

## Escape from Whitehorse, Sept 13

In the Yukon they said the winter was three weeks early (versus 2 in Alaska) and they said every day was colder than the day before, so it was time to get going. I also needed to get back to my job and start paying off this trip.

I had decided that there was no point in getting any early start since it was too cold then and I wanted to see the Beringia Interpretative Center which opened at 9AM. I had a frugal breakfast of a Starbucks scone from the night before washed down with a bottle of orange juice and and room coffee, loaded up, and made a quick stop at the S.S. Klondike before getting on the Alaska highway in the wrong direction (north) to get to Beringia. It had been dry till then but started drizzling when I got to the center.

The center was small but educational, and for \$6CAD not a bad deal. Beringia, a lost continent sunk by an earlier phase of global warming, makes more sense than just an ice bridge that they used to teach us in school. Took off a little after 10AM and found that even then it was cold enough. Needed to stop after 60 miles to warm up again and put on my REI gloves. Should have put on my neck warmer, too. More numb fingers and squirming in the saddle to try to warm up. That's with wearing 6 layers on top and 4 on the bottom. The rain was never heavy, but made the air cold. It slowed down around noon.

Even ended up on a stretch of unpaved road that gave me an idea of what the Alcan must have been like when my Folks did it in the Winnebago 21 years ago. For lunch I stopped in Teslin for a real sit down meal including soup and a veggie burger, which reminded me of the time in the Swiss Alps where I was suffering from hypothermia when I found a warming hut. Teslin turned out to have a nice little wildlife museum. The displays of the local fauna were of a high quality.

Crossing the Continental Divide seemed to improve things. Actually cast a shadow a couple of times, which was a novel experience at this point. Speed picked up with less moisture in the air. At least my engine got up to operating temperature, which didn't happen when I left Dawson City. Made it into Watson Lake and stopped at the Visitor Center to find out what was ahead of me. The next possible stop was 100 miles out, so I decided to stay there. Checked out the sign forest and cruised the streets looking for a hotel. Decided on the Belvedere since there were a lot of cars parked outside. The hotel list from the visitor center gave me an idea of what the rates were. Quaint little place, considering that I was in the middle of nowhere. After checking in walked over to the Northern Lights Center, which is a small planetarium where they present videos of the northern lights. I caught the very last show of the season. Probably the only way I'll ever see the Northern Lights. After that I went back to the Visitor Center which had a decent Alcan Highway museum and watched their slideshow on the Alcan. Since I was in Canada, the show emphasized that work on the Highway started before authorization was received from the Canadian government.

Sept 14

Started off from Watson Lake at a decent time. It had rained the night before but wasn't too bad. I had learned by this time that you need to eat a decent breakfast to face the cold, but it was still cold going for a while. Squeezing my grips, I finally understood why electrically heated handgrips can be popular. Squirming in the saddle to try to get the core temperature up, and just about giving up on the feet. I think around Contact Creek or Coal River it started warming up a little. I stopped for gas and coffee, mainly coffee, and lubed up my chain. Surprised by a couple of guys on BMW F-650s like the one I used to have. They were from Austen and they were heading North!

It was still kind of miserable by the time I got to Liard River Hot Springs so I decided to blow it off even though the gal at Beringia said it was worth checking out. Maybe in the summer it's worth visiting. When it's cold and raining, you don't feel like making side trips, especially on gravel roads. By the time I started getting to Muncho Lake, it was starting to warm up and get pretty nice. I was starting to understand why the Texans thought they could still go to Alaska via motorcycle. Below Watson Lake, there's a definite break in the weather and you can start believing that you'll survive. Bought gas at a really expensive looking lodge above the lake. Really nice area. With a few exceptions, the scenery just doesn't let up on this trip. Riding alongside all of these lakes and rivers has been a thrill. If you tried to stop and take a snapshot at every opportunity, you'd never leave the place.

