

## Our Dream

Why in the world would 2 otherwise sane individuals decide to pedal from Chicago, Illinois to Fairbanks, Alaska?

For years Todd and Bob Buck have dreamed of bicycling from “the windy city” to “the gateway to the arctic”. On May 22nd, they will begin the journey in Lombard, IL, pedal through La Crosse, Duluth, into Manitoba, across the southern half of Saskatchewan, Alberta, into British Columbia, to the eastern edge of the Rockies through Banff, Jasper, the Yukon, Whitehorse and conclude in Fairbanks, Alaska. This will be a self-contained 4500-mile bike tour; the Buck brothers will pedal an average of 75 miles a day with 40 pounds of gear strapped to their bikes, camping along the way. For 11 weeks they will live as nomads, away from work, family and comforts of home.

Why step out of the “comfort zone” for such a physical and mental challenge? This adventure is their way of attempting to live life to its fullest – to enrich their experience as one of earth’s creatures. Physical exertion while being exposed to the elements of nature heightens the senses; the brothers will see, feel, hear, and smell the earth as it really is. The pace of traveling by bicycle will allow them to directly experience things they may have missed had they been zooming by in a car. It won’t be easy. There will be days when they will have to dig deep within themselves to continue, such as when it is pouring rain, or when fighting a stubborn headwind, or pedaling over mountain passes in the Rockies. Mental demons, such as guilt for being away from work and spouse for so long are also sure to raise their ugly heads.

However, the brothers know any misery encountered on this trip is a luxury compared to everyday challenges children burdened with physical illness must face. As Bob and Todd realize their life dream, they intend to help children with life threatening medical conditions live their dreams as well. They have joined with the Make-A-Wish Foundation, and money donated to Make-A-Wish in the name of the Buck Brothers Bike Tour will be used to grant the wishes of children with life threatening medical conditions, to enrich their human experience with hope, strength and joy. The Make-A-Wish Foundation strives to provide the wish child and family with special memories of joy and laughter at a stressful time in their lives.

The cost of each wished granted by Make-A-Wish Foundation averages around \$5,000. The brothers hope to raise enough money to grant wishes for three children in Illinois and three in Wisconsin. That means their fund-raising goal is **\$30,000!**

For more information about the Buck Brothers Bike Tour and their fundraising effort for Make-A-Wish Foundation, you may contact Todd Buck via email at [buckart@earthlink.net](mailto:buckart@earthlink.net). Bob Buck may be reached at [bob.buck@vonbuck.com](mailto:bob.buck@vonbuck.com).

The Make-A-Wish Foundation grants wishes to children with life-threatening medical conditions to enrich the human spirit with hope, strength and joy. For more information about the foundation, visit [www.wish.org](http://www.wish.org).

If you would like to make a donation to the Make-A-Wish Foundation:

Determine to which state chapter you would like your donation to go, Illinois or Wisconsin.

Complete the form.

**Note:** You will need Adobe Acrobat reader to open the form. Get it here free:

<http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readermain.html>

Send the completed form and your donation to the address listed at the top of the form.

Todd and Bob Buck will be notified of your donation by the Make-A-Wish chapter that received your gift.

**Wisconsin Form:**

Download [mailin\\_donation\\_form\\_wi\\_buckbrothesbike\\_.pdf](#)

**Illinois Form:**

Download [mailin\\_donation\\_form\\_il\\_buckbrothesbike\\_.pdf](#)

We've made the papers! Check out the article in the Northern Star, the campus newspaper at Northern Illinois University. We made the front page of the print edition as well as the web edition.

<http://www.northernstar.info/articles/?id=9449><http://www.northernstar.info/>

**Frequently Asked Questions**

Got questions about the trip? Bob is here to help.

**How many miles will you be riding?** *Somewhere between 4000 and 5000.*

**How many miles will you have to ride in a day?** *We want to average 75 miles a day, six days a week.*

**When will you start?** *Sunday morning, May 22nd, 2005*

**Where will you start?** *From Todd's driveway in Lombard, Illinois (Gonna be there for pancakes?)*

**Who's driving the RV?** *No one. There is no motorized support vehicle. Ok...maybe an ambulance.*

**When will you get to Fairbanks?** *We are trying to make it by the second week of August (that's 2005).*

**Will you bicycle back from Alaska?** *I know it looks like it is downhill all the way home, but we will be flying back.*

**What will you eat along the way?** *We will be picking up most of our food along the way at grocery stores or mini-marts. However, do you live along the route? If so, what time is supper and what will we be having?*

**What precautions will you take so you do not suffer the heartbreak of sore asses?** *The bike seats have some padding but most of the protection comes from the padded shorts that we will be wearing. They look like real sissy pants but if you have done much cycling, you don't care.*

**Do you know there are bears where you are going?** *I thought there might be. Don't tell Todd.*

**What will you do if you encounter a bear?** *The first time we stop at a Hardee's, I am going to get a couple of those honey packets. You know, the ones you get when you buy hot tea? Todd is a much faster cyclist, so when he is not looking, I will put a couple in his pack. As the bear chases him, I will shout encouraging word, "Go Todd Go!"*

**Are you camping?** *Yes.*

**Where will you be camping?** *We will try and coordinate commercial or government campsites along the way. However as things get more remote, we might have to set up in someone's yard, in back of the local tavern (how convenient) or just off the road.*

**...like, in a tent?** *Yes.*

**Where will you shower or bathe?** *Why would we bathe? The bears will smell us coming. Incidentally, we will be burning our sleeping bags before returning home. I feel sorry for the people sitting next to us on the return flight home.*

**Where will you go to the bathroom?** *Yeah, I suppose the corn won't be high enough. We will try and do it when no one is looking.*

**Will you be fishing along the way?** *You betcha. Trout, salmon and grayling, oh my!*

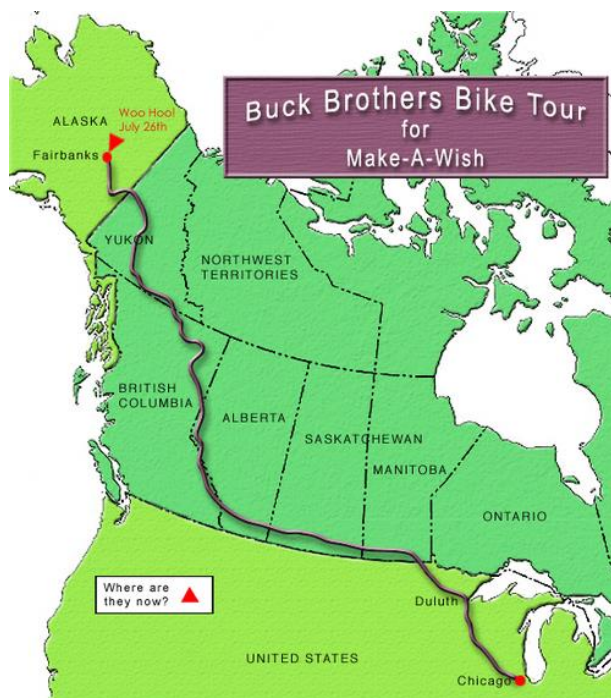
**What spare parts will you bring along?** *A couple of tires, lots of inner tubes, some spare spokes, a spare chain (don't tell Todd, but I put it in the first aid kit in his front pack), duct tape and some bailing twine.*

**Why Make-A-Wish?** *We are making our wish come true. Why not use this crazy trip to get others into helping children achieve their wish too?*

**Are you guys crazy?** *Yes.*

**What does your wife think of all this?** *She's glad it's not her skinny butt on the bicycle seat.*

## The Route



## New Bike



Last minute bike change! I will be doing the ride on a recumbent bicycle. You may or may not know I had a bicycle accident last August that did a-bit-o damage to a cervical disc and corresponding nerve. As I have been pedaling my regular touring bike more miles in preparation for this big journey, the pain started to come back - thus the recumbent. By changing to a more upright position with a straight spine and neck and taking the weight

off my shoulders, I am able to ride pain free. At first I was skeptical because, frankly, I think they look stupid.

A couple weeks ago I went to a local bike shop to test ride a recumbent. The guy didn't offer any instruction and I looked like a drunk swerving down the road. I left feeling a bit discouraged. Lucky for me the first shop did not have my size frame. I went to a different dealer in Hales Corner near Milwaukee called Wheel & Sprocket. A super nice fella there named Harry spent time giving me a lesson in the parking lot and I went for another test ride. Still felt a bit squirrely, but I was getting the hang of it. I rode for almost 2 hours on that test ride and had no pain (on my regular bike, neck and back muscles started to knot up after 20 minutes). I bought the bike. It is a Tour Easy made by Easy Rider. Looks like a chopper with a regular 700c back wheel and a smaller 20" front wheel. The seat is so huge and comfy. First few rides I felt like a kid learning to ride for the first time. I have already put on over 300 miles on it and each time I ride it I feel more comfortable. It is a devil to keep in a perfect straight line because every movement of the body or touch of the handlebars has an effect on the steering. It requires balance and coordination. Heck, if I had coordination and balance, I never would have wiped out last August and I wouldn't need a recumbent! But Ha! I can ride for hours now and feel great. Pedaling uphill requires much more effort than on my regular bike. It moves pretty well on flats and downhill, though, because it is more aerodynamic than an upright bike. I am already pretty darn comfortable riding this new bike. By August I'll be a pro.

Yesterday I went back to Wheel & Sprocket for a tune up and to attach two racks. One goes under the seat to carry my front panniers and the other goes on the back. The bike frame geometry is still foreign to me so attaching racks wasn't exactly intuitive the first time. The panniers seem to hang securely. We put on beefy tires that appear bomb proof. So much of the weight will be on the rear wheel and I expect that to be the weakest link in everything holding together for the long haul. I don't think they make a much sturdier wheel, unless you put motorcycle wheels on. The other option was to pull a trailer. That would require another purchase and make the complete rig about 12 feet long! I guess it works very well, but I'm going to try and hang my stuff on the bike. We'll see how it goes.

I can't say enough about the guys at Wheel & Sprocket. The two guys that helped me the most were Harry and Dan. They were extremely helpful and took their time getting me started and set up on a recumbent. Many guys in the shop have been riding recumbents for years and know what works. They gave me such an excellent deal on equipment, that they are now officially sponsors of the ride. If any of you out there are considering purchasing a recumbent bicycle, I highly recommend you make the drive to their shop. Not only do they carry a variety of recumbent shapes and sizes, they will have you riding that goofy looking thing correctly from day one. The lesson made it much more enjoyable and less frustrating right away. Wheel & Sprocket is the largest dang bike shop with more bikes of more brands than any other shop I've ever been in.

One last thing. Not sure what to attribute this little phenomenon to, but on several occasions I have caught myself whistling while riding the recumbent. Is it the relaxed position? I am also smiling more as I ride. Is it the freedom from pain? Or am I laughing at myself because I think I look ridiculous? Maybe by getting off my upright bike, I have given myself freedom from trying to hammer and prove to everyone else on the road that I can go fast. Ultimately, it is liberation. I'll take it.

-Todd

## **Trip Preparation**

The final countdown to the trip and all the preparation is coming together. I have spent the last few days tying up loose ends at home and work. Opening the pool for my wife, getting someone to mow the lawn and shaving the dog. It seems that my colleagues at work want me back when this is over. I have been overwhelmed with their encouragement, well wishes



and generosity. My buddy Jean also provided me with a back up bike on my last day at work. However I don't think her 2 year old daughter will let me take it.



Now comes the fun task of trying to figure out how you are going to fit everything on your bike. Been training with the text books stuffed in the packs. Now they have to come out. They load real nice. Not like trying to strap that 10' fly rod onto the cross-tube. There is a certain amount of anguish in every decision. "Do I bring the 16" cast iron fry pan for the ultimate fish fry" or "do I bring the 6" titanium fry 'plate' that's just about big enough to fry minnows". Ok.... bring the cast iron fry-pan and compromise on the silverware- bring a titanium spork. Having a digital scale makes the decision process easier. We might even



have to learn to share.

The packing of the bike is very important. If the weight is not distributed properly it could become unstable at certain speeds. Heavy on the bottom, light on the top (heavy on Todd's bike, light on Bob's). The pile is so big, eventually it becomes 'cram' it in wherever it will fit. They're off!



Lots of friends, neighbors and family showed up bright and early on Sunday to see them off (maybe it was the doughnuts!)



The Esposito's made a fabulous start banner to make the whole thing official and the Cosgrove's made up signs to post along the route out of Lombard for inspiration.



Not everyone is happy they are leaving. It is going to take Bandit a while to realize that his buddy, Todd, is not going to come zipping around the corner at any moment.

The weather was beautiful and sunny. Unfortunately for the guys, the wind picked up in the afternoon. They made it to Woodstock (59 miles) by 3:00 pm with stops on the way to drum up donations and enjoy some ice cream. Next stop New Glarus, Wisconsin.

## Monday May 23<sup>rd</sup>

Bob's Birthday! Here he is enjoying a Birthday treat!



