept - the people only leave town twice a year, and the discipline it must take to live this subsistence existence. I am in awe of these individuals! The walking tour of Eagle started at the well, then proceeded to the Wickersham Courthouse, the waterfront customs house, the mule barn, water wagon shed and NCO quarters at Fort Egbert, and past the local library, town hall, community church.



(Downtown Eagle, AK)



(Wickersham Court House –Eagle, AK)



(Community Church – Eagle, AK)

Early in the tour, I mentioned to the guide that I had read "[Eagle Tales](#)" the previous evening. He said "Oh, I think Cassie is down painting at the Customs House - maybe you can meet her!" Cassie was indeed at the Customs House painting - and was thrilled that I had enjoyed her book. She autographed my copy, and we visited for several minutes. She is quite an amazing woman. She has worked a trap line, worked as a cook for the National Geographic Society when they were doing documentary video of the arctic, and many other fascinating things. At the present time, she is trying to raise funds to create a shelter for battered women in rural Alaska. Eagle is said to be a "total history lesson" - with more square feet of museum space than anywhere else in the state. The walking tour took more than two hours! Eagle is so strategically located near the Canadian border, right on the Yukon River that it has quite a past! It has quite a present, as well. The town doesn't exist for tourists, although it is a put in / pull out spot for Yukon River float trips; is the headquarters for the Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve; and is a transition point for Gray Line Tours' combination river boat / motor coach (bus) tours from Dawson City.



(Eagle, AK)



(Public Library – Eagle, Alaska)

We visited the headquarters office for Yukon-Charley Rivers NP, and visited with the ranger. She showed us a video of the "break up" - when the ice goes out on the Yukon River. This happens in May every year. Not having ever lived where the rivers freeze, we were fascinated by the concept that the river really turns into a solid mass that can be driven on/over - for several months out of the year. It freezes up in October - break up is in May. It does not just start getting slushy and sort of melt - break-up is a violent experience! In 1992 (the previous spring) when the video was shot, breakup was so wild it ate 15 feet of the river bank away and nearly took the headquarters building with it! The ice goes out all at once. The pieces of ice are

as big as trucks and just float out to sea, taking everything in their path along with them. It is no small wonder that there is only one bridge over the Yukon in all of Alaska! Breakup eats bridges!



(Yukon River at Eagle AK)

After a burger at the Eagle Trading Company, we did a little laundry, then drove out to the Indian Village which is about 3 miles upriver from the town of Eagle. It is called Eagle Village. There, we observed first hand salmon drying in the sun, a fish wheel in action - not stuff set up as tourist attractions - actual working, functioning devices.



(Operating Fish Wheel – Eagle Village, AK)

There are two air strips in Eagle. One at Fort Egbert, which is grass with many small planes parked in the trees along the edge, and other gravel strip between Eagle and Eagle village. We

stopped at the latter to watch little tiny planes take off and land (we're transportation junkies!), then went to another "market", bought gas for the Jeep, then went back to the camp site. The days are so long that even under the cloudy conditions, it is hard to get interested in going to bed at the proper time!

DAY 13: Thursday 8/12 EAGLE AK TO TOK AK

Weather: partly cloudy - nice to see the sun again!

Road Conditions: dirt

Miles Traveled: 172

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: We broke camp fairly early, then stopped at the Eagle well and filled up all our water containers with the delicious water. We stopped frequently to take pictures of the road signs, the foliage, the town, sort of hating to leave - wishing we could just stay here forever. However, a quick check of the mean monthly temperature in January (-13F) was enough to quell this nostalgic leaning! We proceeded much more slowly this time down the Taylor Highway, having been told by the guy who sold us the replacement tire that the faster you drive on these dirt roads, the warmer/hotter your tires get, and that the rocks slice through hot tires like butter! A word to the wise.... We have 161 miles to go before connecting again with the Alaska Highway (Alcan). Between Eagle and the Alcan lies the town of Chicken.



Chicken is the local name for ptarmigan - a local bird. Legend has it that the founders of the original town wanted to call it Ptarmigan but didn't know how to spell it so they settled for calling it Chicken. This is also the place where the book TISHA takes place (see Recommended Reading). This "town" consists of about 3 buildings - connected to each other, or should I say leaning into each other (!). There is a gift shop, a restaurant and a bar - all the necessities of life!



(Downtown Chicken AK)

We were browsing in the gift shop when the power went out - there was a real ruckus because a tour bus was pulling up out front - "Damn it, Harry, get that generator fired back up - there's a tour bus outside!" Unfortunately for us, the tour bus full of people filled up the restaurant while we were wrapping up our souvenir purchases, and we didn't feel like waiting it out (or following a tour bus all the way to Tok) - so we settled for dried fruit and a head start! The Taylor Highway is rough and winding and tricky. The local economy is wrapped up in gold prospecting. The MILEPOST warns the casual tourist (us) not to stop the car near a stream, or even look like you might be remotely looking in the direction of the water. These residents are very serious about their claims. They shoot first and ask questions later. Again, we blessed our luck at having purchased the book - how else would you know this??? You cannot even see any residences from the road, but after reading this warning, one has a tendency to see the Hatfields and McCoy's peering out from behind every rock & tree! Winding through this gorgeous country was still a treat, even if we were confined to our car! The recent rains kept the dust down, but also created some slippery / muddy / scary driving conditions. At around 2 p.m. we hit the Alcan and drove into the town of Tok. This is a major hub because of its proximity to the Taylor Highway, the Tok cut-off to the Glenn Highway (connector to the Richardson and to Anchorage). The name TOK rhymes with Coke or poke. The population is just under 1000 and the businesses are very definitely oriented to the location - several large RV parks, service stations, restaurants,

convenience stores, tourist traps, a visitor's center and museum complex, etc. We gassed up, bought some beer, and checked into the Golden Bear RV Park. Even though we had made it back down the Taylor from Eagle without incident, Dick was still very uneasy about not having a reliable spare tire. In fact, he was uneasy about encountering a similar circumstance of a flat creating a "no spare" situation - this is very real when one is well over 100 miles from the nearest services! We found a tire place in Tok (see what I mean about tourist-oriented businesses?). The proprietor agreed to drive in to Fairbanks the following day and purchase the same brand of tire we had blown, a new rim and another tire so we would have two spares. This means we lose a day in Tok, but because our plans call for several hundred more miles on dirt roads, it seemed prudent to wait it out. This was not an altogether unpleasant experience, either. Tok is surrounded by forests, and the RV park we chose had lovely tent sites along the perimeter of the campground backed up against the trees.

DAY 14: Friday 8/13 TOK AK

Weather: partly cloudy

Road Conditions: paved

Miles Traveled: 6

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: Well, this was sort of an unplanned stop, so we decided to look around and see what Tok has to offer. We visited the visitor center, prowled through the tourist traps, and did a lot of nothing - we didn't mind just kicking back and taking it easy for a while... we've been making forward progress almost daily for two weeks. Other accomplishments included picking up the new tire & new additional spare, repacking the car around the second spare, and generally getting excited about getting back on the ROAD! We needed showers! We had taken showers in Eagle the day we arrived at the public showers behind the trading post, but the BLM campground had only vault toilets and no further facilities. Fortunately the Golden Bear had showers and we were able to start the next leg of the trip as clean people. We made a weak attempt at a campfire, but everything was either too green or too wet to burn. We packed the car at night (everything except the tent) so we could make an early get-away.

DAY 15: Saturday 8/14 TOK AK TO YUKON RIVER CROSSING AK

Weather: cloudy, rainy

Road Conditions: Alaska Highway: mostly paved - frost heave! Richardson Highway: big frost heaves! Dalton Highway: dirt

Miles Traveled: 335

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: We left Tok at around 8:30 in the morning, heading west on the Alaska Highway. Today was supposed to be breathtaking scenery as we skirted the Alaska Range to the north between Tok, Dot Lake, and Delta Junction. Unfortunately, low clouds settled in and, while the immediate scenery was lovely, the rugged beauty of the Alaska Range remained hidden behind the clouds. We stopped at Dot Lake for breakfast at the rustic Dot Lake Lodge. It was run by a little native lady who really wanted to be somewhere else. On we

went - forging ahead through the winding terrain. We arrived at Delta Junction at about 11:30. This is the official end of the Alaska Highway.



(The End of the Alaska Highway – Delta Junction, AK)

There is a big visitor center here that has a "demonstration garden" showing how big veggies grow where we took pictures of enormous cabbages! There is also a BIG thermometer - it gets real cold here - their record low is -66 degrees F (January of 1989). We were playing the tourist thing up to the hilt - we took pictures of each other by the sign that says this is the end of the Alaska Highway, and stood in line inside the visitor center to get a certificate saying we'd traveled the length of the Alcan - signed by a little blue-haired lady resident of Delta Junction who was working the visitor center this day. There were local crafts persons selling their wares outside the visitor center. I bought a glass locket containing rough gold. It is a lovely piece! The visitor center also contains information about the Alaska pipeline. There was a display outside showing a cross section of the Pipeline pipe comparing the size to other oil carrying pipes used in other areas. This is pretty interesting stuff! The Alaska Highway ends, and we join the Richardson Highway which actually runs from Valdez, 266 miles south of here to Fairbanks, about 98 miles north from here. The Richardson is an old highway which used to be a stage route in the old days. The pipeline roughly follows the Richardson route, and we got our first glimpse of the pipeline as we crossed the Tanana River on our way out of town. One thing we

noticed was that instead of miles and miles of nothing but nature, there was an increasing number of residences off in the trees along the highway. We had the feeling of being in a major corridor instead out in the trees! The closer we got to Fairbanks, the closer the towns were together. We rolled through Big Delta, Richardson, and North Pole (which is real cute, but nowhere near the North Pole!) and on into Fairbanks. We would be back through here in a day or two, but today we wanted to get north towards the Arctic Circle as far as we could. We stopped for gas in north Fairbanks, and stocked up on ice & beer at the Texaco station. At this point, we picked up the Elliott Highway, which connected us to the Dalton Highway 73 miles north of Fairbanks. The Dalton is also known as the Haul Road - a dull name for a beautiful road that connects central Alaska with Deadhorse and Prudhoe Bay on the Beaufort Sea. The Dalton is 414 miles long - all dirt - open all year. There has been ongoing controversy about allowing the "public" to use this road because of its proximity to the pipeline, fear of terrorism, very sparse services, and any number of other reasons. On this trip our only goal was to use this road to get to the Arctic Circle - about 115 miles above the junction with the Elliot Highway. The weather continued to be gloomy and cruddy and as we began our trek up the Dalton, it began to rain, and continued to rain and rain and rain. The thing you read about the Dalton is about the DUST, but that was not going to be a problem this day! The Dalton is a well maintained road, but the rain was gumming things up a little, and we were still a little speed-shy because of our tire experience on the Taylor. This is remote, desolate, beautiful country out here! The farther north we went, the smaller the trees got (ultimately we would cross "timberline" - which, at this latitude, is not an elevation driven thing, but merely a latitude oriented phenomenon). About 60 miles up from the junction, we glimpsed the mighty Yukon River.



