

From Anchorage to Dawson City, Canada, Sept 10, 2008

Got out of Anchorage early in the morning, packing a wet tent. Pretty cold in the morning. Stopped at the McDonalds again to get something to eat and upload some more files through the AT&T wifi connection. Got out of town easily, and opposite of the train, the scenery was pretty good right out of town. Started warming up near Denali and stopped at Nenana to see the golden spike for the Alaskan Railway. Rolled into Fairbanks around 5PM, in time to visit the University Museum in the new building. Very informative. Balmy weather that evening and a beautiful view from the museum, which is on a height.

Eventually found Billy's Backpacker Hoster after one mistake. Nice place, and Sarah let me use a tent that they had set up there, so I didn't have to use mine. Found another McDonald's to upload more files and have dinner and eventually got into my sleeping bag. Woke up around 4AM to get to the Fairbanks airport to catch my flight to Pt. Barrow on a 737-400. The first stop was Prudhoe Bay, and a lot of the passengers seemed to be industrial workers associated with the oil industry in way or another. Most of the talk I overheard was about hunting. Prudhoe Bay looked pretty bleak.

At Point Barrow it was just above freezing and our guide from Tundra picked us up and started our tour. We first went to see the Will Rogers-Wiley Post Memorial, and then drove up to the Bering Sea and got to stick our hands or feet into it. Also saw a gift shop which had animal pelts on sale for multi-hundreds of dollars. Visited a native cultural center that was very impressive and got to watch a performance of native dances and participated in a blanket toss.

We drove out to the gas fields out of town and saw a number of birds, including geese and the white owl that was hunted for food at one time. Then we drove as close to Point Barrow as the paved road would go. You could hire someone with an off-road vehicle to go all the way out there, but no one was interested.

We got to stop at the local supermarket for snacks to take to the airport and then we were dropped off at the Alaskan Airlines terminal. Due to the lack of space, you don't get security screened until right before you board. Boarding was outdoors of course and it was snowing as we left. The return flight was direct and we got in around 9:30 so I had just enough time to take a shower, talk with some other guests and get into my sleeping bag.

It wasn't raining, but fairly cold in the morning when I took off. The first leg was 200 miles to Tok, where I got some food and went to the Visitor Center to find out about the road to Dawson. It was sprinkling as I took off. Delayed shortly by some road construction, I found the turn-off for Chicken, which was about 60 miles away. Road wasn't too bad, but the pavement ended a couple of miles before Chicken. Actually there are quite a few gravel stretches even before the pavement ends so you get some practice. The little town (?) plays up the chicken motif a little, but you can buy gas there.

Any doubts about the road were dispelled when I saw a giant Princess Tour bus go up the road. Also noticed a lot of motorhomes coming from that direction.

From Chicken it's 40 miles to the border. Along this stretch it got pretty warm, enough so I could temporarily remove one layer and change to summer gloves. Stopped for photos along the way where there were river crossings. Noticed that there were campgrounds along the way.

It starts climbing from Chicken, and especially near the border. The border crossing was much easier than the one out of Haines. The Canadian road pretends to be paved at first, as the map claims, but probably 75% is really unpaved. The Canadians pretend that they're just "gravel patches". It started getting pretty cold, wet, and foggy and the road was slippery in spots from earlier rain which I managed to miss. Back at Chicken I crossed paths with a large group of adventure touring (bike) riders who were really fast on the dirt roads. The Canadian Customs guy said that they were from Finland and going to Argentina. They must have blasted through these roads with no problem. I had heard that the scenery was fantastic, but I think it was already in winter coloring, and a big fire must have gone through at some time. The scenery was the best near the border, and the cloud and fog patterns lent the most beauty to the scenery. My father probably drove his motorhome over the same road 21 years ago and probably had a great time. For me it was a real adventure, and one of the main reasons I'd come on this trip.

Descending into Dawson City I was surprised to see the road end at the Yukon River. I asked a couple of guys and found that the government runs a free ferry service over the river. Sure enough, I got my ride into town and an impressive view of the river. It was 8PM, my favorite arrival time, but actually 9 since Canada is on Pacific time and Alaska was one hour behind. After a couple of referrals I found what was probably the last motel room in town, a couple of miles south outside of town. I was relieved.

I decided to stay in town 2 nights since I was exhausted from the ride and from the flight to Barrow. Also, it looked like I could time a break in the weather at Whitehorse. In town I visited the First Nation cultural center to learn the story of the Native Canadians and what happened to them during the Gold Rush. Had lunch at Klondike Kate's and decided to visit the local museum, stopping at other sights along the way. Found the Jack London cabin at the interpretive center, or at least half of it. The top of it is in Oakland, and the bottom here in Dawson, with reproductions of the missing logs used to complete both cabins. Also found the Robert W. Service cabin. There are numerous docent led tours throughout the town mainly sponsored by the Canadian Parks Service, but most are all timed to conflict with each other. There are also people in period costumes staffing a lot of the places of historical interest plus the Visitor Center.

Tonight I'll go to Diamond Tooth Gerties to see the Can-Can revue that my parents had told me about. Tomorrow my goal is relatively modest, just Whitehorse. Looking at the weather predicts, it looks like it's still pretty cold there, even though it's 300 miles south of here. I'm going to spend two nights there to rest up some more, but I'm wondering

about the cold. Both here and there I'll probably have to deal with 40F starts in the morning or worse. That's probably what it was when I took off from Haines Junction a while back. At the border they told me it starts to warm up about 3 hours south of Dawson, but I'm wondering about that.