We left at about 9:15 AM right into a 20 to 30 MPH headwind. We could tell we were going the right direction cause the wind seemed to always be in our face. Our goal was New

Glarus State Park in Wisconsin, but after pushing against the wind, the day was going fast but the miles were going slow. We traveled to Harvard then west to Roscoe where we had lunch. At Rockton we found an oldtimer who gave us directions navigating across the rock river and into Wisconsin just to the left of Beloit. The wind had not let up and we were lucky to be averaging 10 MPH. By 4:00 we had zig-zaged to Orfordville. Another 30 miles to New Glarus. We stopped at the municipal building to ask if there was someplace to stay in Orfordville. Nope, not in a town of 1200. We asked to look at a phone book and noticed that there was a campground in Brodhead, the next town over, called Crazy Horse. 7 miles away. We picked up some cheese, crackers and slim jims for supper and headed to Brodhead. Turns out the campground is real nice. They have a pool, showers, playground, horseback riding, canoing and tubing. They are situated on the Sugar River. If we got here a little earlier we probably would have wet a line. They cater mostly to the drive in camper crew. Jim the owner, donated the site after he saw how we got there and heard what we were doing. People have been really great. The finger count still stands at 0. The road kill is mostly large racoons, with a baltimore oriole and an occasional opossum that Todd got so close that he dragged his bag through it. Yum. The total miles today was 71.4 against a 22-30 MPH headwind and carrying 50 lbs of gear. Not bad for a second day on the road. Tomorrow-Richland Center (maybe).



## Tuesday, May 24<sup>th</sup>

Up with the birds. They were so noisy we could hardly stay in our tents.



We packed it all in and left the Brodhead campground at 7:50. Rode 10 miles down the road to Albany, Wisconsin and stopped to eat hubcap sized pancakes, eggs and toast. Todd asked for an order of bacon and hash browns too but the waitress told him “better eat what ya got before you order any more.” After Todd cleaned his plate, he asked her for the hash browns and bacon. Just kidding. Then we rode hills all day. Todd finally got his bike into

lowest (granny) gear. One road, Rosey Lane had a hill that went straight down forever. We had tears streaming from our eyes and into our ears. We glided past Frank Lloyd Wright's Talieson. Looked like a large red barn. In Spring Grove the bridge was under construction so we took a left and rode along the Wisconsin River. It was the first flat road we had all day. Seemed that the wind was at our back for the last part of the day. Rode 14 to Richland Center and made it before the sun set. Total miles for the day - 97.7 Next stop La Crosse.

## Wednesday, May 25<sup>th</sup>

Hoo boy, made it to Richland Center last night. Stayed in a motel last night and ate pizza. Lots of pizza. Slept like a snoring rock. Up at 6:00 and across the street for a stack of cakes, eggs and some joe. On the road by 8:15. The big decision- do we take route 14 for a more direct and gentle path with traffic and take it easy on the knees or take back roads and add miles and elevation. So we compromised we spent the first part on 14 then took a left out of Viroqua on county road B. County Road B dumps back onto 14 just before Coon Valley.



Had a quick lunch in Coon Valley of beef jerky, cheese and gorp. Blood could not stay in our stomachs too long. We needed it in our legs. The hill out of Coon Valley is a dandy. Good thing the wind was at our back. We hit La Crosse just at 'rush hour' (like La Crosse could have a traffic jam). We wound our way to the Great River Bike Trail and jumped on it to keep from becoming road kill. North to the town of Midway and home. Total miles for the day 82.5. Next Stop - Not quite sure but it will be in the general direction of Duluth. We'll see after a stack of cakes.

## Thursday, May 26<sup>th</sup>

What a day! Donn Branstrator, a close friend of Todd's met us the night before. Donn will be riding with us from Holmen to Duluth, where he lives. We left Bob's home in Holmen at quarter to eight. Headed north and stopped in at Westfalia-Surge Inc in Galesville to get our photos taken by the big sign and say hello.



While we were there we weighed our bikes with the gear hanging on it on the big scale. Donn's bike weighed 64 lbs, Bob's bike weighed 93 and Todd's came in at 102 pounds. Everyone came out to see the rigs, rib us and wish us well. We appreciate it mightily. We left there a few donuts heavier and made our way out of town on County T. Using county roads we wound up in Whitehall, where we picnicked on summer sausage and pita bread.



We decided that our destination was going to be Wissota Lake State Park on Lake Wissota, just east of Chippewa Falls. Not letting our legs get too stiff, we jumped back on the bikes and headed north. The wind was out of the west and just slightly out of the south. Enough to make you think you had a tailwind when heading north. We passed interstate 94 just left of Osseo. We stopped in Fall Creek and purchased supplies for supper. We asked the store keep if he had any hot dogs. He replied "I have some that are sooooo good that you will be back to get some more." Fat chance. By 6:00 PM we had made our way to the State Park. After setting up camp we ate a few dogs, a little chicken soup, shower and to bed. Today we traveled 91.3 miles.

## Friday, May 27<sup>th</sup>

It sprinkled a little bit last night. Just enough to make the tents wet. The woods are filled with white flowers, trillium.



We loaded up and were out of camp by 8:00 AM. We put on 8 miles to Jim Falls, where we stopped for breakfast. Todd parked in the street next to a dressed out Harley. I think he was itchin for a fight.



We headed north along the Chippewa river. By Cornell, The weather started to turn.



By Ladysmith we already had been rained on. Just outside of Ladysmith we ran into a wall of pea sized hail. We could see it coming so we pulled off the road and hunkered down. It makes a funny sound as it bounces off your helmet. We traveled north on Rt 27 towards Hayward. In Ojibwe we rode full force into another hail squall. I had a choice, either watch where I was going or keep the hail out of the face. It ended almost as fast as it started and then rained for the next 5 miles. At 7:00 we pulled into Aunt Annie's and Allen's place. After a wonderful boiled ham dinner we crashed. I don't think anyone else in the house got any sleep because of the snoring chorus. We traveled 104.5 miles today. Tomorrow (Saturday) should be a light one. Traveling to Lake Namekagon.

## **Saturday, May 28<sup>th</sup>**

We started the day with a bowl of Aunt Annie's good Scottish oatmeal. When that was done we started breakfast number two of eggs, sausage and rolls. Our Aunt threatened to follow us and throw any leftovers at the back of our heads, so we ate up. The day was a relatively short one. 30 to 40 miles to Lake Namekagon. We stopped in Hayward and tried to connect with Marty Buck. We wound up lost and on the other side of town. Frustrated we decided to keep on. Sorry Marty.



The day threatened rain but never let loose. Cool with relatively no wind. We rode up Rt 63 through to Cable where we turned left and headed to Lake Namekagon. Our destination was the Rottier cabin in the Garmisch resort. When we arrived, Julie Rottier started emptying the refrigerator and did not stop until we were totally refueled and then some. It was soooo good. Did a little fishing in the afternoon where Todd came up with a smallmouth and hammerhandle pike. We had dinner at the Garmisch resort. The main lodge and main cabins were built in the 1920's by a German immigrant from Chicago. It was named after a city in the south of Germany. The main lodge is very rustic looking with beautiful views of Lake Namekagon. There are lots of very large fish hanging on the walls. We didn't catch any

but we know they're there. Maybe next time. We rode 42 miles today. Our next destination was Donn's place in Duluth.



## Sunday, May 29<sup>th</sup>

We slept like noisy logs and woke up in the morning to a breakfast that would be tough to beat. Thanks Julie and Ralph for the great hospitality! The day was great for riding, clear and no wind. We made great time in the morning. Back through Cable, a little north and then straight west to Solon Springs. Some of those county roads were rougher than a cob; potholes as big as your head. Lunch in Solon Springs and then north.



At Superior we headed west to the small town of Oliver where we were able to cross the St Louis river into Minnesota. We entered the Duluth area from the southern backdoor and then picked our way through downtown.



One last killer climb up 21st avenue to the University of Minnesota Bio lab where Donn works. We stashed our bikes in an empty corner of the lab, grabbed our bags and rode (in a car, heaven forbid) to Donn's place 20 miles north of the city for a day of rest and relaxation.

## **Monday, May 30<sup>th</sup>**

Sleep late- feel great! This is a day with out riding. The bikes are stashed at the University of Minnesota-Duluth bio lab and we are staying with Donn's family about 20 miles north of the city. The legs have built up a good amount of lactic acid and a day off will help us get rid of some of it and let the body heal. We did a little fishing in the lake behind Donn's house. Donn's boat is a 13 foot Boston Whaler with a 35 HP outboard. It really scoots. It was a beautiful day with few clouds and plenty of sun. We caught few hammer handle size pike, a 2 pound bass and a pair of walleyes. We cleaned and ate the walleyes for dinner. Yum. Miles bicycled today - 0.



## **Tuesday, May 31<sup>st</sup>**

We started the day with a bowl of Mueslix (mooselicks) and sausage. We then drove down to the University to retrieve our bikes. We were able to use Donn's email to pass along the pics and write up. After loading up we started to head west out of town. Now the area west of Duluth is all swampland.





It is flat and there are few paved routes that travel through that area. The one main route was route 2. When we asked people about it they said it was a dangerous way to go. Lots of fast traffic on a skinny, two-lane. However we could not avoid at least a small ride down route 2 as there were no alternatives. We had spent some time getting ready that morning and it was getting pretty late. Our original goal was Grand Rapids, but that lay 85 miles to the west and it was almost 11:00 AM by the time we got going. We started looking for alternative campsites east of Grand Rapids, but the pickings were slim. Our thought was that we would aim for a small campsite that was 15 miles closer. It was finally pay back time for the first couple of hard days of the trip- the day started sunny with a 15 mph tailwind straight out of the east! We rode fast through the flat swamplands. When we got to route 2 we noticed that it had a wide shoulder. It was as wide as a regular traffic lane and paved. The shoulder pavement was for the most part in better shape than the road. Our average miles per hour climbed from 12.5 to over 16.5. After traveling this fast for a period of time, we decided to try and make it to Grand Rapids. We made it by 6:00 PM. There is a campground attached to the county fairgrounds so we stayed right in town.



Miles traveled 83. Finger count is still 0, though a few people have beeped at us. We could not tell if they were wishing us well, letting us know that they were there or if they were late to their anger management class. Next destination Bemidji Minnesota.

## Wednesday, June 1<sup>st</sup>

The day started by raining on us while we packed our gear. We headed downtown to a little diner named Dottie's. It had some real old outboards and a 1972 Artic Cat mini bike in the window. Kewl. Ate eggs, hash browns, toast and a couple of hubcap sized pancakes. It will last about an hour. It seems that I am always hungry on this trip and always eating. Our tailwind was still with us, though now slightly out of the south. Our ride took us between Leech lake and Lake Winnabegoshish. Lots of nice fishing rigs passing us on the road. For lunch we stopped in Cass Lake at a small diner called Chuckies Chicken. People there were real nice. Gave us the backdoor directions to Bemidji LakeState Park. Just past the Paradise Bingo Hall and Casino. The State Park is on the north end of the Bemidji Lake. This State Park is awesome. It is in a beautiful pine forest right on the lake. The facilities are very new. Todd went out on their fishing pier and caught a 23 inch northern on the first cast. Came up with a couple of walleyes too. Just babies so we ate chili instead of the fish. Miles traveled 73. Next destination Thief River Falls.



## Thursday, June 2<sup>nd</sup>

Woke up a few times last night. Once from a hooty owl that was calling from a tree above our tents and from a loon calling as it flew over camp. Pretty nice way to wake up. Oatmeal and coffee in camp while we packed up.



Pedaled out by 8:15. Ate again at a cafe before we got out of Bemidji. Winds out of South helped us make good time as we traveled WNW. Couldn't wait to get to intersection of 2 and 59 by Erskine where we were going to be turning straight North. As soon as we turned North we enjoyed the fastest leg of the trip! South wind really snappin' and pushed us into high gear. Made 11 miles to next town in 30 minutes. Felt so good we gave out shouts of joy. Yeehah!!! Terrain is really getting flat and starting to look like Iowa. Our zoomin' came to an abrupt halt when a thunderstorm slapped down on us. Had to pull over, but had no place to hide. Crouched in ditch and got pelted while lightning struck at the end of the farmer's field. KaPow! Gotta love good rain gear! Rain finally lightened up and we pedaled the last 20 miles to Thief River Falls. Total miles today 93.

### **Friday, June 3<sup>rd</sup>**

We stayed at a Super 8 to try and dry out. Woke up to a sore and bloodshot eye. Serendipitous there was a clinic and eye care center just across the street. The urgent care doc looked it over and found a divot out of the right eye. A tube of antibiotics later and we were on our way.