(Yukon River Bridge)

The bridge across the Yukon on the Dalton is the only bridge across the Yukon in all of Alaska. The bridge itself has a 6% grade - the southern bank is that much higher than the northern bank. It is a strange feeling to be going over a bridge and traveling very obviously downhill!! It's also a little weird to encounter a dirt bridge deck...!



(Yukon River Bridge – note the grade)

Our original plan was to camp around here somewhere overnight. We decided to stop at "Yukon River Crossing" - a little settlement on the north side of the bridge - to gas up and inquire about camping. We stepped out of the car into a chocolate malt. This was not mud as we know it! This was seriously the consistency of a malt - about 3-4 inches deep - and it stuck to everything! The car was no longer red - it was the color of a chocolate malt - covered stem to stern with this goo.



(Our "red" car – Yukon River Crossing, AK)

My leg made contact with the door jamb as I stepped out of the car. Now I had this goo on me. It is still raining. Do YOU want to pitch the tent in this stuff? NO! Yukon River Crossing has a "motel" - or so it says in MILEPOST. We inquire within. They have a room for the night with a bathroom down the hall for \$100. Good grief. Oh well. Talk about your captive audiences! The hotel consists of a series of mobile-home- style trailers with rooms on each side of a long hallway. Dark olive green in-door/out-door carpet covers the floors, with dark walnut colored plastic paneling on the walls - fluorescent lights in a line down the middle of the hall. The door on the room only locks from the inside - so when you aren't in your room it isn't locked. Our view from our window, covered by orange & white K-Mart curtains, is of a wide expanse of soupy parking lot and an assortment of construction vehicles. Prudence dictates that we only bring in the absolute bare necessities since every contact with the car covers us with a new layer of goo. We learn that this facility's main purpose is dormitory style housing for pipeline workers and river-raft-trip guides. (I'll bet THEY don't pay \$100/night!) After changing into our boots, we slurp across the parking lot to the visitor center. It was small but interesting - providing information primarily about the pipeline, the Yukon River Bridge and the local flora and fauna. It is remarkable how the world shrinks around you when it is raining and there is no place to go! We had dinner at the "motel" - the staff was very nice and seemed sympathetic with our plight. By this time it was quite late, but still light - something that would really take some getting used to! We decide to call it a day.

DAY 16: Sunday 8/15 YUKON RIVER CROSSING TO ARCTIC CIRCLE TO FAIRBANKS AK
Weather: cloudy, sunny, rainy - a real grab bag!
Road Conditions: dirt
Miles Traveled: 256

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: My Birthday. Up early - we were anxious to get to the Arctic Circle. I might point out that not everyone has the opportunity to be at the Arctic Circle on their birthday. I am a lucky girl! The weather is still heavily overcast, but not raining (we are thankful for small favors at this point). We had breakfast in the restaurant and purchased some Arctic Circle souvenirs (T-shirts, bumper stickers for the garage fridge at home, certificates that say we did this, an "Alaska" thermometer that records temps as low as 70 degrees below zero Fahrenheit) and got the hell out of there! We gassed up and headed north at about 7:30 a.m. There are some 10% grades on the Dalton Highway - it is pretty extreme! One does not have the feeling that not much more was done to create this road than just grade the landscape as flat as possible without too much exertion - no cut & fill / straightening required! It is only about 60 miles up the highway to the Arctic Circle. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) maintains a lovely "wayside" with a great sign (you-are-here variety showing the circle, and the point at which you are standing), an observation deck and an interpretive display. It was very chilly - probably in the 30's - and there were definite signs of autumn in the landscape - leaves changing color and the definite chill in the air. The Arctic Circle is north latitude 66 degrees 30 minutes. This is the point on the earth where for one day in the summer the sun does not set, and one day in the winter it does not rise. We're way above tree line (north) here - and the tundra is lovely. I always thought of tundra as just a sort of frozen desert, but I underrated it severely! This is one of my favorite places we went on the whole trip. I do believe I could have

sat on that deck and stared into the wilderness for the rest of the day. "North" is really calling - we discussed continuing north to Coldfoot, Antigon Pass, Gates of the Arctic National Park & Preserve, Deadhorse, Prudhoe Bay --- How I hate leaving a road untraveled! In the end, we got back in the Jeep and went back down the road toward Fairbanks, but not before doing a little mugging for the camera... One of the technicians at work (Tom Gonzales) had bet Dick before we left that he would not wear his Hawaiian shirt at the Arctic Circle. This sort of thing just can't go unchallenged - so Dick took the shirt along, and we took a series of pictures of Dick in the shirt in front of the sign:

(picture #1) Dick pointing at the shirt "see this shirt?"

(picture #2) Dick pointing at the sign "see this sign?"

(picture #3) Dick holding up five fingers "see this FIVE?"

(picture #4) Dick pointing to his outstretched other hand "put it THERE!"



These slides played very well when we returned home and showed them to the group at work! Back on the road, we stopped frequently to take pictures, look around, explore the pipeline - an incredible and massive structure! It weaves through the landscape - sometimes above ground, sometimes plunging underground. The reason for this is because of varying soil conditions along the route. Where the warm oil would cause icy soil to thaw & erode, the pipeline is above ground to avoid thawing. Where the frozen ground is mostly well drained gravel or solid rock, and thawing is not a problem, the line is underground.



(Taylor Highway and the Alaska Pipeline)

The diameter of the pipe is 48 inches. We stopped at one point along the route where I could stand under the pipe with my arms up stretched as far as I could reach - and still I could not touch it.



The pipeline stretches from Prudhoe Bay on the Arctic Ocean 800 miles south to Valdez in the Gulf of Alaska (Prince William Sound). Back on the road - Dick really warmed up to this dirt road driving! There is one spot that is called the Roller Coaster - a big dip - probably a mile wide with a 10% grade down & 10% back up the other side.



(The Roller Coaster – Dalton Highway)

He liked it so well, we turned around and did it again, just for the hell of it. We passed Yukon River Crossing again at about 11:10 a.m. - and just kept driving. We arrived in Fairbanks about 2:30 and decided we really need to do something about the car! We scrounged up all the quarters we could find and went to a car wash where we washed about 100 lbs of mud off of the car. This was for more than cosmetic effect. There is some kind of chemical they spray on these dirt roads to "keep the dust down" - that will ruin a car's finish if left alone. We were anxious to get that OFF the car. We ate lunch at a cafe in the university district of Fairbanks, then decided we would really love to just kick back and relax. We checked in to a Super 8 Motel that has laundry facilities and did exactly that. Toward evening, we decided to look around Fairbanks. We went to the train yard and took pictures, found an old coal tipple and took pictures, found the downtown area and drove around until we found the visitor center. This is in a lovely little park called Golden Heart Park on the banks of the Tanana River. There is a wonderful sculpture / fountain called the Unknown First Family.



(Statue of "The Unknown First Family" – Fairbanks, AK)

The atmosphere was nearly ruined by a bunch of drunk Indians hanging around the park harassing the tourists - anyone who would attempt to take a picture of the statue was greeted with "Hey, how come you don't want to take a picture of a real native?" Not the best P.R. for the visitor center - which is probably exactly what the natives had in mind... Oh well! Fairbanks is a dowdy run down city with not much in the way of redeeming features. I imagine the winters take their toll on buildings, roads, homes, etc. We just couldn't find any particular charm or attractive qualities here and determined that we would get the hell out of here as soon as possible in the morning. A storm was brewing and we watched in fascination as it approached - black clouds - really black - approaching from the east, while the late afternoon / evening sun brilliantly lit everything in its path. Then the winds came up as the storm whammed into town - it was moving so quickly that it was over within half an hour. We're taxed and tired because of the dirt drive this morning and decided to head for bed.

