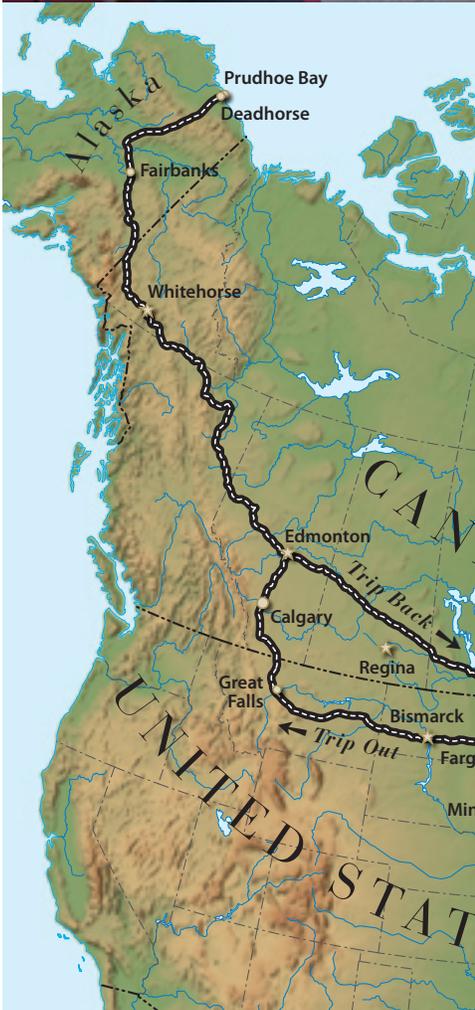


# HOW NOT TO RIDE THE

By Douglas T. Raymond #100456



**Left:** The author reaches the start of the Haul Road. **Middle:** At Trail's End BMW, Fairbanks, I met recent survivors of the Haul Road. **Bottom:** Rain on the Haul Road makes every yard a challenge for a street bike.



# Haul Road

**T**he Haul Road, also named the Dalton Highway, is the roughly 500 mile stretch from Fairbanks to Deadhorse, near Prudhoe Bay in Alaska. It remains one of the great challenges to motorcyclists.

The seed of the idea to ride to Alaska and do the Haul Road was planted while listening to tales from legendary BMW riders like Anton Largiader, Jim Mulcahy and John Ryan. The impossible distance of 5,000 miles from Philadelphia, the savage wilderness, and the unpredictable hazards of Alaska's dirt and gravel roads all began to ferment and germinate in my imagination until the urge to ride became irresistible.

My motorcycle riding is unfortunately limited by a demanding day job, from which I could only possibly squeeze eight more days of vacation for the current year. But combining these with the July 4<sup>th</sup> holiday and two sandwiching weekends gave me a 16-day window of opportunity if I left on the eve of the holiday weekend and returned to work by July 17. Furthermore, other veteran riders like Ken O'Malley advised me that Alaska's rainy season often starts in the last two weeks of July, so that early July is the ideal time for motorcycling on the rough dirt roads there.

Many dear friends begged me to expand this expedition to at least two months, and to enjoy the scenery at more leisure. I'm not getting younger and I feel that opportunities not seized are most often lost. I also rejected good advice to ship my bike to Montana and start the ride from there, for the simple reason that I like to ride. So my theme for the trip was also kept simple: ride to Prudhoe Bay, have a swim, and ride home to

Philadelphia.

I am not really an experienced rider, having started anew only five years ago with the purchase of my brand new 2002 R1150RT sport touring bike. I found long distance riding so thrilling that I quickly put 88,000 miles on the odometer. I am no Iron Butt rider: these guys are in a completely different league from me. They hold certificates proving their insanity, while I remain completely uncertified. I did benefit from many slow school sessions and an excellent dirt track course provided by SuperCamp.

The R1150RT is clearly not the ideal bike for rough and muddy roads. The low suspension and street tires are the greatest disadvantages. The Metzler Z6 tires had almost 4,000 miles on them at departure. The plan was to swap them out on arrival in Fairbanks. But this bike is perfect for long distance riding. The large fairing, adjustable windshield and heated grips protect the rider from weather extremes better than any other bike. It is a relaxing ride on the highway, yet wonderfully responsive and maneuverable in the twisties. I have always found the stock seat to be comfortable all day and all night. I haven't added the

luxury of highway pegs that allow you to stretch your legs. I was to find that after a week of riding with the standard pegs my knees were no longer hurting, though I'm not sure this was a good thing. A week after the trip I am still having a little trouble straightening my legs.