On the way out we stopped at a little bait and bicycle shop, (what a combination!) to pick up some chain oil and a new pair of gloves. The folks there went on to describe how the dam screen had a hole in it letting thousands of Walleye from Red Lake into the Red River. Everyone has been getting their limit the last week. Awe heck and us leaving town. We drove north with a slight tailwind. It started raining the last half of the day as we made our way to Lake Bronson State Park. Along the way at the Black Bear Café we met some nice folks who called the local paper when they found out what we were doing. We were interviewed, told stories and photographed and we were on our way. By Lake Bronson it was raining steady. We were soaked from head to toe. Just as we hit camp, the rain stopped. We rented a canoe and went fishing in Lake Bronson. It was so full of small pike we were pouring jig heads over the side of the boat. The walleye were in the weeds with the pike. We picked up one eater pike and one eater walleye. Bob pulled a 3 lb+ large mouth out of the weeds.





Saw an eagle splash into the lake and pull out a fish. It was great fun. Had pike and walleye fish fry. The campground was full of people and it did not quiet down until after 12:00 AM. Sleep was tough. Ride today was 53 miles. Next stop- Through the Canada border crossing and to the St Malo Provincial Park.

### **Saturday, June 4<sup>th</sup>**

Woke up to a gray drizzly day. Coffee and oatmeal in camp, a wipe of the chain and more oil, and we were good to go. Still going North on 59. Kept our eyes open for moose, but only saw a few deer, a big marsh hawk and some sandhill cranes. A lot of low flat marsh land along here. Had pancakes and eggs in Lancaster, the last town in the U.S. we'll see for awhile.

A black lab farm dog thought it would be great fun to chase Todd down the road. He was fast and very persistent. Chased Todd for about a mile. The farmer chased him down with his truck and corralled the dog. Thank heaven, because Todd's legs were giving out. Just a bit further was the Canadian border. Border guard said that same damn dog chased

another cyclist all the way to the border, then peed on the guy's passport.



Made it to St. Malo Provincial Park. Before heading into the park we had soup at a hip joint called the Crow's Wing. Set up camp, showered, and explored the campground. Walked to The Crow's Wing for brick oven pizzas cooked outside and great live music. Only customers for awhile. Updated the stories and pictures during dinner. Miles today 56. Next stop Stephanville Provincial Park.

## Sunday, June 5<sup>th</sup>

We awoke to a steady rain on the tents. Sleep was fitful. The park was water logged and some of the areas were closed, concentrating the campers. A group of youths thought it would be funny to light up fireworks at all hours of the night. Ha-ha. (little jerkers). We wrapped up our soggy tents and headed out. The rain was a little heavier than a drizzle and steady with a forceful northwest wind that drove it into every crack and crevice. We headed slightly north from St Malo (he married Marsha, don't ya know) and then took a left right into a 30 mile-an-hour west wind. The added rain made the ride real special. We felt like real (wet) men. Manitoba is extremely flat and devoid of trees for windbreaks.



Single digit speeds the whole day. We passed a dead mink. Thought about picking it up, skinning it and letting it dry out on the back of the bike. Nah, we smell funky enough already. We finally made it to Morris for breakfast but were heartbroken when we found out that they stopped making pancakes at 11:00 and it was 11:09. We pressed on. The rain finally ceased in the early afternoon but the wind did not. This is like constantly riding up hill without the fun of coasting down the backside. There were some scary moments on Route 3 as the shoulder was about 1-1/2' wide and the wind gusts and truck gusts would cause you to veer from side to side. Traffic was heavy, which we thought odd for a country

road, but found out later it was a major road for vacationers going back into Winnipeg on a Sunday evening. We arrived at the Stephenfield Provincial Park around 7:00. The staff at the park brought us firewood and helped us with directions for the next few days. Thanks Ken and Angela! Almost 9 hours in the saddle. We rode only 78 miles today. This was by far the most difficult day of the trip so far. Oh yeh, finger count is now at 1.

## Monday, June 6<sup>th</sup>

We both slept really well last night. Laid in tent and listened to the wind howling in the trees. Bob joked as we left camp that the wind will switch to the East in about an hour. Sure enough, the nasty headwinds and crosswinds died down and switched to the NE. Bits of blue sky and sun felt good to cut the chill. No rain today. Yay! Saw three wild turkeys, a coyote and lots of big hawks. Met a fellow bicyclist who was touring from British Columbia to Nova Scotia. He looked like Billy Gibbons from ZZ Top with a long gray beard flirting with his spokes. About an hour later we came across a family of bicyclists touring from British Columbia to Newfoundland. The Feldmanns had sold everything, including their house, and were hoping to make Newfoundland before the snow flies. Then they'd look for a place to settle in. The family consisted of Mom, Dad and their two sons. The boys looked to be maybe 12 and 14 years old and were both pulling their own weight in gear on trailers. They had big smiles on their faces. Look out Lance, these kids are going to give you some competition soon.



Pedaled to Wawanesa, got spaghetti to cook in camp, and camped next to the Souris River. Beautiful park-like setting.



The old gal at the camp wheeled down a load of firewood in a wheelbarrow because the kids were off at a ball game. Caught a nice channel cat below the spillway. River is 6 feet above normal. They have had a ton of rain here! Traveled 76 miles today. Heading to Reston tomorrow.

## Tuesday, June 7<sup>th</sup>

Whewee, last night got exciting. The light show and grumbling thunder woke us up about 3AM. Hopped out of tents, grabbed clothes off the line and battened down the hatches. Within minutes the thunder and lightening was cracking directly overhead. KaPow! The area has had 7 to 11 inches of rain in the past week and some towns were flooding. Bob made the comment that maybe the river we were camped next to would crest and flood us out. Thanks, Bob, like I can get to sleep now. At 4AM I put on my rain gear and checked the river level. Still 3 feet of bank showing, so I went back to bed. We both lay in our tents longer than usual come daybreak, hoping the rain would stop. It could be days, so we packed up and road out in the rain. Got a late start, but had a tailwind helped us make up time. Met a couple guys cycling from Regina Saskatchewan to Nova Scotia to raise money for Alzheimer's research. All the riders we have met are pedaling West to East and are miffed at all the ENE winds. Guess we placed our order earlier. When the winds shift into a headwind from the West, maybe it will stop raining. A monster-sized jack rabbit jumped out in front of us and ran with us for a bit. I didn't see any giant gnashing teeth, so I put away the bear pepper spray. Made 70 miles today. Checked in to Reston Manitoba Campground. Had some trouble finding a dry site. Made a fire with wet firewood and lotsa boy scout water. Ate beanies and weenies. Tomorrow we head for some place in Saskatchewan.





## Wednesday, June 8<sup>th</sup>

We woke early with the prospect of there being the same kind of wind we enjoyed the day before. The wind was gusting to 30 mph. We packed up our wet tents and went into town. As we sat down to eat, it started to rain. It is still raining now. The wind was not as strong or as direct out of the east as the day before. The temperature was downright cool. In the mid fifties. Sweating on the inside of our raingear and rain on the outside. It didn't take too long until we became soaked throughout. If we continued to ride, we generated enough heat to keep reasonably warm. But if we stopped, we quickly became chilled. After riding for a couple of hours we passed into Saskatchewan.



For the most part Manitoba had been flat. Saskatchewan started flat but soon we were heading up to the top of an escarpment. Once on top, the terrain turned into slowly rising and falling hills and valleys. In Saskatchewan there were many oil pumping rigs throughout the farm fields. These pumping stations look like a giant bird with the beak moving up and down as it pumps. It seemed like most of the oil rigs were pumping, probably due to the current high oil prices. We were very wet and also very cold. The decision was to try and make it to a motel for the night. The only town that could support a motel on the route was Weyburn, almost a third of the way across Saskatchewan. So we stuck at it for 8+ hours in the saddle and put in 124 miles today. We hit the motel room and emptied our packs. 1" of water standing in the bottom of the packs. Supposed to rain for a couple of more days. Not many pictures as we did not want to get our cameras wet. The going was tough but then it was only for a day. Some of the Make-A-Wish kids deal with worse issues on a day to day basis. When you put it in that perspective, today was a walk in the park. Tomorrow's destination ?

## Thursday, June 9<sup>th</sup>

The day started with the sun shining. We asked the gal at the front desk for some scrap towels. We used them to try and clean up our bikes. We took so long that we almost missed the continental breakfast. Staying in the same motel was another group of bikers, two girls and one guy. They started in Vancouver and were traveling to Montreal. They didn't speak too much English, mostly French. We could understand that they were a little frustrated with the constant headwind they had been fighting trying to travel east. Headed out of Weyburn with neither a headwind or a tailwind. it felt good to be biking in dry clothes in the sun. When we got to a little town called Ogema we stopped for provisions. We were exhausted from pushing the day before so we decided to stay at the little town campground right behind their hockey rink. We only traveled 51 miles today. We set up our tents and it promptly started to rain. These local campgrounds are pretty low buck affair. This is the second site I have seen that uses washing machine tubs for fire rings. I thought it was pretty hill-billyish but it turned out to be really cool. Once Todd got the wet wood going, it burned so hot you could have made horseshoes in that thing! And when you look at it in

the dark the fire shines through all those little holes in the side looking like a flashing 'lite-brite'. Jill will be wondering why the wash machine is in pieces when I get home. When the locals came around to collect our \$10 (Canadian) for the site they informed us that they were having a community barbecue the next night and wouldn't we want to stay just one more night. Man, a day early again! Tomorrow's goal - somewhere past Assiniboie (no jokes).

## Friday, June 10th

Woke as the wind was shaking the tent. By the time we got packed and got on the road the wind died to nothing. We have been soooo lucky. If you cant have a tailwind, best to have no wind. The day started relatively clear but as it warmed up the clouds showed up. The terrain is pretty flat and if you get a little higher than the rest of it there are beautiful grand vistas all around.



There is wildlife everywhere. Todd spotted what he thought was a coyote. It was too big to be a coyote. It was a wolf! it watched us from afar, then headed north over a small knoll. A little farther there were some cattle with their calves. MMMmm Lunch. In the big sky, you can count a half dozen places where the clouds have become overdeveloped and were now raining heavily in the distance. We dodged rain and it looked like we were going to make it into Assiniboia unscathed. However a dark cloud in front of us bust open as we approached and gave us a good soaking. In Assiniboia we ate lunch. Ate at a small place called the Sweetwater Cafe. We ate just about all the food they had. At lunch we learned that there was to be a rodeo weekend starting that afternoon but due to the weather might be called off. It was a good idea to move on. Not good to be around a bunch of drunk angry cowboys. Especially wearing sissy pants.



On the road we met a father-daughter duo traveling on a tandem recumbent with a trailer. John and Jessica started in Vancouver and were heading east. They were three weeks out and she was done. He was trying to figure out how to finish on his own. We decided to stay at Thompson Lake Campground in Lefleche. We had to go 5 miles out of our way to get

there. This park is used by people who park their trailer there forever, not tramps like us. They stuck us in an overflow campsite on the far edge. This was good as we got to watch a family of Great Horned Owls eat baby yellowheaded blackbirds. They would swoop down amongst the cattails and the blackbirds would go nuts.



We traveled 83 miles today. Tomorrow's destination west somewhere.

## **Saturday, June 11th**

This is day 21. Officially on the road for three weeks now. Up at 6 and rolling by 8AM. Still riding West on 13, also called the Red Coat Trail. Saw several antelope, then saw what we think was a cougar! Assumed it was a deer at first, but deer don't have a tail or run like that. We watched it run through the length of a ravine, then up and over the hill. Folks down the road confirmed that they have had cougar sightings and someone shot one recently. Wow. Stopped in the small dilapidated town of Kinkaid for a big breakfast. While the window was broken and the paint peeling, the people and food were wonderful. Can't drink the water around here. Filled our bottles at a reverse osmosis water station. Nice guy and his son looked over our maps and suggested a spot for camping off the road by an old bridge. Met yet another cyclist heading from Vancouver to Montreal. Pickings very slim for grocery items in the small towns. How far can you ride on beef sticks and peanuts? Many towns on the map consist of a grain elevator, period. Day sunny in morning, but the afternoon clouds appeared out of nowhere. Got a dousing, but were getting more wet from sweating in our rain suits. An antelope ran along side us in a field then crossed right in front of us. Too many hawks and ground squirrels to count. Hawk on every other post and squirrels getting run over by the dozens. Finally, when we were both fading with fatigue, the bridge we were looking for came into view.



It is an old cement structure with several arches. No road on either side of bridge, though a creek still bubbled underneath. The road was redone a long time ago, but the bridge was left as a landmark. Probably was built in the 1920s (met a 70 year old man who said the bridge was there before he was born). We walked our bikes down the railroad tracks to the bridge and set up our tents. There were hundreds of swallows nesting under the bridge. Also nesting there were two great horned owls! They swooped about and snapped their bills at us. Swallows kept the bugs and mosquitoes down. Could not have found a better spot. 81 miles today. Tomorrow we get off of 13 and head north to Hwy 1. Not our original plan, but the road we have been enjoying turns to gravel for a 50 mile stretch by the Alberta border. With the rains, we would have had to carry our bikes.

## Sunday, June 12th

We awoke to the sound of hundreds of swallows chirping and flying about catching bugs to feed their young. Their nests lined the underside of the cement bridge.