DAY 17: Monday 8/16
Weather: cloudy, rainy
Road Conditions: paved
Miles Traveled: 152

FAIRBANKS AK TO HEALY AK

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: Hit the trail early - stopping at a Safeway in Fairbanks to stock up on provisions. On the outskirts of Fairbanks, we picked up the George Parks Highway (Parks Highway) which connects Fairbanks with Anchorage. The Alaska Rail Road generally follows this same route. Our destination was Denali National Park. This is a real highway with lines and shoulders, passing lanes and plenty of room. We were obviously in the more developed corridor or Alaska now! It is only 120 miles from Fairbanks to Denali, and we intended to be leisurely about our trip. Unfortunately, the overcast was real low again today and we only caught occasional glimpses of the river valleys and mountain peaks. The drive was gorgeous anyway, in spite of not being able to see all of the scenery. There was some difference of opinion between the guidebooks about the existence of a bar called Skinny Dick's Half-way Inn. Ostensibly the name was derived from the Inn's location, half way between Fairbanks and Nenana, but the ribald double entendre is just too much for us - we have to find it and have a beer, even if it is only 10:30 in the morning! As we round a corner on the highway, there it is - in all its glory - and in we go.



(Skinny Dick's Half Way Inn)

We had a couple of beers, bought tee-shirts and key chains and hat pins and had our picture taken with Skinny Dick (he really is!). On we went - at noon, we were at Nenana and decided to stop. It is a charming little town at the confluence of the Tanana River and the Nenana River. It is definitely a rail road town, also a river freight port for many towns that lie on the river that are not serviced by roads. We had lunch at a little cafe then went down the street to visit The Alaska Rail Road Museum. The museum is full of all sorts of old stuff that is rail road oriented, but not rolling stock or locomotives.



(Rail Museum – Nenana, AK)

It was fun to tour, but it was MORE fun to learn about the Nenana Ice Classic. This is an annual lottery event which offers cash prizes to the person(s) who guess the exact minute the ice will break up on the Tanana River. In February they erect a large (a couple of stories high) tripod out on the ice in the middle of the river. They connect the top of the tripod to a clock device in a tower on the river bank. When the ice breaks up (in April or May), the tripod falls over, the line stops the clock, recording the official breakup time. The idea is to buy a ticket with the date and time you think the ice will go out. Big Bucks are paid to the winner(s), and the town also gets a cut, which helps them maintain the museum and sponsor their dog races and other civic events. We wandered around a little more through the town, and decided we should get underway once more. We continued south, following the Nenana River into the mountains. We stopped at a turn-out where the river was particularly beautiful and watched a train go past high on the hillside across the river. There was an icy wind blowing down through the canyon! We continued south to Healy and checked in to the local KOA. We found a cool tent site under big trees not too close to other people (although this is relative - KOA has a greed-based bad habit of trying to get twice as many people into the available space as they should!). We decided to drive on down to Denali and see what we were up against as far as getting to see the mountain tomorrow. The weather all day today has been foul - everything we've read says you only have a 30% chance of actually seeing the mountain on any given day. We drove to the visitor center and learned that you can only drive into the park about 12 miles. To get anywhere near the mountain, you have to take a shuttle bus. We decided we'd better take our chances and get tickets for tomorrow. It was raining by the time we left to drive back up the road to Healey. It was getting colder and my ears were absolutely freezing. In the KOA gift shop, I spotted a pair of red fox ear muffs. In spite of my aversion to buying or wearing fur, or supporting the fur trade, I bought them and wore them on and off for the rest of the trip. I absolutely love them. They are warm and they are Alaska. The fur "controversy" has a whole different slant in the far

north where fur is viewed as a survival tool. At sunset, the storm broke up and we had a remarkable sunset view of the surrounding mountains. This is an awesome and gorgeous place.

DAY 18: Tuesday 8/17 DENALI NATIONAL PARK

Weather: sunny, with increasing clouds

Road Conditions: paved

Miles Traveled: 52

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: Rolled out of the KOA about 9 a.m. and headed for Healy to the Box Car Cafe for a quick breakfast, then on to Denali to make our reservation on the bus. We were early, and since you can drive about 12 miles in to the park, we decided to do just that. We had our breath taken away at the top of the rise behind the main visitor center - it was a perfectly clear morning, and far off in the distance (about 70 miles away) Denali was out of the clouds in full view.



(Denali in the distance)

We kept stopping and taking more pictures as we proceeded to the "end of the road" (at least the part of the road that is accessible to the driving public). It was gorgeous. The elevation of the majority of the park is around 2,000 feet. The mountain is 20,320 feet and it just sticks straight up from the rolling foot hills that surround it. Very dramatic! We turned around and went back to catch our bus. This is no luxury tour! The intent and motivation is to leave the park wild and remote. If they let all the people who come here drive anywhere they wanted to go, the place would end up just like Yosemite (which, if you haven't been there, is like Los Angeles with trees). They drive school buses full of tourists way back in to the park at about 30 minute intervals - it is about 62 miles to the Eielson Visitor Center on a narrow, fairly winding dirt road. The bus drivers (park service employees) stop any time they (or anyone else on the

bus) spots wild life. Then, the passengers on the bus all crane their necks through windows to get pictures of whatever creature happens to be in evidence. The countryside unrolls as the bus proceeds west through the park. The terrain varies dramatically, from scrub forest to more tundra-like surroundings.



(Denali Wilderness)

There are rivers and lakes and a pass through the mountains called "Polychrome Pass". One has the definite feeling of being in the extreme wilderness. We saw many caribou, a moose and a fox. The guide pointed out white things on the hillside that they said were Dall Sheep, but I think they were just pillowcases someone draped on the rocks. This trip took several hours! We managed to have a seat at the back of the bus, which I think gave us a bumpier ride than if we had been further forward, but we didn't have people breathing down our necks either. As the day progressed, it became more and more overcast and cloudy. By the time we reached the Eielson Visitor Center (which is essentially at the base of the mountain) the peak was socked in. We did get an unforgettable view of the Muldrow glacier and the lower shoulders of the mountain. This made us very glad we had made our early trek out on to the road for our initial view of the mountain! We hung out at the visitor center for an hour or so - toying with the idea of taking the continuation bus on to Wonder Lake. If the peak had been visible, we would have done this in a heartbeat, but since we would not have been able to see anything, we opted for one of the return buses. The trip out is as spectacular as the trip in (as you might have guessed - it's the same road!). Our big wilderness treat came near the end when the bus driver stopped to let us look at a grizzly bear that was eating a caribou on a sand bar in the middle of a river.



(Denali Wilderness)

This is really wild stuff! We returned to the visitor center late in the afternoon - exhausted from the ride and looking for something to EAT & DRINK! We had read about the "salmon bakes" in MILEPOST and decided that sounded pretty darned good. These are restaurants that are single-menu all-you-can-eat establishments. You eat what they're serving but you get all you can stand! We had a couple of Alaskan beers and ate to our hearts' content. Upon returning to the KOA we noted an abundance of Air Stream trailers parked together (probably close to 100 of them!) - so we decided to park and walk around for a closer look at them. They have sort of an other-worldly look about them, and always catch our attention when we see them on the road. An old man was out buffing imaginary specs of dust off his gleaming Air Stream motor home. We didn't remember ever having seen an Air Stream motor home, and paused briefly in the road to have a look - he seemed eager to show off his vehicle. We talked to him - talked to his wife - went inside for a look around - looked at pictures of their children - they seemed very anxious to visit! I think if we hadn't excused ourselves they would have invited us to dinner (and probably adopted us and put us in their will!). They were both in their 80's - these are the drivers that scare the hell out of me on the highways, but they were nice enough when they were not moving on the same road as me! We were absolutely out of steam by this point, and headed back to the tent for a good night's rest.

DAY 19: Wednesday 8/18 HEALY AK TO GAKONA AK

Weather: cloudy

Road Conditions: Denali Highway: dirt, washboard, mega ruts Richardson Highway: paved

Miles Traveled: 254

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: We showered, broke camp and left the Healy KOA at about 10:00 a.m. Our plan for today was to drive a little further south on the Parks highway and pick up the

Denali Highway Alaska Route 8 - a 136 mile stretch of very remote dirt highway with very few services of any kind. We wanted to camp in the wilderness. This road begins at Cantwell. We decided to gas up and get some breakfast at Cantwell. This was a very strange little town - almost appearing to be abandoned. We located a little restaurant and went inside to discover that we were the only patrons in the place with the exception of a guy sleeping with his head on the table. The "help" all looked pretty hung over. We decided this must be a night life spot because it certainly wasn't much in the way of DAY life! They turned out a respectable stack of pancakes, however! We finally got out of town at about noon and headed east on the Denali Highway, which follows the Nenana River for several miles. The recent rains (and probably many storms before that) had wreaked havoc on the road to the point where it resembled Swiss cheese! There was no place to drive that wasn't rutted and full of holes - a far cry from the Taylor or the Dalton Highways - which apparently receive more maintenance because of their critical nature in reaching their respective destinations. One has the feeling that the Denali isn't used as a major corridor - the Richardson goes up the east side of south central Alaska and the Parks goes up the West side - This is just a connector road. Back in the old days, it used to be the way to get to Denali from anywhere (before the construction of the Parks Highway). We learned that there are several large mining operations out here, and that the eastern section of the road is in much better shape. We were concerned about having our teeth rattled loose after we had gone only about 8 miles. We stopped and took pictures at a beautiful overlook of the Nenana River - almost as much to stop bouncing around as to get the pictures!



(Nenana River)

As we continued, the road improved - thank goodness - and the scenery just kept getting more wild and beautiful. We kept looking for places we could camp. We checked out a BLM campground on the banks of a river, but something about the location spooked us. It just looked like a place where bears would be abundant. Call us nuts - we kept driving. As the road dips and curves through this wild country, views and vistas unfold and the vastness of the

landscape becomes overwhelming. As we rounded a curve in the road where a stand of willows (or some willow-like flora) hugged the outside curve, we thought we saw something yellow in the bushes. We stopped for a closer look and discovered a road-caution-yellow sign almost completely covered by the bushes, warning people that there was a curve ahead. Hmmmmm. The Alaska range draws closer to the Denali highway north of the road. Glaciers appear in nearly every fold of these gorgeous mountains, dropping down to the headwaters of rivers that flow out across the plains. We stopped at a little road house to inquire about purchasing a fishing license. We were the only customers in the place - they sold the fishing licenses in the bar so the guy was forced to open it up, sell us a beer, and the fishing licenses!