I minimized equipment to what would fit in the two system cases and one top case: basic camping gear, 20 pounds of tools and spare parts, and cold weather clothes. I chose my winter weight Joe Rocket Ballistic riding gear as the safest protection from falls and cold weather, but I was to suffer in 100F heat during the ride through the Midwest. A last minute purchase of a BMW one-piece rain suit was to prove very valuable.

I departed at 4 a.m. on a Saturday morning, my sendoff being cries of, "Please don't do this!" from family, friends and girlfriend. Five days later on Wednesday evening I arrived in Fairbanks, on the tail end of a torrential rainstorm that flooded part of the city.

## **Adventures and hardships along the way:**

Three-hour traffic jams and a 10-mile tollbooth backup near Chicago, in swel-

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tering heat made for a long day. Whether I rode carefully eight miles on the shoulder, I'm not saying.

In Wisconsin my helmet was stolen while I was inside a convenience store. The security camera actually produced a good color picture of the kid, his car and license plate, from which the police got his name and address. This tantalizing info only delayed me and I had to hit the road instead of pursuing the thief. It was Saturday night and the best I could do was buy a kid's helmet in the toy depart-

The Alaska Highway (formerly "Alcan") is now finally almost entirely paved, except for several construction sites. It is 1,422 miles of spectacular scenery and wildlife running from Dawson Creek in British Columbia almost to Fairbanks. I saw a wolf, bears and cubs, moose and calves, foxes, mountain sheep, wild horses, deer and buffalo. Any of these could be in the middle of the road at any time of day or night. Fortunately there is a roadside border of about 100 feet on each side that is cut and mown, making dangerous surprises from the wildlife more avoidable. The construction sites demand extreme caution for mud or gravel. In one stretch near Lake

Kluane they had spread round gravel on hard pavement. Riding this was like going over ball bearings on a dance floor.

Trail's End BMW in Fairbanks is a gathering place for adventurers, both winners and losers. Many a shattered bike is shipped here on a pallet or via old pickup truck after unlucky encounters with killer potholes, gravel, mud, or spray of rocks from oncoming trucks. Iron Butt riders and greenhorns alike come here for their final preparation before tackling the Haul Road, or to recover from it. It's the only place in 400 miles to get BMW parts. Proprietor George Rahn has the old-timer's experience in knowing how to get a damaged bike back on the road.



## Trail's End BMW, Fairbanks

Here I met Iron Butt riders Ralph (R1150 GS Adventure with aux fuel tank) and son Perry (R1100RT), recent survivors of the Haul Road. Heavy rain and deep mud had set them back many days. In six hours of exhausting efforts they had only made a few miles in the deep mud, and simply could not get up one more hill, so they returned to Coldfoot to wait out the rain. On the next day they succeeded in riding to Deadhorse and returned without too many problems. Ralph had plugged his rear tire three times and it was still leaking. They described a further hazard: sharp rocks

**Left:** Even the best bikes can be shattered on the Haul Road. This one hit a pothole. **Below:** Reaching the Yukon River, I think I am safe.

ment of the nearest Wal-mart. It fit like a torture device, leaving an egg-sized welt on my forehead. It got me safely to Great Falls, Montana, where I bought a good helmet when the Harley dealership opened on Monday morning.

Thousands of miles of hay fields across North Dakota, Montana and Alberta were peaceful and beautiful, not boring. In Montana I chose a lovely but desolate 380 mile shortcut to Great Falls (MT-200s). With scarcely any traffic and gas stations 100 miles apart, I knew a breakdown here could set me back many days. It was euphoric having the country road all to myself, with hay fields on one side and desert on the other.



embedded in the clay stick up like knives, and your tires can't avoid all of them. I was encouraged that young Perry had accomplished the ride on a bike practically identical to mine, and with only a busted fender to show for it.

My tires now had 8,000 miles on them, but the front tread still looked surprisingly good. The rear was getting bald. Since all assured me I would be plugging tires whether new or old, I made the rash decision to do the Haul Road on these old tires, and save the good ones for the 4,500 mile ride home from Fairbanks. Also, it was too late in the evening for a tire swap.

I heard more horror stories from these riders about the dust and rocks kicked up by the trucks in dry weather. You usually have to slow down or stop and look away as they pass, but you can't get off the road or even onto the steep shoulder in most cases. When it's muddy these trucks go hurtling by a few feet away while you are negotiating the muddy tracks, hoping not to fall. Above all, these riders and George advised me not to try to ride in the rain, but to hole up somewhere until the road dried out. I agreed completely, I didn't think I had much of a chance in mud with my RT.