The owls were happy to see us go. The long grass was heavy with dew and the tents were wet. Bob's 4 lb tent now weighs about 8 lbs. We stopped into a place in Gull Lake before getting on Hwy 1. Todd and I have been rating the pancakes as we have been traveling. The cakes are graded on taste, size, and appearance. The best cakes up until now were the ones we had in Albany, WI. However, the restaurant in Gull Lake is the current champion with an overall rating of 8. Todd's stack of 3 cakes was like a birthday cake. Now on route 1, which is a major East/West Canadian Highway. It has a three foot shoulder and is smooth, but also comes with traffic. People are nice and moving over when passing, but it is still



unnerving when they blast by at 100+ km/hr. I started calling Bob Boom-Boom because he was firing with both cannons and setting a good pace down hwy 1. Not as much wildlife to be seen on such a busy road. Stopped and used the visitor's center computer. Thanks Janelle. Next time don't dance when the security camera is on. Stayed at the Eagle River Campground near Maple Creek, Saskatchewan. 86 miles today. Tomorrow we head into Alberta.

## Monday, June 13th

Awoke to the sound of rain on the tent. Wrapped up some pretty wet stuff again. Learned that the campground we were staying at had been built by the government back in the 60's. It had been in disrepair and vacant for 12 years when a young couple were able to purchase it from the government and apply some sweat equity for the last 3 years. The owner showed us pictures of what it looked like when they picked it up. It was a mess. It is pretty nice now. We bugged out and headed west. Hard to see the surrounding area when your riding glasses are covered with water droplets. Just concentrating on not getting run over. Entered Alberta and finally wound up in Medicine Hat.



It stopped raining just before we got into Medicine Hat. Medicine Hat was like combination Schaumburg on the Dan Ryan with a cowboy flare. We did some shopping and stocked up on food, more memory cards for pics and sent some things home that we no longer needed. We set up camp on the outskirts of town in the Gas City Campground. We ate Pita Pizzas cooked over an open fire. As the sun set the coyotes started to sing. Pretty cool. We traveled 60 miles today. Next stop Lethbridge Alberta.

## Tuesday, June 14th

Gee Golly, No rain! However there was also a headwind from the southwest. It was inevitable. We took route 3 from Medicine Hat west. This was a 2 lane with a wide shoulder and decent pavement. Alberta seems to have a better handle on their roads. I think 'Saskatchewan' is Indian for 'Help Wanted- Someone with road building experience'; However traffic is pretty heavy. Occasionally a tractor trailer rig would come along behind us and blast by, shoving us forward a couple of yards with their wake. Unnerving at first, we started to look forward to these events as they broke up the relentless headwind. We entered Lethbridge right at rush hour. We were told at least once to "get off the road!" We picked a hotel that had internet access so we could update the website. We asked at the front desk before checking in if we could wheel the bikes into our room. "no problem"; the girl says. Then she puts us on the 7th floor. "Will our bikes fit in the elevator?", we ask. "No problem", she says. Then we wheel Todd's bike through. "we have a problem". We could fit his bike in only by holding it in a 'wheelie' position.



Now there are tire marks on the elevator ceiling. No problem. Had a pint in the hotel lounge then walked down the street for some huge chunks of red meat and large potatoes. Slept like logs in a regular bed. Miles traveled today-104. Next stop the mountains.

### **Wednesday, June 15th**

Hard to get up from the comfy beds at the Sandman Hotel. Lethbridge is on the Old Man River. There are only 2 bridges to get out the west side of town. I thought it best to call the local WestfaliaSurge dealer to get the scoop on which is the best way to get out of town. I also needed to pick up a tub of udder balm for my posterior. Those little chap sticks weren't cutting it. We ate at the Denny's attached to the hotel expecting a great breakfast before riding out. We were sorely disappointed. Couldn't even finish the pancakes. We headed over to Lethbridge Dairy Mart on the other side of town. We were warmly welcomed by the crew and took a photo out front.



The gift of the Bag Balm was warmly received. They also gave us great directions out of town. There is a large hill right after the Old Man River Bridge. It took a little while to get to

the top and made for a good practice run before the mountains. Today was extremely windy from the west. Right in the face at a good 30 mph. There was absolutely nowhere to hide. We crawled along as the Rockies slowly came into view. They looked magnificent with their snow covered peaks and purple coloring. Our goal was Old Man River Dam Provincial Park. The park is right along the river below a large dam. We were a bit surprised when we came down a large hill into the river valley and found the campground was closed. And it looked so good too. We ventured on up the other side of the valley and found another campground open on the top of hill. This campground was sooo windy that they had built wind screens around the picnic tables. The lower park was closed because of all the rain. If it rained again, they would have to open the dam and the campground would be washed away. Probably a good thing we camped on the hill instead. The hill campsite allowed us a 360 degree view of the surrounding terrain. The mule deer started to come out at sunset all around us to feed. We rode 69 very hard miles today. Next goal-Crows Nest Pass and Fernie British Columbia.

## Thursday, June 16th

The wind died during the night. In talking to the campground maintenance man, he said that rain was coming and the wind was switching out of the west and going to be coming from the east. Hot Diggity Dog! We must live right. We rode west straight into Crows Nest Pass. Crows Nest Pass is a valley through the mountains about 20 miles long.



We expected a huge hill but never encountered one. The hills were like what you would get in Wisconsin Mississippi River valley. Manageable. Todd had a mule deer run alongside him then cut right in front of him within a few

feet. He could have grabbed the tail and went for a ride. He could hear the hooves on the pavement. He says that the deer had exactly four freckles on its rump. In the middle of Crows Nest Pass there was a large pile of rubble that had fallen from the mountain. Seems a piece over a kilometer square broke off in the middle of the night back in 1903. Wiped out the mining town of Frank and killed 70 people. The wind was at our back and blowing hard but no rain yet, just sunshine. We came upon a tunnel in a turn in the road where we thought we would need our headlights. We dug through our bags, attached our headlights and plunged in. The tunnel was only 100 feet long. Cool anyway.



We blew down the road to the little town of Fernie. Tom Hanks is supposed to have a place in Fernie- big ski resort town. Pretty swanky. Mount Fernie Provincial Park was on the south side of town and up a steep hill. Once there it was gorgeous. We picked a site within 200 feet of a beautiful creek and set up. We found the campground operator just as she was watching a small black bear amble off in the woods. We rode 75 miles today. Next stop Wasa Lake Provincial Park.

## Friday, June 17th

Packed it in and started to ride south towards Elko British Columbia. The wind was still blowing slightly from the east making the pace easier. In Jaffray it started to rain so we pulled into a diner for some breakfast. The sky opened up and the rain came down in buckets. We looked out the window, drinking coffee and waiting for the rain to at least slow down. An hour later it finally let up enough that we could venture outside. The flow had only slowed slightly. We have pretty good raingear but there comes a point where everything is wet. The disappointment was that the clouds were obscuring the mountains from view. We rode on until we reached Wasa Lake Provincial Park (WAZZUUUP!). We pulled in-no showers. I think it has been about 4 days without a shower. "No Todd, I can't smell you because my stink is getting in the way." The camp was empty except for a couple of trailers parked in the back. There was no one around. As we entered the park we noticed that there were 2 brand new yurts sitting in a couple of the camping sites.



A yurt is a semi-permanent tent used by the nomadic Mongolians. It is round with a wooden floor, fabric sides and fabric roof. These yurts were about 16 feet in diameter with 8 foot ceilings. Todd has been interested in yurts for his own property and he wanted to see inside, so he tried one of the doors. It was locked. Right about then Norma, the campground



manager showed up in her blue pick-up truck. When Todd inquired about the yurts, she replied that the rental was 60 bucks a night. However since the beds weren't in them yet and the campground was virtually empty, she would let us have them for 30 bucks a night. As we talked and she learned about our trip she gave us the yurt for the night for the cost of a regular campsite. Thanks Norma! We were so cold and wet it was a real blessing. We pulled our bikes inside, fired up the stove and started peeling the wet layers from our bodies.



The feeling started coming back to our hands and feet. We hung up what we could but with it being 100% relative humidity, nothing dried. The rain continued through the night. We traveled 70 miles today. Next stop Radium Hot Springs

## **Saturday, June 18th**

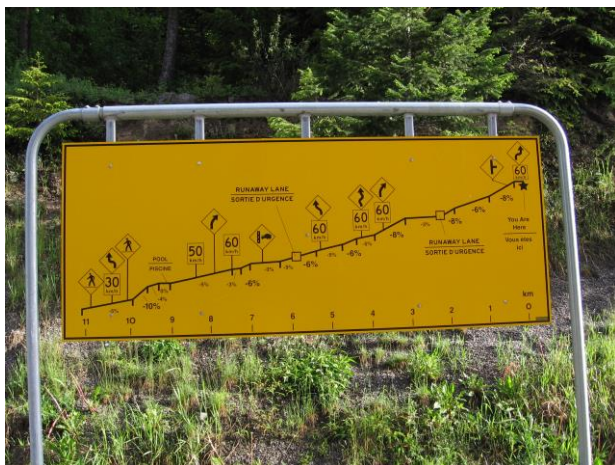
Laid in the yurt listening to the rain hit the roof, waiting for it to stop. Silly us. It was nice not to have to pick up wet tents and pack in the rain. I replaced the rear brake pads on my Trek. They were gone, worn to the backing material. Headed north in the misty morning. The mist soon turned to rain. Head down-keep riding. Hard to see wildlife when the glasses are beaded up. Pedaled past Skookumchuck, Canal Flats, Columbia Lake (where the Columbia river starts) and Fairmont Hot Springs. In Canal Flats we stopped for some cakes at the only place in town but it was closed. A couple in a white car with Montana plates pulled up and they got out. We started talking and found out that they are Joe and Ruth from Sturgeon Bay Wisconsin out on vacation. In further talking with Joe, come to find out that he delivers cattle to one of the test farms that Bob had been working with. Small world. Just outside of Fairmont we came upon an Osprey nest. You could see the little chicks sticking their fuzzy heads over the side. We continued to Radium Hot Springs where it finally stopped raining. We found a laundromat and camped out while all of our things were being washed.



The laundromat was a separate room in the back of a gas station/convenience store. As we were leaving we were joking with the clerk about dancing in front of the security camera. She said that there was a camera in the laundromat. Hmmm, I wonder if they will look at the security tapes to see a couple of Bucks, buck naked, changing their clothes. "Yeh, we used to have the monitor right up here by the cash register." Rode up a giant hill to get to the Red Streak Canadian National Campsite. We also were strategizing about tomorrow's game plan. The road going into the Kooteney National Park would be very busy the next day, Sunday, as people returned home to Calgary with their travel trailers in tow. The road is narrow with a poor shoulder and goes straight up for the first 11 kilometers. So we figured that we would get up early and start up the big hill before it became beastly. The Red Streak Campground was situated directly above the village of Radium Hot Springs, the Park entrance and the Columbia River Valley. To say the least, it was beautiful. We traveled 72 miles today.

## Sunday, June 19th

Woke up at 5:00 AM. Strapped on the bags and were down at the Kooteney National Park entrance by 6:15. They did not lie about it being straight up. We started with an 11% grade for the first .5 kilometer and varied from 6 to 8% after that for the next 10.5 kilometers. The road was situated along a rushing stream between two steep rock walls. The sun was not up quite yet but the sky was clear with only a few clouds. We had the road to ourselves. It was gorgeous.



When we reached the top it was quite cold. The long decent would be freezing so we put on the wind pants, fleece, gloves and jackets. As we started to descend there was a small black bear on the side of the road rolling in something. Traffic was picking up but you could tell

that the occupants were oblivious to the bear. Finally the bear was spooked by a couple of cars and ran into the woods. We rolled past the spot in the forest where the bear disappeared, wondering if we would have to sprint away should he reappear. The other side of the mountain was covered in clouds so that as we broke into the next valley, we were in a fog. Boy, was it a cold ride down that hill. We ran into another group of cyclists from the Helena Montana area. It was a group of eight guys that every year cycle for a week in some mountainous scenic area. This is their 16th year. Their sag wagon stopped and thought we were with this other group. Then he realized we weren't just before we could say, "yeah we need a couple of sandwiches." The National Park has limited access so there aren't too many businesses operating inside of the boundaries. We ate peanut butter sandwiches for lunch that we brought along. About 2\3rds into our ride who should come along but Joe and Ruth from Sturgeon Bay. Ruth pulled some water and energy bars from the trunk of their car. Awesome! Just like having your own sag wagon. Just in time, as we were running out of water. We climbed up over Vermillion Pass and across the Continental Divide into Alberta. We settled into Castle Mountain National Park for the night. Our campsite is right along a rushing stream. Can't see any brookeys or cutthroats. We rode 69 hilly miles today. Tomorrow's goal- Lake Louise.



## Monday, June 20th

It was surprisingly cold during the night. Wound up putting on all the clothes we had. Brrrr. Made coffee and shared it with a German couple staying in the next campsite. She was from Munich and he was from Berlin. They stayed close to us because they were nervous about the bears. Didn't see any. Still no shower- smelling like billy goats and salty like a beef stick. The chickadee baths weren't cutting it. Been 4 days since the last shower. Our goal was Lake Louise. We cut along 1A. The mountains were in full view. The day was finally clear. We stopped to let a couple of Japanese dudes take a picture with the mountains in the backdrop. Wound up taking their picture for them and they took our picture for us. They didn't speak too much English. We arrived in Lake Louise by noon.