(Wilderness Lodge on the Denali Highway)

Still no place to camp. We noted the Tangle Lakes campground on the MILEPOST map, and decided to head for this as a site. It is hard to imagine an ugly place in Alaska, but these lakes were ugly. Dirt campsites, dirt lake shores, dirt roads, very very little foliage of any kind - just generally ugly. Given the fact that the weather was starting to get nasty-looking we could just envision this dirt turning to MUD if it started to really rain (visions of the chocolate malt parking lot at Yukon River Crossing began dancing through our heads). We were almost to the Richardson, and figured there MUST be campgrounds along the Gulkana River, so we kept driving. The Denali Highway ends at the Richardson Highway at Paxson. We turned right/south onto the pavement and started looking for campgrounds. Either we're way picky today, or there just isn't anything on this road! We drove and drove - Mount Wrangell, Mount Blackburn and Mount Drumm all looming on the horizon - by this time, it was getting late (for us), and we were confounded as to what to do! We turned up the Tok cut-off and what to our wondering eyes should appear, but a lovely little road house. Stop this car! The Gakona Lodge & Trading Post, the Trappers Den Bar, The Carriage House Dining Room, all back up to the Gakona River strung out in a line at the northern edge of the highway. The Lodge room rates were \$45 per night - bathroom down the hall - and a far cry from our Yukon River Crossing "bathroom-down-

the-hall" experience! This is a lovely little inn with floors that are as level as a roller coaster! There are nice little decorative touches in the halls and rooms, and a choice of a bathroom with a shower, or one with a tub. Since it was the middle of the week, there was virtually no one there. We gratefully checked in to the lodge, took a nice bath, and went over to the bar for a couple of beers. We walked in on the local "gang at Cheers" - Buck the canoe builder, Julie the Postmaster, John & Jerry, the owners of the spread (John tending bar, Jerry running the restaurant) and other assorted colorful locals. It wasn't the normal "shun the outlanders" routine - they wanted to know all about our trip, where we'd been, where we were from, how we liked Alaska, what we planned to do for the rest of the trip - generally welcoming us with open arms. We told them how much trouble we had finding a camp site (but how glad we were in retrospect that we had found them instead!) and that we wanted to go fishing. They recommended that we head into the Wrangell St. Elias Preserve. Julie excused herself, ran home, and came back with a couple of frozen trout she had in her freezer, and a jar of home-made berry jam. Meanwhile, Jerry kept coming through from the kitchen asking if we were going to have dinner in the dining room - sure - why not! He had just cooked up a batch of spaghetti sauce for their Wednesday dinner special and he wanted us to try it. However, when we got into the dining room and looked at the menu we decided steak sounded better. He found out we didn't order spaghetti and brought out a plate for each of us anyway. (He really wanted us to try this sauce!) The Carriage House is an ancient looking building with high open beam ceilings and large windows out the back facing the river. It was an altogether pleasant experience. We recommend it! We finally left the restaurant and walked along the river on our way back to the lodge. Our room looked out over the gardens and river which we could hear rushing all through the night.

DAY 20: Thursday 8/19 GAKONA AK TO SILVER LAKE AK

Weather: cloudy - C O L D

Road Conditions: Richardson: paved Edgerton: paved McCarthy Road: dirt

Miles Traveled: 74

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: On the advice of the gang in the Trappers Den Bar last night, we headed back down to the Richardson and south to Gulkana where we stopped for gas and breakfast, then proceeded on down the road past Copper Center (where we stopped briefly for ice) to the Edgerton Highway - a shortie (35 miles) that connects the Richardson with Chitina (pronounced CHIT-na) which is at the beginning of the McCarthy road. This road places you right in the heart of the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. The locals don't like the fact that this is a national park. They hate Jimmy Carter for designating so much of Alaska as protected federal lands. They think it screwed up their ability to hunt & fish & log & mine. The perspectives are very different up here. We were quite surprised to find open hostility toward environmentalists in such a gorgeous, unspoiled region. They just want to be left alone to do what they want to do - believing that there is enough room and resources to go around and that the environmentalists are just meddling in things that don't concern them. Unfortunately, that belief seems to be what has brought the lower-48 to the state we're in with regard to stripped resources, polluted air, water and earth. While the Alaskan's desire to be left alone strikes a harmonic note in my libertarian spirit, I would truly hate to think that unspoiled Alaska

as it exists today will not be there for me to revisit in my future. But I digress. The road in to Chitina passes 3-4 lovely lakes. The water level and the road surface are almost the same. It is a very strange feeling! Chitina has a population of 49 (according to MILEPOST). We were looking for wilderness again---and continued on the McCarthy road. This "road" is the old rail road grade to the Kennecott Mine at McCarthy. MILEPOST even warns you to watch for spikes in the road bed. This road is really really rough - major league pot holes and washboard. There are several lovely camp grounds very close to Chitina - but we want to look at Silver Lake Campground, about 11 miles out into the wilderness. We bounced along until we found a sign pointing to the campground. Now we know how Brigham Young felt when he got his first look at the Salt Lake valley -- "This is the Place" !!!!!!! There were several little campsites right along the grassy lake shore - a dock built out into the lake - a little old man running the place - ancient wooden outhouses - all very very picturesque. We picked the camp site at the end, pitched our tent & rain fly (the weather wasn't exactly perfect here), and kicked back.



(Silver Lake Alaska)

We have been waiting and looking for a wilderness experience the whole time we've been gone. We have seen wilderness, but not just basked in it. Now three weeks in to the trip, we decided to stay here for a couple of days and let the wilderness soak in. The clouds moved in and out - no sunshine at all, but varying ceiling levels allowing occasional glimpses of the beautiful Wrangell St. Elias Mountains. Toward evening, two vans of very loud European tourists arrived - the traveling Euro-invaders! They (quite obviously) were not here to enjoy the peace and quiet! They pitched their camp like a well-oiled machine, and proceeded to cook & drink & raise hell. We moved our chairs around to the other side of the tent and just tried to ignore them.

DAY 21: Friday 8/20 SILVER LAKE AK

Weather: cloudy - rainy - COLD

Road Conditions: no movement

Miles Traveled: 0

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: The Euro-invaders got up early, broke camp and went away. BYE! (Good riddance!). After breakfast, Dick took his fishing stuff down to the pier and proceeded to fish. One of the best photographs I took on the whole voyage is taken from a distance - the lake & the dock & Dick fishing against the backdrop of the surrounding mountains & cloudy skies.



(Silver Lake Alaska)

Occasionally, the camp-ground proprietor would fire up an outboard motor and send little groups of fisher-persons out on to the lake, but otherwise, it was utterly and deeply silent. I set up my telescope (the first and only time I even took it out of the car) and with the spotting scope, followed a pair of loons around the lake. These are gorgeous designer birds. They call them "Common Loons" but there is nothing common about them! They are black & white water birds with the most hauntingly beautiful cry. I suppose someone from Michigan or Maine probably thinks I'm the loon for thinking these are such extraordinary birds, but this California girl fell irretrievably in love with these feathered creatures. Dick shared the dock with a fly-

fisherwoman. This was our first experience watching this very artful performance. We were both enthralled with the strategy and technique (she didn't catch anything, however!). In the afternoon, a man and a little girl came back in from boat-fishing on the lake. They had a boat full of fish! Dick inquired about what kind of lure they had been using. The man produced an iridescent yellow/green (Day-Glo?) plastic wiggly thing and said he had caught all the fish with that type of lure. Dick said, "Hmmm - I have one of those"... he put it on his line and within five minutes he had a 12 inch trout. He decided to toss it back - the hunt is the game! I have to say that neither one of us are fishermen, but we also thought it was completely ridiculous to go to Alaska and not be prepared to fish. Before we left home, we went to K-Mart and just started pulling things off the shelves - ("hey! these look cute - let's get some of these!"). It was quite rewarding for Dick to actually catch something! The weather kept getting colder and colder. We couldn't seem to get warm! Along in mid-afternoon we got back in our sleeping bags just to get our toes warmed up! It rained off and on and we enjoyed listening to the patter on the tent roof. Toward evening it stopped raining and we heard the loons quite close by. We were out looking for them when one of the other campers approached us with a pan of fried trout and hush puppies. They had "too much" for their group and decided to share. We were quite touched by this random act of kindness. The food was delicious and a fitting end to our beautiful, relaxing day at Silver Lake.