In Fairbanks and northward it doesn't get dark at night this time of year, so they say. So I suddenly got the brash idea of leaving immediately on Wednesday evening and riding through the night the 280 miles to Coldfoot, the last refuge before Deadhorse. I had already just finished a tough 600-mile ride this day through



*The rear wheel bearing failed on this GS, stranding the rider 80 miles north of Coldfoot.*

Yukon Territory and Alaska, and I was a little tired. There was a break in the rain, and there was daylight at night and fewer trucks to contend with. My bike was as ready as it was going to be. So off I rode, north into the twilight.

This was not a brilliant idea. I was actually very tired now but filled with adrenaline and excitement to see the Haul Road.

Before I got out of town it began to pour, with lightning and dark clouds in the hills before me. I put on my rain suit and hoped it was a passing shower, not knowing it was going to rain most of this lonely night.

I knew it wasn't likely I could make the 280 mile trip to Coldfoot on one tank of gas in these conditions, though I often

get this range on the highway. But there are two gas stations near the halfway point, at Yukon Crossing. Surely one of them would be open 24 hours, at least for credit card sales?

After 80 miles of fairly good pavement with rain showers off and on I arrived at the real start of the Dalton Highway, the unpaved Haul Road, at a place called Livengood. It was wet and slick for a few miles but seemed ride-able. Then I reached the first steep downhill section, a sea of mud. The bike started sliding right and left. I didn't think I could make it 100 feet without crashing.

It was drizzling, under a gloomy twilight of thick low clouds. I could hardly see the tire tracks. My visor was too foggy to close. So I raised my visor halfway and raised the windshield also, which left a narrow gap of visibility between the two.

The hill was steep enough that I could not even walk down it in this mud. There was no good traction anywhere. A smooth section near the shoulder turned out to have the slimiest muck, so you had to stay near the center and hope for no oncoming traffic. But I had not seen a vehicle for over an hour, and I wondered what sort of animals were around.

I could not touch my brakes since the R1150RT has linked front and rear. Either brake pedal or handle would apply too much front wheel braking for this situation, where I believe only rear wheel braking is safe. So I relied on engine braking only. Even at idle in first gear I was going too fast on this hill, with sickening side-sliding every few seconds. I used a trick I learned before: pull in the clutch, hit the



*The bridge at Yukon Crossing is decked with planks, now wet and slippery.*

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kill switch to stop the engine, then carefully let out the clutch until the desired amount of engine braking gets to the rear wheel. This got me safely down the first hill, and many more later.

At this point I didn't have much hope of making it. What kept me going forward was the fear of trying to get back up that first steep hill I had miraculously come down. If I could just get through another 50 miles of mud to the Yukon Crossing, there would be people, gasoline, food and rest.

I settled into a slow routine of weaving through the mud, mostly in second gear and often killing the engine on the steep downhills. I tried to keep my feet on the pegs, though this is scary. The weather cleared to a medium twilight as I reached the broad and gentle Yukon River at midnight. The bridge, about 800 meters long, was decked with longitudinal wooden planks, wet and slippery. I crossed very slowly, trying to stay on one line of planks as the bike made dizzying lurches whenever I crossed a crack.

The first café was closed for both food and gas, no exceptions. I swiped some stale thick coffee anyway. The next place, about ten miles north, was the Hot Spot Café. It was an eerie ghost town in the gloom. No people were to be seen, but neat café tables were set amongst the planter boxes filled with flowers, and lights were on in the raised trailer that served as indoor diner. I walked around quietly for several minutes wondering how I was going to get food and gasoline.

Just then a huge truck pulled in and shut down. I approached the driver, whom I'll call Eggor since that was the company name on the side of the cab. He told me in a whisper that we must not disturb these café people after hours; they needed their sleep especially during the perpetual daylight of summer. He led me into the diner where there was cold beef stew in a crockpot, with a note telling customers to put \$5 in a basket nearby.

We ladled the stew into plates using a plastic cup. I spilled the cold grease on my hand, and trying to wipe it off with a napkin only succeeded in smearing it all over. "Oh, great!" I remember thinking,

"now when I meet Mr. Bear I'm gonna smell like beef gravy!"

Before we finished, the lady manager did roust herself and came in to talk. She was sympathetic to my desperation for some gasoline, but her pump was broken and none was available.

Eggor cheered me up by saying that the road up ahead was paved, most of the way to Coldfoot, if I could just get through the next 25 miles of mud. It was still 120 miles to Coldfoot and refuge, but I could possibly make it with the gas I had if conditions suddenly got very good. The rain had let up but it was still dark and threatening. Eggor himself was going to continue driving to the paved road, where he would pull off and sleep until morning. Now it was about 1 a.m. Again I rashly decided to go ahead, though I knew that the prudent decision would be to camp here and ride south to the Yukon River for gas in the morning.