We only traveled 17 miles. 'Lake Louise' means 'tourist trap' in French. We tried to update the website but they would not let us load a memory stick. Gonna have to wait until Jasper. Met a couple of mountain bikers who were biking behind the village and almost ran into a grizzly bear. Could have slapped its rump. Their eyes were still as big as saucers. We had to hang out at Lake Louise to pick up a new rear rim that I had ordered. I noticed that the aluminum rim had started to show signs of cracking at the spoke ferrules back at Old Man Dam. Called the bike shop to get a new one sent then figured forward where we would be. The rim showed up just as planned! Yeh! It even had a new cluster and tire on it. Thanks Smith Cycle and TREK! By the time we got to Lake Louise the rim had 7 bad cracks in it. Would have been a matter of days and disaster. Probably my fat ass. The campground had an electric bear fence to keep the bears out. Seems that back in 2000 someone had food in their tent and got attacked by a grizzly. They couldn't re-open the park until the fence was installed. This park has showers. Ahhhh. As soon as the sun started to set the temperature dropped dramatically. We put it all back on and went to bed. Our goal the next day was to travel the Icefields Parkway and wind up at Wilcox campground near the Columbia Glacier.

## Tuesday, June 21st

Brrrrrr. Fired up the coffee and got dressed. We rode the 4km uphill to Lake Louise to get a look. It was pretty close to granny gear all the way without the weight. Pretty cool. The lake is a blue green with a Glacier at one end and a resort on the other. It is covered in tour buses and Japanese tourists. There is an occasional roar as the ice busts loose and falls. Sounds like thunder. We rode back to camp, picked up our bags and headed north. It was a beautiful bluebird day. The mountain views were spectacular. The road rose gradually throughout the day until we were at Bow lake pass at 6877' above sea level. There was a spectacular view of Bow lake. At the entrance of the Bow Pass Lookout, we met Aaron, Lori, and Ryan Coenen. Aaron is cycling from Fairbanks to Key West Florida!





He is raising money for the Lance Armstrong Foundation which supports cancer research. His mom, Lori, and kid brother Ryan are riding the support RV. Aaron is a UW- Milwaukee student. Farther down the road at one of the scenic overlooks we were out of water and wondering how much further before coming to a place to refill. Just then, an Irish fella offered to fill our bottles from his RV. Ends up he is a big cyclist who has been on many long charity rides. He and his companion are from Dublin. They also gave a donation for Make-A-Wish. Talk about running into friendly people! The last 50 km today took forever! At about 6:30 PM the road turned vertical and we climbed. And we climbed some more. 2



hours later we were still climbing and using our grannies. Phenomenally brutal. The legs were sizzling with lactic. The mosquitoes could keep up with you at that speed and took advantage of the easy meal. Slap one of those and wind up in traffic. Good thing it stays light late. At 8:45 we finally pedaled into the campground and took the last available campsite. Since there were no places to buy groceries, we were down to our last rations. Potato soup, ramen noodles, and licking peanut butter packs and jelly packs taken at last week's breakfast stop. We traveled 94.5 Miles today. Tomorrow's goal is Jasper, Alberta.

## Wednesday, June 22nd

Rain, rain go away. We awoke to the sound of rain on the tent. But we can't lie around, we have bears to tickle under the chin and moose to ride today! Pulled everything to an available shelter building and loaded up. A few miles down the road we pulled into the Columbia Ice Fields tourist trap. They will take you out on a special bus and let you walk around on top of the glacier. We ate an extremely expensive breakfast, picked up something for lunch and headed out. We caught a glimpse of a bull moose heading into the woods. We got off the bikes and followed after it. (nobody said we were smart). Then we noticed the big bear scat and decided we should probably get on with the ride. The steady rain in the afternoon made it difficult to see any wildlife. Stopped at Wapiti and Athabasca Falls.



The water was high and rushing over the falls with great energy. I would not recommend jumping into the middle of them. We arrived in Jasper about 5:00 PM soaked to the bone. Figured we would live it up in a hotel for the night and try to get the website updated. Tried to check into a hotel but the prices were pretty steep. 180 bucks and up. But one of the clerks told us about a row of houses where people rent out rooms for much less. So we walked our bikes down the street and here are these houses with 'vacancy' or 'no vacancy' signs on them. We checked the first house with a 'vacancy' sign out front. Turns out we get two bedrooms, kitchen and storage for the bikes for 80 bucks Canadian. Score! We rode 70 miles today.

## Thursday, June 23rd

Hey! Today is Jill and my anniversary. 26 wonderful years. (I think I am still married). Can't strap on the bikes yet, we have things to do. The house we are staying at is within walking distance of downtown Jasper. Laundry, breakfast, post office, grocery store and liquor store in that order. Ran into the German couple that had camped near us at Castle Mountain four days before. They had gone camping just outside Jasper. They had gone hiking in the rain and wound up at Fairmont Hot Springs. They got into trouble by walking into the hot springs clothes, shoes and all. They said it felt good. We didn't get out of town until after 12 noon.



As we left Jasper we ran upon a small herd of elk, munching the nice grass along the road. They weren't spooked too easy. The amazing thing about this leg of the trip was that we were being pushed along by a very strong tailwind. Covering the first 20 miles in less than an hour. We were being spat out of the Rockies like a watermelon seed at a family picnic - ptuh. Within 30 miles the Rockies could be seen only when we turned around. The foothills lay before us. The plan is to head East on 16 then North on route 40 to Grand Prairie and then Dawson Creek to pick up the Al-Can highway. One turn north onto route 40 and we

started right up a Disneyworld hill. This type of hill is very much like the waiting line for a Disneyworld ride. You step in line for a ride that doesn't look too long. In front there are maybe 40 people ahead of you. As the line advances and you turn the corner, you realize that hidden from view were another 100 people waiting ahead of you. Then the next turn and there is even more line. This hill gave me the same feeling. Bike up the first part and it looks like you're just about to the top. Then you go around a small corner and see more of the hill. The hill turned out to be about 6 miles long.



It was a great way to bring you back to reality after flying along the first part of the day. Route 40 is heavily traveled by trucks and tourists. It is 2 lanes with about 18" to the right of the white line to ride on. There the pavement ends and there is a steep gravel shoulder into the ditch. Not much room for error. The road surface was also full of wheel wrecking chuck holes in serious need of patching. Our attention had to be focused on riding, which was a shame since the scenery was so beautiful and opportunity to see wildlife was pretty high. We finally made it to the William Switzer Provincial Park-Gregg Lake Campground. The park was pretty empty except for a couple of trailers. We started to talk to the folks and found that they were getting ready for a group gathering weekend. They are a group of Edmonton surgical nurses that had worked together at one time and they get together every year for a weekend. Hal, Ilke, Hazel and Jerry were extremely generous. They gave us each a beer and had us over for home made wine, baked potatoes and Christmas schnitzel. Yummm. Finally went back to camp and crashed hard. We traveled 63.3 miles today. Goal tomorrow, Pierre Grey Provincial Park.

## Friday, June 24<sup>th</sup>

Wow it's cold! Woke up in the night and put on just about everything from the pack. When we finally crawled out of the sack our clothes out on the drying line were stiff as boards from ice.



As the sun rose it warmed quickly. Pack it in and move on. Out on Route 40 Todd spots a mama moose with 2 babies. The babies are cinnamon brown with spindly legs and the mama is Hershey's special dark chocolate brown and are really cute. One of the calves was nursing. We watch as long as we can but something spooks them and they move back out of sight. We come upon Pierre Grey Provincial Park by 1:30. Too early and the ride is going good so we decide to keep going and pick up one of the next campgrounds. We decide to go to Smokey River Campground which is just past Grand Cache. Many years ago around these parts there was this trapper by the name of Yellowhead. He would store his furs before trading in what is now called Grand Cache. Road up to Grand Cache is a steep one. Stopped in Grand Cache for some magic soup and then down a big hill and hopefully the campground.



However the map we had was wrong and we rode right past the campground. We kept riding and riding looking for the campground but it never materialized. Flagged a stopped vehicle down and he guided us to the next campground- another 7-8 miles down the road. We wound up in Sheep Creek Campground on the Smokey River. There were maybe 5 sites total backed up on the river. You could tell it didn't get much use. As we pulled in it started to rain. We traveled 93 miles today. Next goal Musreau Lake Campground.

## **Saturday, June 25<sup>th</sup>**

Drip, Drip, Drip. Yep, rain again. I think we could count the days on one hand since entering Canada where it has not rained on us. Oh well, strap on the bikes and get to it. Today will be a little shorter since we biked so late yesterday. Too far to try and make Grand Prairie in one day and the only campsite between here and there is Lake Musreau. After Grand Cache the road became quite nice with a smooth surface and wide shoulder to ride on. We climbed the first part of the day to the ridge of one of the foothills and rode along it for a while. Then a series of hills where you would ride up for about 2 miles then recover with a nice sled ride then another 2 miles up and subsequent sled ride. All day long in the rain. We arrived at Lake Musreau in the early afternoon. The entrance to the campground was a muddy 4 mile gravel road. While biking in we saw deer and a small coyote. When we arrived at the camp, we met Helen the camp host. She's a super friendly gal with blue dyed hair. She put us in a nice site overlooking Musreau Lake.





No running water here so we jumped in the lake to wash off the road grit and sweat salt. EEEE...that's cold! The lake is beautiful and surrounded by Provincial Park land. Only place on lake is campground. Supposed to be good rainbow trout fishing, too. Helen and Jim, thank you for your generous donation to Make-A-Wish! Traveled 58.2 miles today. Tomorrow we head to Grand Prairie, Alberta.

**Special Feature:** Today's topic is *fragrances*.

The heavy smell of pine while in the Canadian National parks of Kooteney, Banff and Jasper. The sweet smell of sage from Manitoba through Saskatchewan. Add in the cedar and cypress trees and the smells have been heavenly. In Jasper, the lilacs were still in bloom, perfuming the air. Todd swears he occasionally smells pizza bread. Is it a plant? Delirium from hunger? Something left in his moustache from last week? Or is there a sasquatch bakery just past those trees? Of course you have your diesel exhaust fumes and the occasional road kill but these are few and far between. We can smell the rain coming. On two occasions Todd thought he smelled bluegills, but that is just weird. Could have been his breath blowing back in his face or Bob riding in front of him. We could smell the cows before seeing them. The black bean soup added some interesting smells, too. The damp mossy woods sometimes smell like mushrooms. The scent of pine wood campfires let you know a camp is close by. Then there is the smell of deet bug repellent to ward off the skeeters and black flies. The funk of soiled damp clothes being pulled out of a plastic bag. The super funk of shoes that have been wet for a month.

## Sunday, June 26th

We stole out of camp before anyone else was up. Helen, the camp attendant was nowhere to be seen. Todd had joked with her earlier that we would be down for pancakes. She must have known we were full of it because there were no lights on at the trailer by the gate. As we drove the 4 mile gravel camp road to the main road we could see all kinds of animal tracks in the soft sandy goo. One set of prints in particular were canine. They were very large. These prints were made by a doglike creature even bigger than my old 100 lb Alaskan Malamute Mortimer. Probably a wolf. The gap between the prints also showed that it was running. Mixed in were moose and deer tracks. Pretty neat. Back on the main road we were riding up and down some long rolling hills. As traffic started to pick up a few of the trucks would beep at us. People in cars were giving us the thumbs up or waving. The traffic attitude seemed to change overnight. Yesterday we were in the way, today? What's different? As we approached Grand Prairie a pick-up truck pulls over to the side of the road right in front of Todd. The gentleman rolls down the window and sticks a \$20 bill out at Todd. Dumbfounded, we soon learned that Helen from Musreau had called the local (and only) radio station and explained on the air what we were doing. Turns out the passenger in the pick-up was named Barb Buck. A distant relative? The rest of the day we were treated to happy honks and waves by many of the passerby's. As we start to enter Grand Prairie,

the sky opens up and it starts to rain. We stop into a restaurant for the magic soup. During the stop some little jerker went through a couple of our packs. Nothing turned up missing but it shakes your trust in humanity when someone messes with your stuff. The chain on Bob's bike is getting stiff. The constant riding in the rain and the accumulation of grit in the chain oil has been taking its toll. A new chain and a spare set of brake pads are found at the local bike shop. The decision is made to hotel it for the night. Get a shower, a restaurant meal and update the website. Got a room on the main floor this time so we didn't have to cram Todd's bike into an elevator in the wheelie position. We took the shuttle bus to a local laundromat before taking showers so we had something non-stinky to put on once we were clean. At the laundromat, while reading a magazine, Todd found a bulletin from the Canadian Food and Drug Administration about insect pests including the Asian Long Horned Beetle. Back in Banff, about 20 miles North of Lake Louise, an Asian Long Horned Beetle landed next to Bob's foot and he stepped on it. Todd called the hotline number in the bulletin to report the sighting. Guess those pests are getting around! Had BBQ ribs at Tony Romas next door that made Todd's eyes roll into the back of his head. Gooooood! We traveled 61 miles today. Goal tomorrow is Swan Lake Provincial Park, BC.