DAY 22: Saturday 8/21 SILVER LAKE AK TO TOK AK

Weather: cold, rainy

Road Conditions: McCarthy Road: dirt; Edgerton: paved; Richardson: paved; Tok cutoff: supposed to be paved, but large areas under construction - MUD

Miles Traveled: 215

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: Reluctantly we packed up our camp and headed back down the McCarthy Road. We have the feeling that we've turned the corner and are heading for home - today we're driving to Tok, then back down the Alcan to Whitehorse and points south. We stopped for pictures and just to look all along the brink of the Copper River. When we got back down to Chitina we decided to stop and mail some postcards and buy some beer. It was pretty early (9:30 a.m.) and we had the definite feeling that the residents of Chitina are not on a real strict clock. When we stopped in front of the store several locals were milling around out front. We asked if the store was open, and the guy said "Well, no, but we could be - what do you want" - we said "Beer" and - bingo - the store is open. I picked up a copy of the 1993 subsistence hunting guide in the store (along with the beer and some ice). It was pretty interesting reading - how many of each kind of available critter you can "bag" depending on your area of residence. As romantic as moving to Alaska sounds, I'm not sure I could trap or shoot a muskrat, skin it and eat it. I'm a super-market kind of girl. I guess if I move up here I should probably live in Anchorage - not in Chitina! We meandered back down the Edgerton Highway to the junction with the Richardson, stopped to eat at Gulkana (again), then made our way to the Tok Cutoff. We waved as we drove by the Gakona Road House... warm memories of that place, for sure! The Tok Cutoff is a diagonal road between the Richardson and the Alcan connecting Glennallen with Tok. The road goes right through the Alaska Range, and the scenery is absolutely fantastic. This is the kind of scenery that sells the tours. One of the things we

purchased to take to Alaska was a series of old radio shows - "Mystery Theater" - "Bob & Ray" and "Duffy's Tavern". We had been enjoying these at various intervals on our long driving days. As I was scanning the map for the next stop, I found a road house called Duffy's Tavern! Well, we decided we had to stop there! As it turns out, this place was in the middle of a very long (25+ miles) construction zone, and we were ready for some relief from the long string of cars that had built up behind the escort vehicle! Normally in the construction zones on these roads, you're sort of on your own - the flag person tells you to watch out and how long the construction zone is going to be, then you just sort of wind your way between the enormous earth-moving vehicles. This stretch of road must be more traveled or something because there was an actual caravan system happening. We had a forgettable lunch at Duffy's Tavern and decided that we shouldn't base our expectations on a name! On we went through the Alaska Range - following beautiful rivers and catching occasional glimpses of glaciated peaks and valleys through the clouds. If it weren't for the construction, this would have been a perfect piece of road. It almost was ANYWAY! We rolled in to Tok in the early afternoon. We were real low on clean clothes and we hadn't had a shower for a few days, so we picked a cool little old RV park that had all the facilities in the woods outside of Tok. We spent a couple of hours taking care of house-keeping chores and setting up camp before we headed in to town. We did a little souvenir shopping, had dinner at the Golden Bear, and headed back to camp. By this time it was raining cats & dogs. We turned in early and let the rain lull us to sleep.

DAY 23: Sunday 8/22 TOK AK TO HAINES JUNCTION YT

Weather: cloudy, clearing

Road Conditions: Alaska Highway: paved, except where under construction - WAY bad in construction areas

Miles Traveled: 301

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: It was still raining a little when we were packing up. We did a quick job and headed into town for breakfast at a local pancake place - right on the Alcan between a big motel and a very large commercial RV park. These places on the main drag are really big and organized - not like the cozy little spots we found off the beaten track. We filled up with gas and hit the trail. This is the part of the Alcan we missed by heading north at Whitehorse and heading for Dawson City. We looped north on the way up, connecting back with the Alcan at Tok. Now we're seeing new country. The Alcan between Tok and the border was VERY under construction. There were places where the detour route went through very slippery mud and places where we weren't sure where we were supposed to go. The sections of the road that weren't torn up were extremely winding and narrow. This was a particularly slow section of the road. After a couple of hours of driving we reached the Canadian (Yukon Territory) border. A native woman border patrolman ransacked the car in front of us - the guy had to take every single thing out of his truck - he had camping gear and all sorts of traveling paraphernalia spread out all over the border station. We were watching all this thinking how neatly we had just packed everything IN to the car, wondering if we were next. She either didn't like his looks, or she only ransacks every other car, because she asked us where we were from, how long we had been gone, where we were going, and waved us through! The Yukon Territory is beautiful. This section of highway goes down the back side of the Wrangell St. Elias

Mountains; only over here on the Canadian side, it is called Kluane National Park. Mount Logan, the highest mountain in Canada is in this range. Alas, the visibility/ceiling was quite low and we were unable to see the peaks. The lower flanks of the mountains were absolutely beautiful. The road wound through green and flowering valleys with lakes and streams everywhere. Toward mid-late afternoon we reached Kluane Lake - an enormous lake of a very unusual glacial color. Even in the stormy weather we could see the turquoise quality of the water.



(Kluane Lake, YT)

We stopped at Destruction Bay for a look around and a couple of beers. There is a very modern bar and restaurant here, run by very young and efficient people. We enjoyed kicking back for a little while before proceeding on our way. This region is quite historic - the Canadians and Americans had a big opening ceremony along the shores of the lake when the Alaska-Canada Highway was first finished in 1942. The weather was starting to clear as we rounded the southern end of Kluane Lake. The river that flows out of the lake goes into the most wild, gorgeous canyon I have ever seen. The memory of the sun shafts stabbing through the clouds, lighting up portions of the landscape is a moment in time that I will carry with me always. The region into which this river flows on its way to the ocean is rugged land that is totally inaccessible to vehicles - feet or nothing!!! As we wound down out of the mountains into the valley, Haines Junction spread out before our feet. This is where the Alaska Highway and the Haines Road come together. It was late in the day, and we decided a motel sounded like the thing to do. We checked in to a nice little place with a gorgeous view of the towering cliffs that surround the town. Haines Junction and surrounding peaks look like the town in "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" - a tiny little town, made to look even smaller by the towering mountains closely surrounding it. We went exploring after we took our luggage into the motel. The population of Haines Junction is 536 (according to MILEPOST). The business district stretches out along the highways. The road to Haines was a great temptation - but we had decided that we would approach coastal panhandle Alaska at Skagway - tomorrow! We picked

out a cool looking little restaurant and had dinner. We struck up a conversation with some local youths, talking about the local economy, employment opportunities, the outrageous price of Canadian cigarettes, and how they smuggle American cigarettes up from Hyder - the only Canadian American road border crossing without a customs agent. They say it is well worth the two day drive to go down to Hyder and buy cigarettes because they can more than double their investment, cover their trip expenses, and still sell the cigs to the locals for less than the market price of the Canadian cigarettes. (1997 note: I read in Alaska Magazine that this little loophole has been plugged - there is now a customs agent at the Hyder/Stewart border... so much for people's liberation free enterprise!) We drove around after supper - went to a soft ice cream drive in and ate ice cream, even though it was freezing cold - ice cream tastes pretty good after you haven't had it for a long time, even if it is probably only in the 40s! We returned to our rented digs at the Cozy Corner motel, and settled in for the night.

DAY 24: Monday 8/23 HAINES JCT. YT TO SKAGWAY AK

Weather: clear to increasing clouds

Road Conditions: paved

Miles Traveled: 208

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: Left Haines Junction around 9 a.m. (after having been adopted by a cat who just strolled into our motel room as we were packing up to leave...). Our destination for today was Skagway Alaska - one of the very few (3) cities in the Alaskan panhandle to which you can drive a car, the other two being Haines & Hyder. It's about 140 miles from Haines Junction to Whitehorse on the Alaska Highway, then about 135 miles from Whitehorse to Skagway on the Klondike Highway. My mom and dad promised to send us a letter to general delivery in Whitehorse, so this was our first stop. It was an easy drive - about three hours on actual pavement with no construction (!). The landscape is beautiful, remote wilderness with only one "town" on this entire stretch of road. In Whitehorse we eventually located the post office to which general delivery items are sent, retrieved the letter, and went in to the Westmark Hotel for breakfast (actually, it was about noon, but we did eat breakfast!). We were anxious to get to Skagway, and headed out with very little ceremony. About 15 miles east of Whitehorse, the Klondike highway takes off to the south. It passes through rugged mountains, past enormous lakes, and through the wonderful scenic little town of Carcross. The road starts out in the Yukon Territory, goes through a little cross-section of British Columbia, then through the customs station into Alaska. We stopped at Emerald Lake (also known as Rainbow Lake) to take pictures. The water is a deep greenish blue color, and very clear - the bottom of the lake is visible in many places and is very apparent because it is white, decomposed shells.



(Rainbow Lake)

We decided to catch Carcross on the flip side - too many tour buses here today - and continued up into the mountains to White Pass. This is very historic country - the White Pass & Yukon railroad's original trackage ran all the way from Skagway to Whitehorse. These days, it is only maintained as a tourist rail road from Skagway up to the top of the pass. White Pass is only 3290 feet, but it seems almost alpine. Because of the northern latitude, timber-line is very low, and these coastal mountains are extremely craggy.



(White Pass)

Even this late in the year, there is still snow on the ground on the northern slopes of the mountains. We stopped at the summit and took a few pictures of the general landscape, the summit lake and the rail road tracks.



(White Pass)

Down, down, down we dropped into the valley. The customs border crossing is about 15 miles outside of town. This was the most laid back of all the border crossings. Skagway is a great little town built on the alluvial fan of the Skagway River sandwiched in between towering cliffs on three sides, and the Lynn Canal - a long, beautiful fjord of the Pacific Ocean. It is about 4 blocks wide and about 23 blocks long with a very western / frontier feeling about it. Skagway is a deep water port which is visited 3-4 days a week by enormous (5000+ passenger) cruise ships and serves as the northern terminus of the Alaska Marine Highway Southeast system. This day, no ships - the tourists in residence had all driven there or arrived previously by ferry. We drove around looking for a place to camp - and found a great little campground right next to the White Pass & Yukon Rail Road tracks - The Back Track Camper Park. We figured this would give

us a great view of the tourist trains heading for the pass (we were right!) Because we had a tent, we were able once again to take advantage of camping at the fringes in the trees. We pitched our tent in a little circle of aspen trees on a soft grassy surface. We were close to the showers, and the tracks - gee - could life get any better than this? After the camp-pitching was complete, we headed for town. We immediately fell in love with this town! We parked the car and wandered up and down the streets - in and out of the little shops and bars. It was obvious to us that the infrastructure here is built for a lot more people than were in town today! We went down to the water front and looked around at the rail road station, ferry dock, the public docks and the cruise ship docks. We had read in the MILEPOST about the existence of a water taxi between Skagway and Haines. Remember this morning we were in Haines Junction? The "junction" there is the Haines Road and the Alaska Highway. These two towns, Skagway and Haines, are only 13 miles apart, but to DRIVE from one to the other, one must travel 359 miles! The water taxi was pretty cheap - only \$29 per person, round trip. We decided to go for it, and purchased tickets for tomorrow. We treated ourselves to pizza for dinner at the Northern Lights Pizza Parlor.