I suited up, said farewell to Eggor, and hit the dirt road for Coldfoot. Almost immediately it started to drizzle again and I could hardly see the track, which became slicker than ever. I had made only a few miles in half an hour, reaching a section where I began to slide wildly every few seconds, even while going slowly in second gear and avoiding all braking. I kept recovering by luck but knew I couldn't keep this up. Finally both wheels flew up and I went down hard on the right. This was a very low point in my life.

I wasn't hurt as far as I knew. The instant I stopped moving, hundreds of voracious mosquitoes were hitting any exposed skin, even diving with an impact into my eyes. I carefully focused all my energy into lifting the bike, bags and all. It had to be first time or never, and by golly it came right up and rested on the sidestand. What a relief. I fetched the shattered right mirror out of the mud and shoved it under the tank bag rain cover. My newly installed stalk mirrors were OK.

I tried to start

the engine. It coughed, backfired and died. Oh crap. I tried again, same result. On the third try I gave it more gas, and one cylinder caught, running roughly and sounding like an F650 engine.

About this time Eggor's truck passed me. He slowed to reduce the mud spray and waved. I just waved back, knowing there was really nothing he could do to help.

So I started riding the mud again on the one-lunger engine, which stalled out every so often if I cut the throttle back too much. Otherwise it was slow steady riding in first or second gear, desperately looking for the best traction in the gloom.

And then came my worst nightmare. A blur ahead to the left, and a young wolf jumped out of the bog onto the road beside me! It was a perfect specimen, like a small german shepherd. This must be a bad dream! At great risk I looked back for a few seconds through my open visor, seeing a horror I will never forget. The wolf was running up on my left system case, gaining steadily on my calf. His paws were finding their own sure way, as his eyes were fixed intently on mine, calculating the ability and condition of what he was chasing.

I couldn't risk any more backward looks. I kicked up the speed to about 10 mph, checked the mirror, and there he was right behind me!

This really must be a dream, I thought. I am over-tired, over-stressed, and such things do not happen to anybody! When I next look in the mirror he'll be gone. But no, there he was, still pacing me, every time I looked!



I tried to start *Steve Sady (left) gives the author a hand at bike repair.*

The road was still as slick as ever. I was almost certain that I would fall again any second now, and I didn't like to think what the wolf would do then. There was no choice, I had to speed up. I kicked it up to 15 or 20, wobbling around now. There he was in the mirror, settled into an easy lope that said he could do this all night. I had many terrible thoughts at

this point.

As if by a miracle, part of the wheel track now appeared a little drier, with some crunchy gravel. I poured on the throttle and the second cylinder even kicked in a little. I hit a good speed and rode several miles before I dared to look back, and then the wolf was gone.

My heart was pounding as I fran-

tically analyzed the situation and the possible outcomes if I had fallen. I carefully reviewed if this could have been a dream, but it was not. Some dark humor occurred: "I came to Alaska for me to enjoy the wildlife, NOT the other way around!"

In a few more miles I reached the paved highway and began to feel I was going to be all right. I passed the Arctic Circle at 66.5 degrees, unfortunately without the expected thrill of crossing this major milestone. The engine was running smoothly on one cylinder, and the second one also fired when I added throttle while climbing hills. Ten miles further I came across Eggor's truck, parked on the side near a concrete bathroom on a hilltop. At this point I knew I could not make it to Coldfoot with the gas I had left. There were 90 miles to go and I had gas for about 60. It was the middle

**Left:** I rested near Eggor's truck for safety.

**Below:** The Haul Road, leaving Coldfoot towards Deadhorse, with the Brooks Range in the distance.



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of the night, no people anywhere.

To my amazement I saw two solo riders about this time going in the opposite direction, each on a BMW GS. I wanted to talk, I wanted to warn them about the wolf and the mud. They appeared unstoppable, riding like supermen with perfect confidence in their ability and the machine. I'm sure they made it to Yukon River or Fairbanks without trouble.

The temperature was 42 degrees in a light drizzle. In my waterproof suit and heavy riding armor I was actually dry and toasty warm. I simply parked the bike on the road near the truck and lay down on the gravel between them for a deep and refreshing nap of about three hours. I figured Eggor would let me in if another wild animal emergency occurred.

When I awoke there was still no sign from Eggor. Desperate as I was for gas, there was no point in disturbing him since he wouldn't be carrying any in his diesel truck. I decided to push on as far as I could, with hopes of finding another safe spot to stop just before running out of gas. I didn't want this to occur at some arbitrary spot next to a bear. As expected, the reserve light came on when I had 70 miles still to go.