## Monday, June 27th

Cleaned up the bikes and changed the chain on my bike. Noticed that the teeth on my middle crank gear are a bit smaller than the other two. I might have to finish this ride in granny gear. We finally get out of town at noon and head west- and none too soon. We can see behind us the rain falling in Grand Prairie. All the way to Fort St John the rain stays behind us. Winds are favorable and the terrain is flattening out. Looks a lot like SW Wisconsin. Stopped to take a picture of a road sign and noticed a huge owl sitting on a fence post.



It was a grey owl, the biggest dang owl we've ever seen. Bob snuck up to it and took a picture from about 10 feet away before it flew to another post. Pedaled on to Swan Lake Provincial Park and set up camp. Todd caught a nice walleye from shore and we cooked it in foil over the fire. White twister tails rock. Rode 67.9 miles today. Tomorrow's goal Charlie Lake Campground just past Fort St. John, BC.

## Tuesday, June 28th

Woke up to a heavy fog. By the time the bikes were loaded to go the sky revealed itself as blue! Yahoo! Started to get hilly again with long ups and fast downs. Rode into Dawson Creek where the Alaska highway starts. It is called mile zero in town.



Picked up campground information at the visitor's center. Loaded up on groceries in Fort St. John and had a heck of a time getting it all into our packs. I know, never go shopping hungry, especially with Todd. The food bag is swollen and now weighs about 30 pounds. In fact, we broke a good sized branch off a tree trying to hang it that night in camp. Camped at Charlie Lake Campground. Met a fella there who track races bicycles. Traveled 81.5 miles today. Tomorrow's goal Pink Mountain Campground, BC.

**Special Feature:** Today's topic is "the freak machine". As most of you are aware by now, I am riding a recumbent bicycle. Not many people out here have seen one before and stare at me like I have two heads. While using a pay phone in Jasper, a guy saw my bike on the sidewalk and started taking pictures of it from a couple different angles. It seems to really appeal to kids and old men. The kids say stuff like "cool bike!", "awesome!", "whoa, look at that!", "can I try?" while the old men grin from ear to ear and give me a wiggly thumbs up. Then the overweight middle-agers come up and say stuff like "that looks comfy", "that's cheating", "I need to get one like that". And just about everyone asks the big questions, "Is it easier or harder than a regular bike?" and "How is that thing on hills?". Well, I haven't had to walk it up any hills yet. It has a wide range of gears to match just about any terrain. There was one long stretch in Alberta where I spent an entire day going up hill in the smallest gear and downhill in the biggest gear. My eyes have been crossed and legs burning while climbing up some steep inclines at the end of a long day. I have trouble comparing it to my regular touring road bike because I've never pedaled a fully loaded regular bike up hills like this. It seems more efficient against a strong headwind as the lower position is more aerodynamic. It is fantastic on downhills. Very stable with such a low center of gravity. It saves on brake pad wear because if the road is pretty smooth I can just let loose and fly. The back wheel is still handling the extra weight of gear nicely. No mechanical problems at all, actually. Deore XT shifters still snapping right into gear. Will change the chain in a few days. Our bikes have been out in the elements for over a month. Our morning ritual consists of wiping the bikes down (especially the chain), re-oiling the chain and moving parts like derailleurs and brake cantilevers, and topping off the tire pressure. I guess people assume the recumbent must be an easier bike to pedal because the rider looks so comfortable. A cool dude in a loose mood. Bob says it looks spooky from behind because he can't see my legs moving. Looks like I'm sitting in a chair and just cruising along. There is no doubt that riding a recumbent is easier on parts of the body. I don't suffer any rear end discomfort. Heck, it's like sitting on a sofa (I suppose I could get a bed sore). My neck and back hasn't hurt since I got this bike, which is a real blessing. My hands do not go numb from pressure of holding up my upper body since there is no weight on my hands. So in that respect, yes, it is easier! Just plain old tired legs after a long day of riding. And it is an ice-breaker allowing us to meet more people as we travel. I give it two thumbs up. "Hey, I

didn't hear you pull up on your Harley, heh, heh." "Really? I had both motors running, too! Both my left AND my right."

## Wednesday, June 29th

Rain is back. Road is wet. Tons of traffic along this stretch blasting road grit onto everything. Had to stop often to clean glasses. Bikes, legs, panniers, face, everything covered with wet road grit. Good news is the rain stopped long enough for the road to dry. Bad news is there are large patches of pea size gravel covering parts of the road. Fishtailing in four inch deep gravel as an RV whips by makes me swear like a sailor. Trucks were nice to go around us, but they don't slow down. Pelted with showers of small gravel. Unnerving, to say the least. Back in the "couple miles up, couple miles down" topography. Got past the gravel patches and the sky turned dark, the grumbling of thunder started and cracks of lightening could be seen on the horizon. We found a dilapidated shack a ways off the road to wait out the storm.



Glad we did! Even though the shack had three walls and a sagging leaky roof and broken glass on the floor, it kept us out of a nasty squall. Rain and hail and lightening. The storm did a nice job of cleaning off the bikes and passed in about an hour. Rode the rest of the way to Pink Mountain Campground, took a nice hot shower, and put a nip of brandy in the cocoa. Mileage today was 91. Tomorrow we may play it by ear. Our legs need a rest.



## Thursday, June 30th

Back on the road and feeling pretty good. Started out with a fast four mile downhill. Cool morning air at that speed will wake you up. Traffic much lighter than yesterday and scenery is beautiful. Nice smooth shoulder on road, too. And better yet, it is not raining. Fella driving from other direction pulled over to warn us about three grizzlies feeding on a moose at the side of the road about 15 miles away. We rode through some steep terrain, including



a smoking fast descent to a bridge with construction over the Sikanni Chief River and a few more miles of climbing. By the time we got to the dead moose, the bears were gone. We were both relieved yet a tiny bit disappointed. I mean, we want to see bears but we don't want to get eaten. Many RVs and trucks passed us before we got there and probably spooked them. There was a well beaten path from the woods to the carcass only a few feet from the road. Bet they will be back on it tonight. Pedaled into the Buckinghorse River Campground. We were only going to have lunch there at a picnic table, but it was so beautiful that we set up the tents and stayed. Mosquitoes getting pretty thick. Wore the headnet for the first time this trip. Bet I flattened 50 while writing this. There are moose droppings and moose footy prints all over. Spring wildflowers abound everywhere you look. Pink, yellow, white, blue, red, violet sprinkles of color on a dark green background. Even found and ate two tiny wild strawberries, though most of the strawberry plants still have their white flowers. Bluebells in bloom, too. They are usually in bloom in Lombard around Mother's Day. Need a plant taxonomy book to identify them all. The river runs close to our campsite and we can hear water rushing over rocks.



Fished for grayling in the afternoon after more thunderheads and rain rolled through. We caught several while casting small spinners and kept two to cook over the fire. Man, that is the stuff! A middle aged guy wearing shorts and a short sleeve shirt popped out of the woods with a shotgun to ask about the fishing. Thought for a second he was going to ask us to squeal like a pig. He looked like pigpen from the Peanuts cartoon, but the cloud around him wasn't dirt, it was a cloud of mosquitoes. He was covered with the little beggars. I swear his feet nearly left the ground as they started to carry him away. His wife was the smart one- she was dressed appropriately. It was real weird. Only two other sites up by the entrance are occupied this evening. Pedaled 36.1 miles today. Tomorrow we may do another short day to Prophet River.

## Friday, July 1st

Today is Canada Day, a nationwide holiday like our 4th of July, though nothing of historical significance seems to have occurred on this date. It is more a celebration of Canadian pride. Heavy truck traffic seems lighter. Had a nice leisurely morning in camp. The two RVs that stayed here left early so we are the only ones around. Such a lovely spot, yet the RV folks never went outside other than to throw something in the trash. Me no understand. It got cold last night, the kind of chill that sinks right through the sleeping bag and forces you to pull your knees to your chest. This morning's sun feels downright hot and we're back to shorts. Within an hour, big clouds and a breeze from the North cooled things down to a perfect riding temperature. We both felt good today. The shorter riding day yesterday was rejuvenating. Rode to Prophet Creek campground and ate lunch. The water back in Buckinghorse River Campground came from a big cast iron hand pump, but a sign said to boil it. We did, then filled our bottles. It tasted weird and fizzed like soda pop when we added Gatorade powder. When Todd opened his bottle top it sprayed his glasses like a sneeze. So yucky that we both still had full bottles after three hours of riding.



Prophet River Campground, however, has spring water flowing out of a pipe (not like the pipes flowing into the Fox River). We filtered and refilled with the good stuff. Decided to pedal on to the next campground called Lum & Abner's. Found out it was named after a couple radio show personalities from the 1930's and 40's. It is also known as Prophet River First Nation and is owned and run by Aborigines (native Canadian Indians). The local Indian tribe is the Beaver Indians. Very nice folks there. Ed is the cook for the restaurant and makes a great Buffalo burger and awesome peanut butter ice-cream cake. He helped fill us in on some of the history of Prophet River. It was the site for one of the first camps for workers who built the Alaska Highway. This area along the highway is now doing big business in oil and natural gas exploration and drilling. When an oil field is discovered, crews come in to clear a road and area, an electric fence is put up surrounding the site to avoid bear confrontations, wells are drilled and tapped or capped. Mobile camps are set up wherever the crews are working. A couple of guys who work at an oil camp across the street gave us a tour of the facility (thanks Jordon and Rusty!). The entire camp is mobile and can



be disassembled, moved as oversized semi trailers, and re-setup at any location. There are kitchen trailers, bunk house trailers with showers, dining hall and rec room trailers, VIP trailers for the bigwigs, boardwalks, sanitation hookups, etc. So now we know why there are so many oversized truckloads cruising up and down the highway. There are camps being put up and taken down all along here. Ed offered to let us stay in one of the unoccupied units that houses workers instead of camping out back. Worked out nicely because another rain storm blew in tonight. Pedaled 57.1 miles today. Tomorrow we head to Fort Nelson.

## Saturday, July 2nd

Got up early and had Ed whip us up some breakfast. His pancakes rate very high on the size, appearance, and taste scale. Got on the road by 7:15 AM hoping to catch a glimpse of some wildlife. We look in every opening in the woods for that dark shape that might be a moose or bear. Starting to think the animal caution signs are just to amuse tourists when we finally see a very dark shape ahead to our right that is moving. It is a black bear.



A semi-trailer also sees it and sees us, so he slowed down and stopped to create a safety barrier between the bear and us. Very nice! We took a quick picture and pulled ahead with the truck close behind. This particular bear paid no attention to us and went about his business. Wonderful riding today with a wide smooth shoulder and hardly any wind. A couple steep dipsy doodles down to river crossings and up the other sides. Bob was the happy recipient of flat tire number 5 today. Was a piece of wire. Made it to Fort Nelson pretty early. The care package Janet sent with my new chains (recumbent uses 2.5 chains) did not arrive. Was told FedEx is great in the states, but not so good in Canada, eh. They'll probably arrive Monday. Fort Nelson is a jumping point to great sights, but itself is a big RV parking lot. Not exactly the Shangri-la you want to spend a couple days waiting for bike parts. So we walk into the local sports shop and talk to a fella in the doorway. It is the same fella who pulled over and warned us about the grizzlies at the side of the road eating a moose a couple days back. Ends up he is the owner of the sports shop. He said he will pick up the package Monday and put it on a bus to be delivered to a lodge further up the road. We can pick it up when we get there. Hope it works! Set up tents in a gravel lot next to a bunch of holiday ramblers. Bob went to the store and brought back chili. Could be another chapter on fragrances tomorrow! Rode 60.2 miles today. Tomorrow we head toward Tetsin

Provincial Park. Many people have been telling us about the stretch coming up that includes Muncho Lake and Liard Hot Springs. They all say it is super hilly and the most beautiful stretch along the highway. Can't wait!

## Sunday, July 3rd

Woke up at 4:30 AM. It was still light. We must be getting far enough North that the days never end. Closed the eyes again when we heard the rain pitter pat on the tent. Woke up again at 6:30 and the sun was shining and things were heating up. We tried to beat the RVs out of the lot but some of them escaped before we could get out. The scenery started to get pretty real fast. Next thing you know we were heading up. About 20 miles in to the ride we started to climb.