DAY 25: Tuesday 8/24 SKAGWAY AK TO HAINES AK AND BACK TO SKAGWAY AK

Weather: cloudy, clearing

Road Conditions: city streets paved

Miles Traveled: 0 in the car -- 13 by water taxi

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: We woke to dreary cold weather and decided that sour dough pancakes sounded like a good start for what promised to be a cold day. We found a pancake place that advertised that their sour-dough starter is over 100 years old. Hmmmm... I don't know if that is good or bad! Today is one of the days the cruise ships come in. We were on hand when the influx of blue-haired humanity in polyester leisure suits hit the docks. The helicopters were waiting to sweep interested parties up to a fly-over of the near-by glaciers - the taxi's were waiting to drive the lazy a block to town - the train was simmering in the station ready to take the historically minded up the White Pass narrow gauge route. The majority, however, seemed to be headed straight for the curio shops waiving their VISA cards in the air - power shoppers! We were glad to be heading for Haines - Skagway is going to be a nut farm today! We located the water taxi berth on the public dock and boarded the boat. It seats about 25 people inside--and there is an upper deck for the brave who want to be in the elements. It was a very interesting ride - the captain pointed out various rock formations, waterfalls, and drove us up close to the seals sunning themselves on the rocks.



(Lynn Canal; between Haines and Skagway)

As we traveled west, the storm began to break up. By the time we reached Haines, it was an absolutely beautiful day. The sun came out and the air was crystal clear. The surrounding snow-capped peaks provided a stunning background against the fjord.



(Haines Harbor, Alaska)

We had 2-3 hours to look around in Haines, and set out immediately to find something to eat! We had lunch at a nice little restaurant near the wharf then proceeded to walk around town and have a look. We had the opportunity to take a taxi/bus out to the movie set of "White Fang", a Disney production that had been filmed in this area a couple of years before. We

decided that we would rather entertain ourselves, and proceeded to wander around town. We walked and walked - Haines is the site of an old military installation Fort William H. Seward. Many of the old buildings on the base have been turned into private homes, bed & breakfast hotels, restaurants and little shops. We continued our walk back toward the docks - all this exercise can't possibly be good for us - let's find a place to have a beer! We went back into the restaurant where we had lunched, and enjoyed a couple while we were waiting for our departure time. We finally had to stop ourselves from taking more pictures - everywhere we looked was another photo opportunity! The scenery is magnificent. (I feel like I'm running out of superlative adjectives!) Near Haines, in January, one can see large flocks of Bald Eagles roosting in the trees. Oh, to be in Haines in January. The average temperature is 17 degrees (in January) - which, compared to interior Alaska, is almost balmy. So far, everything we've seen makes us want to see more! On the return trip to Skagway we passed a couple of the big cruise ships coming out of Skagway - these are enormous floating cities, but are dwarfed by the landscape. The weather was still fairly nice and we spent most of the return trip topside with the wind in our hair - soaking up the scenery. Our return to Skagway was to a much calmer place than we had left in the morning due to the departure of a couple of the cruise ships. We got to watch the BIGGEST ship (Princess Cruise Lines) cast off and maneuver around in a tiny tight little space and get turned around heading back for the open waters. It was very interesting to watch them finesse that enormous liner in such tight quarters! We drove up to the other end of town and poked around in the White Pass & Yukon Rail Road yard, photographing all the rolling stock, looking into the engine houses, marveling at the ancient rotary snow plough and generally enjoying the RR yard ambience.



(Snow Plow – Skagway Rail Yard)



(White Pass & Yukon RR)



(White Pass & Yukon RR, Skagway AK)



(WP&YRR Caboose – Skagway AK)



(Rail Yard – Skagway AK)



(White Pass & Yukon passenger car – Skagway Alaska)

Next, we drove over to the "air port" (air strip) and watched the planes taking off and landing. This is active, live entertainment! Alaska operates on planes - I think I read somewhere that there are more planes per capita in Alaska than anywhere else. This shouldn't be a real surprise considering how few roads there are, and how much area there is! This is the transportation form of choice. We spent the evening wandering around town - even though we're a couple of months past mid-summer, the days are still very long, and evening is a well lit experience.

DAY 26: Wednesday 8/25 SKAGWAY AK

Weather: cloudy, clearing

Road Conditions: city streets paved

Miles Traveled: 11

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: For the past couple of days we had noticed a lanky, blonde kid hanging around the campsite next door to ours. Dick (being a magnet to kids and dogs) struck up a friendship with Eli from Tacoma, Washington who was touring Alaska with his grandfather. We had the serious feeling that grandpa was drunk most of the time, and that Eli was touring Alaska anyway. He was about 15, and seemed to be enjoying himself, although he also seemed to enjoy having someone to talk to! He had been wearing a really ratty looking hat, and Dick decided to give him an "Alaska" hat he purchased yesterday in Haines. Eli was really excited about this gift! Many days ago we decided that once we got to Skagway we would go to an old time photographer and get our picture taken. We just had the feeling there would be one here - we have seen these establishments in most of the tourist towns we've been in (Virginia City, Jerome, Old Town Sacramento, etc.). Sure enough, we located one on the main drag of Skagway and dressed up. Dick was a Mountie - and I was some sort of velveteen hussy. We chose our backdrop and costumes and sat for the photo - they do the processing on site and

have the picture ready in a couple of hours. This is foolish tourist sentimentality, but we loved it, and the picture is in an ornate wood frame in our house to this day. We spent the rest of the day wandering around Skagway, doing a little grocery shopping, a little beer shopping (love that Alaska Ale!), and doing some major league souvenir shopping - most of the places we've been have not really been geared to this activity. We were nearing the end of the trip and Skagway is loaded with t-shirt emporiums (or is that emporia?)! We did a little laundry, and generally just relaxed before beginning the long trek home. While we know we will see much beautiful country between here and home, we have the definite feeling that the rest of the trip is the journey home. There seems to be some strange forward momentum that strikes the returning traveler! We followed our earlier routine and packed everything except the tent & sleeping gear into the car before turning in for the night.

DAY 27: Thursday 8/26 SKAGWAY AK TO WATSON LAKE YT

Weather: clear & pretty

Road Conditions: paved

Miles Traveled: 322

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: It rained hard in the night, but when we woke up, it was clear. The tent was sopping wet - I really hated packing it up wet!!! We broke camp, and drove out of town. We had really enjoyed Skagway, and hated to leave! We enjoyed the scenery going out of Skagway as much as we did coming in - it is absolutely spectacular! We stopped at Carcross and had a look around, but there were still too many tour buses. If there is one thing we can't deal with it is tour buses! We got out fast! We drove through beautiful scenery on the cut-off road to the Alaska Highway (sort of a "Y" arrangement - new territory!), and decided to stop for breakfast at a road house where this cut-off road joins the Alaska Highway at Jake's Corner. Because it was mid-morning, there was no one else around (or so we thought). While we were eating, a disturbed young woman approached us demanding that we buy her breakfast. We politely declined and she proceeded to tell us what she thought of selfish rich people (us?) who wouldn't even buy her something to eat or a pack of cigarettes. The restaurant staff removed her from the premises, but we kept an eye on the car, just to make sure she didn't take her retribution out on it! No matter - we get to drive off into the gorgeous Yukon Territory - through the rolling hills and river valleys between here and Watson Lake. This is one of the very few instances where we are traveling the same road twice on this trip (there really isn't any choice!) - but we don't care at all because it is so beautiful! We retraced our steps back past Teslin, Nisutlin Lake, the Swift River, Rancheria, and the Upper Liard River. Even though the Stewart Cassiar Highway takes off south before Watson Lake, we decide to go back to visit our sign (it's still there!), gas up and camp over night in Watson Lake. The Stewart Cassiar is a very remote highway with very little in the way of tourist services along the way. Also, we haven't really experienced camping in this lovely region because we "motel-ed" it the first time through. All our camping gear was soaking wet from having packed up in the rain over night in Skagway. We hoped that the early stop (3 p.m.) and the sunny weather would enable us to dry everything out! We found a large grassy tent site in the Gateway to the Yukon RV Park in Watson Lake. We spread everything around on picnic tables, trees, clothes lines, etc. to dry, and just kicked back to relax. It is nice to see the sun and enjoy the wind in the trees. Toward

evening we ventured back in to town to see about buying some beer (we always seem to be out - what can I say??!) We went back to the Watson Lake Hotel and learned that we could buy beer from the bar to take away with us - not something you can do in California! We're quite surprised by this given the very strict liquor distribution laws we've encountered in other parts of Canada. We're half-amused, half-awestruck by the electrical cord/plugs sticking out from under the hoods of all the local vehicles - amused because it looks so strange to us, and awestruck to consider living where your car won't start unless you plug in the block heater for a period of time before trying to fire it up! What an incredible existence these people lead! Back at the campsite, everything is dry, and we pitch the tent and pack up the car for an early start. If we can do it, we're going to try to make it to Hyder tomorrow over an only partially paved thoroughfare known as the Stewart Cassiar Highway.