The next terrifying hill was aptly named Beaver Slide. The steep downhill north side was not only unpaved, but churned into thick oily mud. I made it down in first gear, engine off.

When I had maybe five miles left in the tank I reached another good hilltop, called Gobbler's Hill, also with a concrete bathroom. This would be the best place to wait for rescue. The weather had cleared and the great view showed me some buildings in the distance below. My Mileposts book confirmed this was the Jim River Maintenance compound, exactly 6.5 miles ahead.

I went for it, coasting the first two miles down Gobbler's Hill and entering the maintenance yard on fumes. These places are strictly off-limits to the public, but I was determined and desperate. The foreman gave the OK and a young man named Corey gave me 1.5 gallons of gas, no charge. Then 35 miles later I limped on one cylinder into the muddy truck-stop called Coldfoot.

Oddly, this important refuge, the sole

station along the 360-mile stretch from the Yukon River to Deadhorse, first appears only as an intersection of two dirt roads, unmarked except for a curious billboard announcing "Sourdough." So the weary rider has to explore the muddy crossroad to discover the compound. In a quarter-mile you round a bend and ride into the two-acre parking lot of mud and puddles. On one side is the 24-hour café/restaurant. On the other is a soggy campground and the Slate Creek Motel. I think these stations are somewhat removed from the main road in attempt to be out of range of the huge dust clouds that trucks stir up on the Haul Road.

I eagerly filled my tank and sipped hot coffee. I told the story of the wolf chase to staff and travelers, both to warn them and to get local opinions about the behavior

strapped on its side to a palette. Another casualty of the Haul Road, I thought.

But the owner/rider, Steve Sady from Utah, emerged out of his water-soaked tent and explained that the rear wheel bearing had failed prematurely, leaving him stranded 80 miles north of Coldfoot. Steve had spent a few days getting a local pickup to fetch the bike and was now negotiating with truckers to find space on a flatbed to haul the skid down to Trail's End BMW in Fairbanks. What luck for me to meet an experienced GS rider here, who turned out to be a mechanical engineer with time on his hands! "C'mon, let's fix your bike!" he said enthusiastically.

Without much hope I agreed, and started the engine to begin diagnosis. The right exhaust stayed cold, so we



*Coldfoot is the last refuge before Deadhorse on the Haul Road.*

of the wolf. To my surprise, many Alaskans laughed outright and said the wolf was just having fun. But others took it more seriously, as I did.

Now discouragement and a feeling of failure set in, as I sensed that I must turn back. The bike was barely running on one cylinder but might quit at any time. I was beginning to crumple with exhaustion. Though the rain had tapered off, the remaining 240 miles to Deadhorse were still probably slick with mud, and I knew the road climbed over a mountain pass in the Brooks Range. Coldfoot had been named after an exhausted group of gold miners who gave up and turned back here in 1900, and I knew how they felt.

What first caught my attention near the gas pump at Coldfoot was an R1150GS

removed the right fairing. The throttle body looked completely normal, but we soon discovered that its return spring had been broken at one end, apparently during the fall in the mud. This left the butterfly valve in a random position at idle and explained why the engine ran better at full throttle. The spring was captive inside the throttle pulley and it looked impossible to replace it or to bend a new hook on its end. I made a phone call to Tom Cutter back home who confirmed that I needed a new throttle body assembly containing pulley spring and all. I came out of the café glumly, only to find Steve with a big grin on his face. He had produced a piece of shock cord from his kit and threaded it through a hole in the throttle pulley. We tied the other end



**Above:** Approaching Atigun Pass from the South, I see it will be fogged in. **Left:** With Prudhoe Bay in the distance, my bike goes down in the deep gravel.

of to a brake line on the bike frame. Then to my amazement the throttle opened and closed normally, and the engine ran just fine! Still I went to bed discouraged, with the idea that I would ride south for home as soon as the roads dried out.

The sun shone all night, and the shiny morning found my energy renewed. The roads were drier, my throttle was work-

ing fine with the shock cord, so let's take our chances and ride for Deadhorse! I rode off north quickly, before better judgment might change my mind. I was sure I could make the 240 miles on one tankful, though other bikes I saw here carried extra fuel. Incidentally, most of the bikes around here were BMW GS types, plus a few KLR's and one R1150RT exactly

like mine. This one had left Fairbanks the morning after I did, but the intelligent owner rode during the hot dry day instead of the cold rainy night.

The six-hour ride to Deadhorse was beautiful. About half of the 240 miles is paved. The dirt sections were only a little wet. The main hazards on the paved area are deep potholes and sunken road sections, often just beyond the crest of a hill, and slippery surface gravel.