Made it in early to Ft. Nelson around 4PM. I didn't care for Fort Nelson too much and it was sunny and warm, so I decided to chance going on to Ft. St. John, another 220 miles or so. The going was good initially, but the roads started getting more challenging and there was more traffic, something I hadn't had to worry about in the Yukon so much. No gas for the first 100 miles, either. Found some at a place that actually looked like a commercial type depot for contracted road maintenance. They had an industrial type cafeteria and trailer type barracks. However, they did sell gas to the public and even sold me a sandwich to go. The gas was stored in industrial type tanks above ground. After that I saw more open places selling gas. You don't see that many real gas stations. This time I had pushed myself too far and the last 45 minutes were in the dark, since it was overcast and the moon was covered up and I lost the twilight from the sun earlier. However, before it became too dark, the lighting was often quite dramatic and beautiful since the clouds were still broken then. The last stretch into civilization was scary since the visibility was poor, there were no reflectors on the road, and oncoming headlights could blind you.

I was grateful when I started getting into Ft. St. John. and found a decent hotel after a referral. It was on the commercial strip paralleling the Alcan, full of motels, fast food places, and brand name stores. I was finally back in Civilization. Celebrated by going to a Wendy's.

Sept.15

It was a short run into Dawson Creek, the starting point of the Alcan, but all the road work delayed so I didn't really get there till about 10AM. Found Milepost 0, but the Visitors Center was closed and I was the only person there checking out the site. The current Milepost is actually in the middle of a traffic circle and you can't go up to it. However, there is a cairn that is supposed to more accurately mark the starting point of the Alcan, and you can go right up to it.

After my jubilation I almost ended up on the road to Edmonton since I hadn't realized that the turn off for 97 to Kamloops was actually outside of the city, before you get to it. After I asking for help, I finally got onto the right track. The road to Prince George went up into the mountains again, so I had to put back on some of my cold weather gear, but nothing like what I had to wear in the Yukon. The scenery was spectacular again around McLeod Lake, and I crossed the Continental Divide again, although I didn't see any signs. I got into Prince George around 4PM, and decided to put in some more miles, about 140 to Williams Lake. I was surprised again since I was returning to cold country, but it wasn't anything like the night before. Getting into Williams Lake wasn't too hard, and I found the Super 8 Motel which was actually pretty nice. However, it was near the outskirts of town so there weren't any reasonable restaurants within walking distance, so I made do with a tuna sandwich I had picked up for just such a situation. It's funny, but when I get off the bike at the end of the day, I don't feel like getting back on to run errands or go to dinner if I can help it. I prefer to walk wherever I need to, or I don't go.

I was back in the high country of mountain lodges, so the going wasn't that fast. At a gas fill-up I ran into a group of friendly Canadians on dual purpose bikes with full knobbies and camping gear. They were on a real 10 day adventure tour, trying to make it through all the backroads, even the ones the locals found impassable.

I found that entering PR5 didn't actually take me into Kamloops, so I missed a gas stop, but with my 6 gallon tank that wasn't too big a deal. The country had been changing again and it was arid and mountainous, and not so scenic. PR5 is a big multi-lane freeway, the first I'd been on since I'd left Bellingham. At Merritt, I stopped for gas and lunch and decided to finally check my rear tire. That morning at Williams Lake I'd finally checked my tire pressure. It'd been so cold and miserable up till then that I had neglected doing that, although I had been religiously lubing my chain and checking my oil level. I'd been checking my tires with the kick test. The air pressure was only 25psi, versus the 40psi I normally maintain. The front tire checked out okay. At Merritt I had a chance to check out the rear tire carefully in good light and found a piece of steel in it. I pumped up the tire and decided to keep on going since there wasn't that much around. I figured that I'd wait till I got back to Seattle where I knew there were Suzuki dealers.

I found the turn off for the border crossing at Sumas and as I hoped there wasn't much of a line. The US border agent seemed to be only interested in my passport and my license plate, making for a fast entry back into the USA. I guess there aren't many border crossings there since it's 30 minutes on back roads to get to Bellingham. My time in Canada had been like a trip to a parallel universe that was very similar to my own,

except that the money was different and the people talked a little differently. Also, you needed a lot more of their money. Everything was pretty expensive by our standards. You also had to learn about “Twonies” and “Loonies”, the common \$2CAD and \$1CAD coins. There was also a tendency towards ridiculously low speed limits in town that everyone seemed to ignore. In fact, speeding seemed to be more prevalent than in the US.

I stayed in the Bellingham Motel 6, which happened to be near an REI. I also made a stop at the Riteaid to pick up cleaning supplies to get the bike into shape for a trip to the dealer. I vowed never to use the PJ-1 chain lube again since it had made such a mess on everything.