DAY 28: Friday 8/27 WATSON LAKE YT TO HYDER AK

Weather: clear to increasing clouds

Road Conditions: Stewart Cassiar: some pavement, lengthy dirt/gravel segments

Miles Traveled: 410

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: This morning we got going early (for us) - with breakfast at the Watson Lake Chevron station (they have a restaurant - don't worry), then headed back down the Alcan to the junction with the Stewart Cassiar Highway. This road was completed in 1972. It is the route of commercial truckers headed north of the 60th parallel. It is several hours shorter than the alternative Alaska Highway route. Many many miles of its 456 mile length are gravel or dirt. The road runs down the "back side" (inland side) of the coastal mountains which are tall, steep and rugged. Over the mountains lies the Alaska panhandle, which is not accessible by road at all except at Skagway & Haines (at the north end) and Hyder at the south end. We were filled with the sense of adventure as we turn down highway 37. The weather was getting crappy again, but we could still see many lovely vistas as the road winds and rolls through the countryside. This is gold and jade mining country, very sparsely populated, filled with lakes and rivers and beautiful scenery.



(Stewart Cassiar Highway)

We noted with interest that the advertisements in MILEPOST for the various guest ranches, motor inns, and services along the Cassiar (particularly in the middle third) do not list telephone numbers, but Mobile Radio numbers... this is really the boonies! There are many places worthy of stopping and staying a week! About 150 miles south of Watson Lake we stopped for gas at Dease Lake. The more remote the road, the more interested we are in using the gasoline out of the top half (or third) of the tank! Along the route we see float planes taking off and landing on the road-side lakes. In a couple of places, the highway doubles as an air strip, with many warning signs that the air craft has the right of way -- it reminded us of the plane sequence in the movie North by Northwest (rent it). We did a little exploring off the road and found a beautiful picnic site next to a river. The clouds were hunkering down, hiding the mountains, giving the landscape a less grandiose, more intimate feeling. We wanted to stay forever, but we were being pulled south by our homing instinct. We reached Mezadine junction, and left the main highway to head to Stewart & Hyder. The MILEPOST makes reference to the "hanging glaciers" along this road. These glaciers are truly hanging - and an amazing sight to behold. They cling in the crevices of the rock - enormous robin's-egg-blue ice masses that never go away.



(Hanging Glaciers near Stewart, BC)

They are only a couple hundred feet above the road - one could easily walk/climb up to them in very little time (with lots of effort!) - but I couldn't quite get past the feeling that it might fall on me at any minute (silly girl...). We stopped many times in a very few miles---it is only 41 miles from Mezadine Junction to Hyder, but this valley is full of wonders! About half way out we stopped at Bear Glacier - an enormous swath of ice that is the headwaters of the Bear River. We stood and watched as chunks of ice the size of Chevys dropped off the face of the glacier into the small lake that is formed at the base.



(Bear Glacier – near Stewart, BC)

The Bear River flows out of this lake - and makes its way to the ocean only about 20 miles away. Short river, but spectacularly beautiful. It flows through a narrow canyon (that also contains the road and a beautiful forest) from the glacier down to Stewart/Hyder at the head of the Portland Canal. Stewart is in British Columbia - has a population of about 1700. We learned that the town's electricity is completely provided by a central generator for which fuel has to be trucked or shipped in by the road or the canal. The Portland Canal is a long inlet of the Pacific Ocean - part of the inside passage fjord system. The "Misty Fjords National Park" is nearby. Past Stewart by about 2 miles lies the Alaska border and the town of Hyder. We were anxious to check this out. The town was pretty run-down (quaint?) with a population of 85. We were surprised to learn that this AMERICAN community uses CANADIAN currency - it makes one wonder if they shouldn't just re-draw the borders to include Hyder as part of Canada! The weather had been pretty awful all day, we had driven over 400 pretty demanding miles this day, and we were pooped. We decided to check in to the Sealaska Inn and have dinner and turn in early. Big mistake. We had a nice dinner and watched a couple of Alaska Videos on the big screen TV in the restaurant (which we enjoyed), but by the time we were heading for bed, the bar crowd showed up and there was no rest that night! It seemed like the entire population of Hyder (all 75 of them) decided to whoop it up in the bar.

DAY 29: Saturday 8/28 HYDER AK TO BURNS LAKE BC

Weather: beautiful! clear

Road Conditions: paved

Miles Traveled: 299

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: I suspect that if we had made this trip in the opposite order (Up the Cassiar, and Down the Alaska highway) where this had been one of our early stops, we probably would have taken more pains to explore Hyder and the surrounding area. (I also suspect that if we had done the trip in the reverse order we may have never gotten to Alaska - northern BC is beautiful beautiful beautiful.) However, the bad night sleep and the "southern pull" were playing against us. We got up and out of Hyder early (8:00). We gassed up at a Chevron station in Stewart - the people in this town are great! The girl in the gas station was very interested in what we had seen and where we were going. We enjoyed driving back past the Bear Glacier - we stopped again and just let that color soak in to our brains. That glacier blue is just indescribable! We picked up the Stewart Cassiar Highway again at Mezadine junction and headed south. It is only about 98 miles from here to the junction with the Yellowhead Highway which is the main east-west thoroughfare through central British Columbia. It starts in the west at Prince Rupert, goes through Prince George, continues into the Rockies and on to Edmonton, Alberta and points east. We picked it up at Kitwanga, but not before stopping for breakfast at a forgettable little road house. The wait staff must have been relatives because anyone seriously wishing to remain in business would have fired this crew years ago. We finally got everything we ordered, paid the bill and got the hell out of there! We stopped to take pictures of a collection of authentic totem poles that stand in this region.



(Kitwanga Totem Poles)

These were not the brightly painted totems of the tourist brochures, but carved, natural wood, beautiful old totems. We were amazed at how Polynesian the faces on the figures seemed to us.



(Kitwanga Totem Pole)

Turning on to the Yellowhead is like coming out of a dream. After days and days of rough, rutted, nearly vacant roads, the presence of other automobiles was startling to say the least! This is a major four lane highway heavily traveled by trucks, local traffic and tourists, all driving about 60 miles per hour. Dick had to make some major attitude adjustments real fast. The highway follows the Skeena River for many miles through beautiful country. It is different, once again - more towns and farms - the orderly existence of farming communities and well tended fields against the backdrop of rugged mountains, still bearing snow at the end of August as the locals harvest their grains in the valleys below. The road takes a southern turn at "The Hazeltons" - a little group of towns (Hazelton, New Hazelton, South Hazelton) and begins following the Buckley River. These are the towns from which the youth are yearning to escape, the towns the older generation take for granted, and the towns that make tourists like me consider renouncing US citizenship and moving to Canada. There is water everywhere - lakes, streams, ponds, rivers, every possible form one can imagine. We passed through Smithers, a picturesque little hamlet with a mountain backdrop. (I think this is where the guy from the Clinton campground with the Karaoke machine was headed - we decided the safest thing to do was keep driving!) At about 4 p.m. we decided we'd had enough driving for today and pulled into a scenic little KOA conveniently located between the highway and the rail road tracks at Burns Lake. This questionable sounding location was beautifully dressed in forest garb, hiding both the cars (good thing) and the trains (bad thing) from view (although not from hearing!). We enjoyed being nearly alone in the tent sites up on the hill, looking down on a little lake. It looked like it was going to "weather up" so we decided to pack up after dinner and be ready to hit the road early and pick up breakfast on the run.

DAY 30: Sunday 8/29 **BURNS LAKE BC TO CLINTON BC**

Weather: clear

Road Conditions: paved

Miles Traveled: 386

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: Left Burns Lake at about 8:00 a.m. The countryside continued to be spectacular as we made our way through Fraser Lake, Fort Fraser and Vanderhoof. We stopped for breakfast at a little road-side cafe which was crowded with locals enjoying Sunday morning breakfast. The old adage about picking cafes with lots of trucks in the parking lot seems to work pretty consistently. We are now in a major "get on down the road" mode... once we reached Prince George at about 11:30 a.m., we were back on roads we've seen before, but that did not take away from the lovely scenery one bit! We hit Williams Lake at about 2:00 p.m., then continued on down highway 97 for a couple more hours. We arrived at Clinton at about 4:00 p.m. and decided to stay at Lakeview Campsite again, just for old time sake. The difference in the weather was astounding - 26 days later and we're in a different season! The campground was nearly deserted. We picked a spot right on the lake this time around. Toward evening a few trailers pulled in, but compared to our first time here, it is nearly empty. Thinking back to the first time through (with the guy and his karaoke machine) we made a joke that made us laugh ourselves silly -- Don Ho vs. Perry Como -- comparing the tropical weather of early August to the "Christmas Special" feel to the air tonight. (I guess you had to be there.) We packed up everything but the sleeping gear before we went to bed - another early "out" tomorrow.