Deep fog covered the Atigun Pass (4,800 ft) in the Brooks Range, where the temperature dropped to 25F on this July noontime. For several miles I could only see 15 feet ahead and I hoped the dampness all around would not be converted into icy patches on the road. What looked like frost in the dirt

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turned out to be dry salt when I stopped to check it.

In the flat tundra I was making good time on the pavement, and getting used to the intermittent sections of hard or loose gravel. Deadhorse was just appearing on the horizon as I rounded the final bend at 50 mph, I had it made! Next thing I knew the bike was in deep soft gravel, falling fast to the left. I fought it as hard as I could, determined to keep it up. I careened down to the right, back to the left and again to the right and finally lost it going down on the right valve cover in a shower of pebbles. I had scrubbed off a lot of speed over 200 yards in the gravel bed. The right luggage rack was snapped off the frame along with the system case, but the engine remained intact. Again my thick armor limited my own damage to a few bruises and a twisted ankle. Luckily no traffic or bears were in sight. I righted the bike, bungeed the system case on top of the passenger seat, and rode the last three miles very carefully into Deadhorse.

In this dismal small settlement of metal buildings and trailers I quickly found the Arctic Caribou Inn, where I had reserved a place on the tour bus. The single office window was blocked by the parked bus always, indicating how little pleasure the staff took in the bleak unchanging scenery in constant daylight

**Right:** Watch out for deep gravel just before Deadhorse. **Below:** Downtown Deadhorse has few attractions. **Bottom right:** During the dip in Prudhoe Bay both air and water temps were in the low 30s.

or darkness.

Inside, next to the counter looking into the office, was posted a sign reading:

Warning!

Marauding bears in area.

Do not walk alone around the town, especially at night...

A surreal conversation followed, between me and the secretary inside:

Me: Have bears recently been seen near here?

[Note that the Mileposts guidebook warns that the area has been overrun with grizzly bears, and polar bears have also been spotted]

She: Yes.

Me: But this is why I called you two weeks ago. I was very scared of having

a motorcycle breakdown south of here, and what if the bears found me before a truckdriver came along?

She: You don't need to worry, that never happened.

Me: But a motorcycle could break down anywhere, and the rider has no protection. Have there been any bear attacks at all?

She: Well, yes. Two campers were sleeping in a tent by the river. A bear went in and killed them and ate them.

Me: But, but... that's why I called you! Why didn't you tell me this?

She: Well, that was last year and nothing's happened since.

At this point I realized I was in a different culture here, and resolved not to ask Alaskans any more questions that my



health might depend on.

There is no public access to the oil fields or Prudhoe Bay beyond Deadhorse. Only the tour buses can take you there, and for this you need to make a prior reservation and provide an ID number from passport or driver's license.

I boarded my bus with about 15 other travelers. Along the way the guide told us some of the amazing facts about oil extraction, water separation and re-injection into the wells, and the enormous pumping stations that send a million barrels per day southward to Valdez. As we neared the water's edge both air and water temperature were in the 30's. I had a chilly apprehension but couldn't back out now from my planned swim. The water was brutally cold but I waded out to chest depth and ducked under. The shock wears off quickly and is replaced by a pleasant numbness. I swam for about five minutes with no problem. One other brave soul jumped quickly in and out.

Back in Deadhorse I considered spending the night since it had been a long hard day. But it was only 6 p.m. and the weather was clear, so I decided to ride back to Coldfoot. I found the sole gas station, which is unmarked and unattended.

You enter an insulated shed, follow the credit card instructions, start the pump, then go back outside to use the fill hose.

The ride back to Coldfoot was lovely and peaceful. I saw a pair of moose, but missed the herd of musk ox that some others had seen. The fog had lifted just enough in the pass so that I could see the snow-clad slopes all around me. I rode slowly and enjoyed the tree-less landscape of tundra, river and vast fields colored brilliant pink by little blossoms in the ground cover.

At midnight I reached Coldfoot, still in bright twilight. I parked the bike, dismounted and promptly fell flat on my back, more tired than I had realized. Pitching the tent was not an option, so again I treated myself to a pricey motel room (\$150). Things looked rosy and dry for my ride south to Fairbanks in the morning.

But it rained all night, and was still coming down hard when I awoke. I relaxed in bed 'til checkout time, determined to wait out the weather.

At this time I began to hear reports that a wolf had attacked a woman and bitten her twice. This occurred at Arctic Circle only half a day after my wolf incident and

about 20 miles from it. She was walking from a campground to the nearby concrete bathroom when the wolf attacked. She ran into the bathroom and hid for several hours, and when she started to come out the wolf was still there waiting for her! Finally other campers came in a car and rescued her. Prior to this many Alaskans had told me that there has never been a recorded case of wolves attacking humans. Here are some further proposed explanations of my own wolf experience. I was greatly comforted by the last one of them.