The climb lasted 6 miles to a gorgeous panorama around Steamboat pass. Words or pictures cannot capture the beauty that we were exposed to. The top of the hill allowed you to look down into a huge bowl surrounded by mountains and within a green sea of emerald pine. Then it was all downhill to Tetsa Regional Park Campground. Diane, the camp attendant really runs a clean park. The campground butts up against the beautiful Tetsa River. The river is a 15-20' wide, fast running blue ribbon in a rock strewn valley. We put our poles together, loaded up our bear spray, bug spray and adorned our bear bells for a hike to the riverside. The river is supposed to be good for Grayling and Dolly Vardon (not Dolly Parton). Dolly Vardon is a type of trout often confused with bull trout. The rocks in the valley range from softball size to basketball size and were rounded in shape.



There is no good way to walk on this moonscape, except hop around like a one legged drunkard. The bear bells made the hike sound like a stuttering sleigh ride. Todd all of a sudden said "I'm tired" and like Dorothy in the field of poppies laid down on the bank of the river and fell asleep. I couldn't believe it- fish to catch and Todd sleeping!? He finally came to a half hour later. The sun was shining and it was hot. By the time we headed back to



camp we were so thirsty we were spitting cotton balls. We ran into another fisherman named Duane from L.A.. Duane was fly fishing for the Grayling. He had been fishing all day without a bite. We let him in on where he might be able to find some fish. The one thing Todd and I noticed was that Duane was drinking a cold bottle of Ale. "Darn", Duane said, "this is my last beer." "Rats", we thought. We knew we were out of water and getting water meant hiking to the other side of the camp and pumping up a quantity of river water, boiling it and letting it cool or running it through Todd's filter pump. Todd made the comment "wouldn't it be nice if Diane left us some drinking water?" And wouldn't you know- as we rounded the corner there was a 5 gallon jug of spring water sitting on our picnic table. Spooky.



Three Grayling made it into the fire, the biggest being 15" long. Our kitchen is running lean and we did not have oil or tin foil. The question became, how do you cook these fish? So we decided to do it primitive style- gutted and beheaded the fish, seasoned the insides with salt and pepper and threw them on the grill over a hot fire. Even left the scales on. When we pulled them off the fire, the skin fell off and the meat dropped off the bones. They were pretty darn good. We invited Diane over for some cocoa as payment for the water and L.A. Duane stopped in carrying an empty martini glass. He said he just drank the last of his gin and had none to share. "Rats", we thought. We offered him some of our Southern Comfort and he could only gag. Must have had a bad experience. He caught 4 grayling after we talked to him earlier that day. We jawed and joked a bit and then everyone went their separate ways and off to bed. We rode 62 hilly miles today. Goal tomorrow, Toad River.

## Monday, July 4th

Independence Day. We get to ride bikes today. All day. Yippee! I gotta tell you before I write this - today ranks in the top ten. Everyone has been telling us that this part of the Alaskan Highway is the most scenic. They did not lie. We took scads of pictures but none do it justice. We packed and left camp by 8:00. The plan was to go up the road 11 miles to a place that Diane had told us had the best pancakes and cinnamon buns "in all the galaxy" We were psyched. As we raced down the road, who should ride up but L.A. Duane in his "Minnie Winnie" Winnebago. He said he was going for some cakes too. When we got to this little bakery, the lady running it said they only made pancakes in winter and no, she would not make any for us. So we had to settle for her sticky buns and coffee (keep your mind out

of the gutter). We were sorely disappointed and the topic of pancakes and how we were living on them and rating them across North America kept burbling up.

**Blogmaster Interjection:** LA Duane had this to say about the whole situation:

*"To whom it may concern,  
Just for the record, in case some of you are skeptical whether Todd and Bob are really bicycling to Fairbanks or just hanging around Chicago topless joints, I did witness them in British Columbia - and it was not a pretty sight. I first saw them downriver on the Tetsa river cleaning some grayling for their dinner. I saw them later at the campground, where they were eating the grayling with - I couldn't believe it -Southern Comfort!! I nearly spilled my martini in disgust. Todd was certainly talkative, but Bob didn't say a word until the subject of pancakes came up, which was almost immediately, and his eyes lit up like a demon. Both of them have gone over the edge. I have seen people addicted to drugs and alcohol, but I have never seen anyone so strung out over a breakfast food. Simply saying the word "pancake" made their eyes go blood red like zombies. They complained repeatedly that some places don't serve pancakes after 11AM, which reminded me of myself complaining that some bars don't open earlier than 8AM. It sounded like all they look forward to is pancakes, and that is all they wanted to talk about - except for Canadian topless bars. I took a picture of them after being disappointed in British Columbia yet again by "no - we only serve buckwheat pancakes in the winter". I would worry about them - I suspect they will need rehab when or if they return to Chicago. I am a few days ahead of them on the Alaska highway, and I have some bad news for them - they're far more likely to be bugged by moose than find a decent pancake up here."*

We said goodbye to L.A. Duane and headed back out again. The road turned narrow, curvy and hilly. A few days ago, Louie from the sports store was telling us about an Italian cyclist that was cycling past the Fort Nelson area a few years ago and happened upon a Grizzly. He was attacked and dragged into the bush. A passing truck driver saw the cycle in the road, stopped, followed the trail and shot the rogue bear. The cyclist survived but required 300 stitches in his head. The cyclist tried to reason with the bear- offered his lunch and then tried singing Italian songs to it. I guess it didn't like Italian music. But I digress. You can see how an attack like that could happen. This part of the road there is brush from the forest almost to the roads edge. You could easily surprise an unseen bear. The road has a fair bit of traffic on it- mostly RVs and a few cars and trucks. As we pedaled on, along comes L.A. Duane. He rolls down the window and shouts "This ones for you!" And then the unmistakable beginning of Black Sabbath's Iron Man starts to crank out of the Minnie Winnie. All you can do is bike and bang your head. Thanks Duane. And down the road he goes. The road turns up towards Summit Pass which at 1250 meters is the highest point in the Alaska highway. The incline up Steamboat pass yesterday was very steep. Today's climb is slow and steady. As we settle into a steady pace I spy a small white sign attached to an old post. "Free Pancakes" it says. What!? I turn the bike around and head back to the sign. "Huge!! All You Can Eat!! Only 1034 miles ahead". It is written with a sharpie on a Chinette paper plate duct taped to the post. L.A. Duane has a pretty good sense of humor. We find 2 more signs before the day is done telling us about these free pancakes. What a hoot!



At the top of Summit Pass is Summit Lake. It is deep blue-green. As we start our decent we come across a herd of Mountain Goats. They are at the side of the road licking the highway. Probably getting some of the salt that is left over from winter ice melting.



The herd is oblivious to us and the RVs. There are a few baby goats bouncing along with the herd. Pretty cute. As we continue down we catch a glimpse of some caribou crossing the road. And then some more goats. At the bottom of the hill in an abandoned camp ground we take a break for some peanut butter and tortilla shells. As we hike around we come across a beaver dam extravaganza.



This thing has multiple tiers that feed into each other. The lodge is the size of a semi-trailer. Cool. The rest of the day is spent riding up and down slow rolling terrain. As we finally get



to Toad River, it starts to rain. We stop and set up for the night. There is a moose in the lake behind camp eating. Wow, this day will be tough to beat. We traveled 62 hilly miles today. Legs are burned. Tomorrow we add a stop. We will be going to Muncho Lake.

## Tuesday, July 5th

Packed it up and headed out by 8:30. Scenery is still unbelievable. Toad River got its name because when in 1942 the Army was building the road and the equipment had to be 'towed' across this river. 'Towed' became toad. Headwind and hills. We are heading back up. We only travel 34 miles and turn into Strawberry Flats Campground in Muncho Lake Provincial Park.



Muncho Lake is jade green due to the copper mineral content. When you get closer you can see through the water like a pane of glass. It is so clear. The lake is 7 miles long by about 1 mile across. The brochure says that it is 600 feet deep and the surface temperature only gets to 50 degrees F in the summer. Nipply. Supposed to be full of fish. Tried fishing it but didn't see any. We came back to camp for a nap when one of our neighbors asked us to come over and help eat up their supper. They had thawed a pack of fish from their motor home freezer and had to finish it or it was dog food. These folks were from North Carolina and were letting their southern hospitality show. It was awesome- we ate up the halibut, salmon, hush puppies, fries and slaw. Too bad for Gus the dog. None left. We wish Richard, Willa, Earl and Linda safe travel. Thanks! Rode 34.5 miles today. Tomorrow is another short day to Liard River Hotsprings Provincial Park.

## Wednesday, July 6th

This is day 46 of our bike trip and all is still going well. We actually got up squirrely early and were pedaling out of camp by 6:45AM. It usually takes a solid 2 hours to make and



clean up breakfast and repack our gear. Traffic is very light at this time of day, allowing us to really enjoy the scenery. Pedaled along length of Muncho Lake (12km). Saw a couple families of mountain goats right off the bat. Started to see whopper sized scat on the road, a sign that we were near the bison herd that calls this area home. We came across a herd of 15 to 20 semi-wild horses. Yes, they still exist! They even have signs warning about horses on the road. The rancher can't fence them in because of the grizzlies and bison so he lets them roam, we were told. Really fun rollers today where you could almost get



going fast enough to make it up and over the next hill. Rode to the Liard River bridge where we were stopped along with the rest of traffic by construction. There is an 11 km stretch of road that is all torn up. The crew made us put the bikes into the back of their pickup truck and ride 1 km across the bridge to Liard River Hot Springs Provincial Park. As we bounce over the river in the construction truck we see a herd of wild bison running along the river bank.

If we want to pedal through the next 10 km of construction, we will have to do it before the road crews start tomorrow at 7AM. Set up tents then walked across street to Liard River Lodge to pick up a package that Janet sent. I was happy it had arrived! Thanks Louie, Suzanne, and Chelsea at CMP sports! They were the ones who re-routed the package via Greyhound bus so it would arrive along our route. The box contained new chains for the recumbent and lots of great foodstuffs. A cubic foot of delicious calories. More Joe bars! Joe bars are yummy homemade Powerbars that are heavy as stones. I'll have to tuck those babies in Bob's bag. Walked over to Liard Hotsprings to dip in the magical waters that smell like eggs. There are two pools, Alpha and Beta.



Alpha is the hotter of the two. It even has increasing levels of hotness as you move upstream to where it is almost unbearable. Hottest end is about 130 to 140 degrees. Never made it all the way to that end. Alpha also has a small waterfall to massage your shoulders. Beta pool is deeper and has a even temperature like a hot bath. Did bike maintenance in camp while swatting skeeters. Holy smokes, this swampy area is a hot bed for skeeters. They lick deet like an ice cream cone. Rode 40.5 miles today. Tomorrow a long ride to somewhere halfway to Watson Lake.

## Thursday, July 7th

Time flies when you're having fun.



We quickly packed our gear and headed out by 6:15 AM. Trying to beat the road crews so we wouldn't have to ride in the back of the truck through the construction. Successfully dodged them and rode through the gravel for the first 6 miles. Came upon a very skinny black bear grazing on the side of the road like a cow. He wasn't interested in us and let us pass without even a look. If we don't stop we were told the bears will leave you alone. And don't sing Italian songs to them. Had my 5th flat. The 'squitos made the chore quite frantic. When I inspected the rear tire, it was in tough shape with a lot of cuts. This was disconcerting since it was new when I replaced the

wheel at Lake Louise. The road is a very rough chip seal with larger gravel embedded into the goo. We try and ride where the cars have been rolling the gravel flat as long as traffic will allow. I have a couple of extra tires the same make. I hope they can make another thousand miles. In early afternoon we came across a herd of wild bison grazing on the side of the road. These animals are huge! There were also quite a few babies in the herd also. Todd stopped for a couple of pics and then we quietly glided past. The big males with the horns were facing us and staring intently at us. Made me nervous. I didn't want to be riding on the business end of one of those horns. It was a tough bike riding day. The wind was right in our face, steady and blowing at 10 to 15 mph.



The road followed the Laird River and consisted mainly of slow rolling terrain. However there were a few big hills thrown in for good measure. What is interesting is that there is not as much concern about keeping the grade as gradual as possible. Some hills are very steep. Kept looking for a gear below granny gear, to no avail. We stopped in Iron Creek for the night, exhausted. We traveled 98 miles today. Tomorrow is a short one to Watson Lake.

## Friday, July 8th



Catch up day. Short ride to Watson Lake today. No wildlife. They must be hiding. And they have plenty of places to hide. Watson Lake is a pretty big town. We spent the afternoon eating, getting money, groceries and finding an email connection. Watson Lake has a park in the center of town with signs from all over. There are tons of town limit signs from around the world and signs from individual families. These signs are on posts, making it look like some surrealistic forest. George my barber has one up that he nailed up a couple of years ago. I looked but could not find it. Watson Lake Campground was really nice with mature pines all around and situated on Watson Lake. We had a squirrel adamant on eating our food. Had to bean him with a couple of rocks so he would leave us alone. I can hear it now, "but he's soooo cute. Just give him one more cracker". Morons. We traveled 45.5 miles today. Tomorrow we try for Rancheria.

## Saturday, July 9th

We woke to the sound of a weed whacker clearing brush from the side of the campground road. It was Francois the camp maintenance man. Francois was originally from Montreal but came to the Yukon on vacation 16 years ago and decided to stay.