DAY 31: Monday 8/30 **CLINTON BC TO HOPE BC**

Weather: clear

Road Conditions: paved

Miles Traveled: 182

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: When we awoke, the thermometer in the tent said 30 degrees (Fahrenheit). It takes a great deal of courage to haul one's butt out of a nice warm sleeping bag when it is damp & very cold with no apparent source of warmth in the offing. We learned way back in this trip to store our clothing between the sleeping bag and the bed cushion pad on the cots to keep them from absorbing the moisture in the tent during the night. We end up looking nicely wrinkled, but it is a vast improvement over pulling on damp jeans! We whizzed through breaking up camp and got on the road (the car, after all, has a heater...). We proceeded to Cache Creek where we stopped for gas and breakfast. On the way up, we had taken the recommended route through Yale, Boston Bar, etc. to connect to Cache Creek. The map shows a major freeway (for Canada) connecting Kamloops to Hope. We decided that we would try this alternate route. This required journeying east (the wrong direction) for about 25 miles to get from Cache Creek to Kamloops, but we figured we would probably make up the time on the superhighway, and we wanted to see a different road. This ended up being a very rewarding experience - cutting about an hour off the trip distance, and allowing us to see another facet of British Columbia. The area around Kamloops is fairly arid, considering this is one of the

gateways to the Rocky Mountains. We were quite surprised by the lack of trees in this landscape. The trip was fast and we arrived in Hope at about 11:00 a.m. Now that we're back near the US Border, we aren't ready to go home (go figure!). We decided that we'd make today a short driving day, have one last look around the Hope area, then launch our assault on the lower 48 with a great exuberance tomorrow morning. We continued last night's nostalgia and went back to the Wild Rose campground where we were promptly adopted by an orange "Morris" cat. We drove around town, did a little shopping, and ended up at the Silver Chalice Pub which boasts a huge collection of Winchester rifles. We were impressed with this very interesting collection. Dick was particularly interested since the gun we bought to take along on this trip is a Winchester 30/30. After lunch, we went to the air port and watched the planes take off and land (remember, we're transportation junkies, in case that hasn't become obvious!), then proceeded back to the campground for a relaxing afternoon in the sun. It is a lot warmer down here! Tomorrow, onward as the road home unrolls before us.

DAY 32: Tuesday 8/31 HOPE BC TO COTTAGE GROVE OREGON

Weather: clear - HOT

Road Conditions: paved

Miles Traveled: 468

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: Today we put the miles behind us. We broke camp and left Hope at about 8 a.m. This put us in the commute traffic heading for Vancouver, but it wasn't too bad, mainly because we left the freeway at Abbotsford to head for the border at Sumas / Huntingdon. We crossed the border without incident, and drove through the farm country of northern Washington, headed for the dreaded I-5. We hit the Seattle area about 11:45 a.m. and were delighted to learn that their "express lanes" truly are! We refueled in Tacoma (SeaTac Texaco!) and had fast food for lunch. Being back in the USA (lower 48) is quite a jolt. Things move much quicker down here and are considerably more crowded than anything we've experienced in the last month. The whole southward experience from this point forward seems like a blur - we sat still and the world rolled by underneath us! Through Washington, over the bridge - into Oregon - on and on - and on and on... The weather was very hot for Oregon (for any place, actually, but particularly for Oregon!). About 4:00 p.m. we started looking for a place to stop. We didn't want to get too far from the freeway, and we wanted to make sure there was food AND lodging wherever we picked - so I started looking through the AAA book on accommodations in Oregon. We decided to find the Best Western Village Inn in Cottage Grove, Oregon. Best Westerns are always a gamble - some are very nice, and some are real dives! We were pleasantly surprised to find this one to be absolutely charming. It was an older ranch-style sprawling one-story affair with drive up carports outside the room entrances on the driveway side, and beautiful little patios on a shaded garden on the other side. We rested up before dinner in the restaurant, then back to the room to collapse. It is amazing how just sitting in a car can wear you out! We watched TV and fell asleep - another long haul tomorrow. This is the point in the vacation where you wish you had a Star Trek transporter to just beam you back home!

DAY 33: Wednesday 9/1 COTTAGE GROVE OR TO WILLIAMS CA

Weather: clear - HOT

Road Conditions: paved - I-5, what can I say!

Miles Traveled: 391

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: We left Cottage Grove at 7:00 a.m., and hit the California border at about 9:30. We stopped for lunch in Redding at Jeff's California Cattle Company. We were entertained through the Redding area by some red neck woman, teasing the truckers on her CB. Goodness - the FCC must not be monitoring this very closely these days! It was hot again - but one expects it to be hot on September first in Redding! Down the valley, we began considering whether we wanted to try to make it all the way home (which would have made this a VERY long day, and put us in the Bay Area right at rush hour), or if we wanted to just find a nice little motel with a pool and wait it out. At about 2:00 p.m., the pool concept won out, and we stopped in Williams California at the Comfort Inn. We gassed up, bought some beer, and headed for the pool. There, we met a marshal from Arizona who was in California to extradite a prisoner. He was going to meet a local law enforcement agent the next day and fly back to Arizona with the prisoner. We enjoyed visiting with him about various aspects of law enforcement, Arizona, California, Alaska, and just life in general. Amazing how conversations get started in a situation such as this! We also learned that the motel was full of hunters, getting ready to head up into the hills for the first day of dove hunting season (hmmm...). In the evening, we put on respectable clothing and headed in to town for dinner at Granzella's Delicatessen. This is a fun place! They have good food, and a great gourmet shop, full of all sorts of wine, cheese, breads, sauces, tubes of tomato paste, pasta, pickled this and that -- a paradise for people like us! We strolled around and bought a few things, then headed back to the motel to rest up for the final leg of our trip home.

DAY 34: Thursday 9/2 WILLIAMS CA TO ATASCADERO CA

Weather: clear - HOT

Road Conditions: paved

Miles Traveled: 309

Noteworthy Stops & Scenery: We left Williams at 7:00 a.m. and headed on down the road. All of our efforts to avoid the bay area during rush hour - only to hit it anyway - we figured that after 8, everyone should BE at work - but they weren't - they were all out driving on the freeway. It seems that the east bay freeways have always been and will always be under construction. I think if they ever actually finish up there, I'll die of shock. This was routine stuff - we stopped for gas in Gilroy - and headed for home. We watched the odometer on the car turn over to 20,000 miles in the vineyards just north of San Lucas, and decided we couldn't quite make it clear home, so we stopped for a potty break at the rest stop just north of San Miguel. We rolled in to our own driveway at high noon. It was good to be back, but take it from me - when it comes to traveling to Alaska, you never come all the way home.

- The End -

Recommended Reading:

Periodicals:

Alaska Geographic Magazine (quarterly publication)
(2011 update: Alas, this publication is out of print – but individual copies are still available here and there – worth looking for...)

ALASKA Magazine
<http://www.alaskamagazine.com/>

Books:

Two in the Far North - by Margaret Murie
Alaska Northwest Books – ISBN 0-88240-111-4
(An amazing book by an amazing woman!)

Tisha – The Story of a Young Teacher in the Alaska Wilderness
(as told to Robert Specht)
Bantam Books – ISBN 0-553-26596-2
(A little schmaltzy, but really gives a flavor of old Alaska)

Eagle Tales (Volume 1) - by Cassalona Rhea Richter
2011 Note: Unsure of availability. Info in front of book says PO Box 22, Eagle AK 99738
(A collection of Short Stories, Published Articles, Essays, Odes & Poems)

Alaska's History – The People, Land and Events of the North Country - by Harry Ritter
Alaska Northwest Books – ISBN 0-88240-432-6
(Nice short "pop history" piece)

Facts About Alaska – The Alaska Almanac
Alaska Northwest Books – ISBN 0-88240-249-8 (16th edition)
(Fun, fact-filled info piece)

The Great Alone - by Janet Dailey
Pocket Books – ISBN 0-671-87504-3
(An historical novel. Enough history to make it really interesting - enough trashy novel elements to make it REALLY interesting.)

Arctic Daughter by Jean Aspen
Laurel Expedition Books – ISBN 0-440-21449-1
(A modern day adventure - gets a little depressing and grisly at times)

Wildflowers Along The Alaska Highway by Verna Pratt
Alaskacrafts, Inc. - ISBN 0-9623192-1-X
(*A Field Guide*)

Two Old Women by Velma Wallis
Harper Perennial – ISBN 0-06-097584-9
(*Native Legends*)

Yukon by Northern Light by R. Wayne Towriss
Studio North Ltd. – ISBN 0-88925-453-2
(*Gorgeous photos of the YT*)

Outhouses of Alaska by Harry M. Walker
Epicenter Press – ISBN 0-945397-41-0
(*Quirky, fun photos and stories*)

A Schoolteacher in Old Alaska – The Story of Hannah Breece by Jane Jacobs
Vintage Books (Random House) – ISBN 0-679-44134-4
(*Another interesting history*)

One Man's Wilderness: An Alaskan Odyssey by Sam Keith
Alaska Northwest Books – ISBN 0882405136
(*An record of the amazing life of Richard Proenneke – a must-read*)

Into the Wild by Jon Krakauer
Anchor Books – ISBN 0385486804
(*Heartbreaking...*)

More Books:

Sitka by Louis L'Amour (ISBN 0-553-27881-9)
The Call of the Wild and White Fang by Jack London (ISBN 0-553-21233-8)
Alaska by James Michener (ISBN 0-449-21726-4)
The Best of Robert Service (poetry) (ISBN 0-7700-0017-7)

Vacation Planning Materials:

The Milepost
www.themilepost.com
(*This is the essential traveling companion - the BIBLE OF THE NORTH. Don't leave home without it!!! Revised and published every year.*)

Alaska-Yukon Handbook by Castleman, Pitcher, and Stanley

Moon Publications, Inc. – ISBN 0-918373-40-9

(A great book to acquaint, orient, instruct and entertain anyone interested in traveling to Alaska!)

Alaska Atlas and Gazeteer

DeLorme Mapping – ISBN 0-89933-201-3

www.delorme.com

Alaska's Wilderness Highway – Traveling the Dalton Road by Mike Jensen

Umbrella Books – ISBN 0-945397-28-3

AAA Materials

Map: Alaska and northwestern Canada

Tour Book: Western Canada and Alaska (this is NOT a substitute for Milepost, but still important)

Other Trip Planning Info:

http://www.travelalaska.com/Planners/Planner.aspx?utm_source=1400&utm_medium=ad

<http://www.alaskatravel.com/alaska-tourism.html>

<http://www.akbeautiful.com/>

www.northtoalaska.com

Alaska Marine Highway - <http://www.dot.state.ak.us/amhs/index.shtml>

www.bcf ferries.com

www.travel yukon.com