Wolf was playing (as mentioned).

Wolf had rabies.

Wolf just happened to be jogging north.

Wolf appeared as my protective spirit, my 'totem'.

By noon it was still drizzling with no end in sight. I couldn't wait any longer, so I rode out southwards into the mud. Today's ride was hot, sticky and muddy. The rain did stop after two hours so at least visibility was then good. I was getting better at riding in the mud but still inched my way up steep hills like Beaver Slide. Occasionally some GS riders would pass me, cruising happily



*Muddy sections through the tundra keep you alert, and you get used to the nearby pipeline.*



**Above:** Atigun Pass, between Coldfoot and Deadhorse, is very cold at 4,800 ft. **Right:** Leaving Coldfoot for return to Fairbanks in the rain, fireweed on the right.

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as if they were on dry pavement. The last steep hill before Yukon Crossing looked hopeless, and I was done in. I paddled and rode my way across the crown looking for better traction on the other side, but lost it when I put my foot down on the low side in sticky muck. The bike rolled down on the right into the mud, with the handlebars pointing downhill. Another low point, I was too discouraged even to take a picture of this sorry situation. I slowly started rotating the bike towards a handlebar-uphill position where I had some chance of righting it. I was mighty grateful when a young guy in a pickup truck stopped to help. Together we got the bike up right away. I expected to fall many more times on that hill, but I slowly made it through the mud to the top. Soon I reached Yukon Crossing and



filled the tank. Finally the roads were starting to dry out. The remaining 140 miles to Fairbanks made a pleasant ride of about five hours. A couple of full rainbows appeared during light showers. My old tires now had 9,000 rough miles on them, and they hadn't gone flat on the Haul Road. When I reached Fairbanks late in the evening my once pretty red bike was totally brown, with duct tape and bungee holding various parts in place. I myself didn't look much better.

The following day was Sunday but

I rode to Trail's End BMW on the off chance that George might be there (he was) and might be in a tire-changing mood (he wasn't). In a not-unfriendly way he told me to go away and wait for him to call. I was so tired I just lay down next to my bike and rested until mid-afternoon. George had already heard about the wolf chasing me, from the grapevine of adventure riders who came off the Dalton Highway in the last two days. Finding that his day of leisure was ruined for other reasons as well, George

tackled my tires in the late afternoon. As always, he worked quickly with hand tools, using three tire irons and not needing much help from anyone else. He balanced the tires and helped me check fluid levels on the bike.

To wait for a new throttle body to arrive would cost me about three days, and I decided that the shock cord working as return spring would get me home. So Monday morning I started the ride back to Philadelphia. I rode past Tok and was well into Yukon Territory when I stopped for the night.

On Tuesday I met a fascinating lady resting along the side of the Alaska Highway, next to the large wagon she had been pulling. I had seen her the week before on my way north, a striking tall blond in brief jogging shorts, striding around a bend in the road with a wagon in tow. She had a happy smile, oblivious to the rain shower that was just starting. The curve and the weather made it too

dangerous for me to stop then. But now during her morning break on the shoulder we had a nice long chat. She is Rosie Swale Pope, walking around the world for charity. She has completed Europe, Russia and Siberia, where she camped at temperatures of 50F below. She camps practically anywhere along the road and has no fear of the wild animals. She once crossed the Atlantic solo in a small sailboat back in the 70's. Meeting wonderful people like Rosie is another thing that makes the ride memorable.

While riding much later that night I saw a large black bear crossing the road. He stopped near the edge to watch me. What would happen if my engine failed now? How long was that old piece of shock cord going to keep the throttle working? I was glad to find the Coal River café and motel just a few miles later. It was closed for the night but I pitched my tent down by the pond near some other campers, and dove inside the netting just

before the mosquitoes ate me alive.

On Wednesday I took some local advice and visited the Hot Springs at Liard River, just inside British Columbia. I swam for an hour in the clear, almost scalding water. When it gets too hot you can agitate the deeper and cooler water for relief. You get used to the stinky smell of sulphur after a few minutes. A simple wooden deck and stairs give access to the pool, which is about three feet deep. A cloud of steam permeates the lush ferns and shrubs overhanging the bank, giving the scene a tropical or prehistoric atmosphere. The hot springs are reached by a one-kilometer long boardwalk through the woods and swamp. A tragic incident occurred here ten years ago when a bear attacked a couple walking back from the springs. The bear killed both and ate the woman. >>

*Fairbanks and safety are just beyond the rainbow.*



# Haul Road

This sad story and my recent close calls left me ever mindful of how dependent a rider is on the bike's engine in these parts. The further north you ride the more the bikes turn into BMW's, especially the GS models. I did see one Harley riding in the mud. I heard stories of a Goldwing and another Harley on the Haul Road that did not have happy outcomes. One of the purposes of my trip was to make the most out of my R1150RT, one of the few motorcycles you could depend on to bring you safely through a ride of 10,000 miles.

This pleasant dream was shattered when the engine suddenly died, as I rode up a hill about 20 miles west of Fort Nelson. I coasted to the shoulder. With coaxing I got it restarted and continued up the hill with the bike coughing and lurching. I didn't think I would get far. But by great luck the hilltop had a scenic overlook with parking area and concrete bathroom. The late afternoon weather happened to be sunny.

I removed the right fairing. The shock cord was still there but now the entire

pulley had fallen off the butterfly shaft and was dangling by the throttle cable. I pushed the pulley back on its square shaft but it fell right off again. The square hole was now oversized due to vibration.

The bike was dead, the nearest dealer was 1,000 miles ahead in Edmonton AB, it was too late to call, and there was no cell phone service anyway. The pulley simply had to be fixed somehow. I found a Pepsi can, flattened it and pierced holes top and bottom and threaded cable ties through them. Then I replaced the pulley on its shaft and slipped the Pepsi can outside the pulley and strapped the can to the throttle body. Now the pulley could turn and operate the shaft without falling off. I re-attached the shock cord as return spring, and the engine ran again! Throttle control wasn't smooth, but I figured I could make 1,000 miles this way so I continued riding late into the night, into Alberta.

Thursday morning I stopped in a small town about 200 miles before Edmonton. First I called ahead to the dealer there, Argyll Motor Sports, and ordered a right

**Right:** At the tire shop at Trail's End BMW, George (left) uses only hand tools. **Below:** Hot Springs at Liard River BC make a refreshing pause

throttle body, which they could possibly obtain via Fed Ex by the next morning. Then I found an auto parts store and bought some JB Weld, a miracle epoxy for metals that has a high temperature rating. I glued the pulley back on its shaft with this for extra security, and applied some grease to the Pepsi can which was holding up pretty well. It was afternoon when I finally got under way. The bike seemed to be running well enough.

But a few hours later the bike died again on the open road. Once again I coasted to the shoulder and removed the right fairing. All looked "normal," that is, the Pepsi can and shock cord were still



in place and functioning. Now I removed the left fairing and was amazed to find that the throttle pulley had fallen off! It too was dangling by the cable. The butterfly shaft bearings were completely shot, so that shaft and pulley had vibrated themselves to death. Even the square boss on the shaft end was mostly eroded from wear. What to do? It was still two hours' ride to the dealer in Edmonton, it was getting dark and starting to rain. As I stood pondering in the tall grass at the side of the road I noticed my foot was on an old sardine can...

About an hour later the sardine can was strapped onto the left throttle body with cable ties, holding the pulley in place. A little bit of JB Weld also secured the connection. A spare piece of shock cord given to me by Steve in Coldfoot was now working as return spring here on the left side too. The bike was now back in operation. I reached Edmonton and found Argyll Motor Sports just

before closing time. They confirmed my part was expected in the morning and very kindly helped me get to a motel room.

Friday morning I walked back to the BMW dealer. The new throttle body arrived at 11 a.m.. The shop techs already had a fully scheduled day but they allowed me to install the part myself, giving useful tips now and then. By 2 p.m. the bike was ready to go. I had decided to continue riding home with the sardine can on the left side since otherwise it would be Tuesday before they could obtain another new throttle body. I had to be at work on Monday and there were about 3,000 miles to go.

The bike held up pretty well the rest of the way. To avoid traffic jams near Chicago I rode through Duluth, the Upper Peninsula, Mackinac Strait and Detroit on the way home. In both Duluth and Detroit the left throttle pulley jammed open several times. I had to downshift

and load up the engine to keep it from red-lining. Then and at other times I had to stop and re-tie the shock cord or adjust the sardine can.

The Upper Peninsula is a beautiful ride through evergreen forests and country scenery. But at night it's like riding through a zoo. There are too many deer and other critters, especially on a 40-mile stretch of country road through Foster City, which my GPS selected as a shortcut. Once I rode between two porcupines walking slowly three feet apart.

The bike continued to perform well. It got me safely home just in time for a short nap before showing up at work at 8 a.m. Monday. It took more than a week to rest up from this 10,000 mile ride. 🌀

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*Doug Raymond is a software engineer for Siemens in Spring House, PA.*

*Muncho Lake, British Columbia, is famous for the turquoise color.*