We were talking to Francois and his boss when his boss started to gag on a mosquito she had sucked in. With his French accent he said "mmmmm Canadian breakfast, mosquito - rare". We have had quite a few Canadian breakfasts. Francois is also an avid Cubs fan. We left camp and started riding. The road was a series of rolling hills. Not too bad. Sighted a large black bear. He sighted us too. No Italian love songs and rode on by. He must not have been able to smell the smashed peanut butter packet in Todd's pannier bag. Had to don the sweat bags only once for a half an hour as we rode into a rain storm. We finally reached a private campground/RV park in Rancheria and set up for the night. A German couple from Berlin came biking into camp. They had started in Fairbanks 6 weeks ago and were taking their time heading to South America. Now that's a trip! Found beautiful stretches of river to fish, but did not catch anything. Gin clear water and moose trails everywhere. Even the wild mushrooms here look like pancakes! Mmmmm...pancakes.



Pedaled 78.8 miles today. Tomorrow we head for Teslin Lake.



## Sunday, July 10th

Up at 6 AM and rolling by 9.



Stopped to admire the Rancheria River Falls and watch a 14 year old fishing guide show an older couple where to catch dolly varden. Looked like a great spot, but we chose to keep moving. Plenty of headwind required us to put meat behind the pedals, even on the downhill. Dynamics changed when we turned more north late in the afternoon and we enjoyed a happy tailwind the last 25 miles. Everything seems easier with a tailwind. Crossed over the Continental Divide again today, though not as high up in elevation. Stopped for lunch at a roadside cafe but found out the cafe was forced to close by the Canadian Health Authority. Seems the septic was too close to the well. The place looked like it was in need of a bulldozer, to tell the truth. The health officials probably saved us from a gastric disaster. Rode on to Dawson Peaks campground (sounds like a bad TV show). It was situated on a hill overlooking Teslin Lake and two mountains. Teslin Lake is 90 miles long and known for good lake trout fishing. The lady running the place gave us free showers. Not sure how to take that. The site was wooded with the constant hum of mosquitoes like an engine idling in the distance. We traveled 84 miles today. Tomorrow's goal is Jake's Corners.

## Monday, July 11th

We woke to a dry blue sky day. The wind was at our back most the day. Rode next to the Teslin Lake in the morning until we crossed the Nisutlin Bay Bridge.



This is the longest bridge on the Alaskan Highway. Stopped for cakes in Teslin. They rated about a 7. Size was their downfall. Rode on until Todd heard the emergency call of the wild (if you know what I mean). As Todd ran into the woods with paper in hand I thought it would be a great time to test fire one of the bear bangers. A bear banger is a small pen shaped device that fires a projectile about 100' in the air where it then explodes and sounds like a rifle shot. Gotta make sure they work before you really need it. They do. Todd was not amused.





We were feeling pretty good, the day was bright and the wind was at our back so we decided to go past Jake's Corner to the first territorial park. At Jake's Corner we turned north and started riding along big Marsh Lake. The territorial park campground was right on the lake. It has large mature pines and our campsite backed up to the crystal clear lake. We jumped in to wash the salty sweat from our bodies. Brrrrrr.



No water pump at this camp so we filtered lake water. Lots of pretty rocks at water's edge. Todd found a rock with gold in it! Gold color, that is. An elderly couple staying next to us was traveling to Colorado with a trailer full of their grown son's stuff. We offered them some firewood and they came back with a can of salmon to put in our soup along with some OJ and crackers. There are a lot of big hearted, generous people out there. We rode 94 miles today. Tomorrow will be a short one to Whitehorse.

## Tuesday, July 12<sup>th</sup>

Woke to the sound of ravens screaming above our tents. Songbirds are rare here in the north. But there seems to be plenty of these noisy ravens. Ach! - Ach! The day was sunny and the wind was from the southwest. Sweet! A good tailwind will blow us to Whitehorse. And with Whitehorse less than 30 miles away we should be there by lunch time. We got our first glimpse of the Yukon River. The water is very clear but with an emerald green glow. As we were coming into town, a truck pulling a travel trailer pulled right out in front of us, forcing us into oncoming traffic lane. What is maddening is that the driver looked right at us coming down the road and pulled out anyway. Takes a few miles to let the anger subside. We grabbed a bite to eat at the Bonanza Restaurant then headed downtown to figure out where everything was at. There are 20,000 people that live year round in Whitehorse and that is 2/3 of the total population of the entire Yukon territory. Whitehorse

is also the capital of the Yukon Territory. Groceries, an internet connection and a hotel were on the docket. We started at the visitor center and found out that a decent hotel was \$100+. Then the guy started telling us about a 'hostel' in town where it was only \$20 a night per person. A hostel is a low cost accommodation that may be like a dorm or bunkhouse with central bathrooms and either prepared meals or a kitchen. Todd called the proprietor from a courtesy phone and found out that the house was full but since we were bicycling we could set up our tents in the back yard. And get a 10% discount to boot. The place turned out to be a small house in a neighborhood. The proprietors, Detlov and Renete came from Germany 5 years ago and set up this hostel. You normally have to make reservations at least 3 months in advance to get a room in the house. It was interesting. Detlov said that

there were 24 people staying in the house. We met a family of 4 from Poland, a couple of Japanese guests, a group from New Zealand, a group from Germany, an American bicycling from Inuvik to Seattle, a young woman from the Netherlands and a young Swiss couple. I am sure there were some folks we didn't see.



The young Swiss couple were staying in the honeymoon suite - an early 70's VW campmobile planted in the back yard. The place was well organized with places for your food, shelf in the fridge etc. There was even a little closet with 2 computers for internet access. Todd made friends with Piko the cat. We set up our tents in the small backyard, showered and went downtown. Whitehorse is filled with eclectic shops, cafes and restaurants. There are musicians in the street and a small market area with artists selling their wares. Pretty cool. The grocery store was on the way out of town so we figured that we would stock up on the way out in the morning. Slept like logs. We only did 29.5 miles today. Tomorrow's goal - start up the 'Top of the World' highway.

## Wednesday, July 13<sup>th</sup>

Hard to sleep with so much activity going on. Packed it up and headed to downtown Whitehorse for some cakes. Provisioned up at the local supermarket so we could go 3 days without needing anything. The day was sunny with a slight tailwind. The terrain seems to be changing. The trees are a little sparser and it looks a little dryer. We get off of Route One that goes directly to Alaska and turn right onto the Yukon Highway that heads north to Carmacks and Dawson City. We pass a large burned out area from a fire in 1998. Stuff doesn't grow back real fast. One plant that does grow well in the burned out areas is the purple fireweed (thus its name). Whole mountainsides were purple. Also found out that this area of the Yukon is a hot bed for morel mushrooms. The first year after a forest fire, morel mushrooms grow like crazy. It is actually a huge business up here. People make a good living picking morels, as much as \$600/day.



Each day they have to dry the 'shrooms in an oven before selling them to a buyer. Wound up at Twin Lakes campground. As we rode up on the campground we spotted a pair of loons with a baby loon riding on the back of one of them. The only other wildlife we saw was an overweight guy in a blue speedo sunning himself just down from our campsite- where's the bear spray?! The campsite was on a hill overlooking a blue green lake with very clear water. We rode 85 miles today.

## Thursday, July 14<sup>th</sup>

Woke up and started packing. Darn magpies flew down and started eating our tortillas. There goes lunch. We met a man from Jamaica who was going through the garbage looking for liquor bottles and beer cans. He said he was from Pelly Crossing and he'd look us up when we got there. Pelly Crossing - one of the guys from the hostel said that there was a great campground in Pelly and it was free. The sky was bright blue without a cloud in the sky. Gorgeous. The road was relatively smooth with slow rolling hills. As we rode, grouse would lift up from the side of the road like someone's chickens. More burned areas were along the route. There would be a sign along the road with the year of the burn. One area burned in 1969 and 36 years later was just starting to look like a forest. The growing season is just too short.



The wind was at our back and the road rolled up and down. What was interesting was that Todd and I both felt great and just hammered up the hills like we were almost in shape- took 55 days but I think we are getting there. Rode into Pelly Crossing and stopped at Penny's Place (named after a black and white dog) for some ice cream and water. The girl behind the counter wound up giving us the ice creams and waters for free when she learned what we were doing. Double sweet. The campground was right on the Pelly River and was



indeed free. The campground was run by the Selkirk First Nation. Laying everywhere were long poles from a gathering of the all the Yukon First Nation just last week. Remember we spoke of Jamaica Man pulling cans from the trash? He pulled up to our campsite in his little red car. He told us his name is Walter, is really from South Africa and is the deacon for the Pelly River church. He also teaches and gets locals prepared for the GED. He sang a song in South African to prove he wasn't lying this time. The recycling collection is to raise money for fixing up the rundown log cabin church. He gave Todd a tour of the town. Very nice. Rode 101.2 miles today. Tomorrow we head for a brown triangle on the map about 62 miles up the road.

## Friday, July 15<sup>th</sup>

As we were making our morning coffee and packing our bags, Walter showed up again to give us his business card and show his picture I.D. I guess when Todd asked him why should we believe him this time, he wanted to show he was on the up and up. Before we got out of camp, a drunk aborigine came over and started yacking with Bob. It was 8 AM. Pelly is a dry town, but bootleggers keep the poison flowing. It is a shame the power alcohol has over these people. The road out of Pelly turned up. It was up to the ridge- ride for a bit, then down to creek level, cross the creek then back up to the ridge. Hills are no problem anymore. Stopped for lunch at Stewart River Crossing. The manager of the local lodge was telling us about the fishing.



We had gotten word that the king salmon were up to Pelly Crossing and the subsistence fisherman had gone to fish camp to man their nets. The manager went on to describe the arctic grayling fishing at moose creek and how good it was. The campground we were going to was moose creek! We finished the 62 miles to the campground and pulled in. It was awesome! And there was no one else here. We quickly set up camp, put our poles together and slid down the hill to moose creek. We had to work to keep the arctic grayling off the hook. They were fat and sassy and sitting in the slack water adjacent to riffles and small rapids. We bushwhacked our way along the creek, finding plenty of moose scat and beaver trails along with great fishing spots. We both nearly jumped out of our skin by a loud kersploosh. It was made by a huge beaver about the size of a rottweiler! Could have saddled it up and went for a wild ride. Man, those things smell bad. Hey Leddy, the grayling love that little pink tube jig with marabou. We kept two each, gutted them, and cooked them over a fire. Started to rain just as dinner was ready, so we took our food under the wooden shelter. Met a couple of Germans having dinner there as well. They heard we didn't have any beer so they shared some of their "Bavarian bread". This campground is easily in the top ten. Our next goal is Dawson City.



## Saturday, July 16<sup>th</sup>

Woke up late without stirring all night. Didn't get rolling until 10 AM. Sunny, blue skies and our favorite kind of wind, a tailwind.



Road is very rough today with chip seal and loose gravel in construction zones. One oncoming double oil tanker truck thought it would be really neat to blast by at about 70 mph, making us duck for cover in a cloud of gravel and dust. Stop at every river crossing to look for salmon. Walked into some recently burned woods looking for morels. Nothing. However, we did stumble upon a motherload of ripe raspberries! We picked and ate until Todd had to be dragged away from the red juicy orbs of goodness. He'd still be there. Almost made it to Dawson City before the rain, but not quite. Too much time at the berry patch. Dawson City sits on the Yukon River/Klondike River junction. Checked into the Downtown Hotel which has most of what we are looking for: laundry machines, internet, restaurant, and bar. Down the street at Diamond Tooth Gerties is a gambling hall and can-can dancing girls, but the miles have worn us out. Maybe.



## Sunday, July 17<sup>th</sup>

Woke up, dressed and went downtown for coffee and cakes. Checked out the Yukon riverfront where they have one of the ore boats up on blocks for display. The 'Keno' was built in the 20's and was a steam powered paddle wheeler used on the Stewart River. It took a cord and a half of wood an hour to keep her running. Went across the street and bought a couple days worth of groceries. Rolled the bikes out of the hotel room and packed 'em up. We had to cross the Yukon River by ferryboat.



The ferry is provided free of charge by the Yukon government. It will hold a half dozen cars or a couple of large bus type RVs towing their cars. On the other side of the Yukon is the Top of the World Highway. The road heads up for 14 miles before giving us a break. The scenery is breathtaking. The maps show this road as a solid line, meaning that the road is paved. They lied. The road quickly turned to a mix of pavement and loose gravel. Traffic is light except for the occasional RV or speeding oil tanker truck. The road winds up around the mountainsides and you can usually see the road far ahead. (usually at a much higher elevation.) Pretty soon the trees are thinning out and we come across snow. Man, we're high up! This is why they call it 'Top of the World Highway'. We thought it got its name from being so far north on the map. You truly feel that you are on top of the world. The gravel and hills slow us down to about 6 miles an hour.



This is by far the most challenging day of the trip. It is also one of the best. I would not have wanted to start the trip here without the 50 some days of warm-up. The day was disappearing fast and we wanted to make it to the Yukon-Alaska border before they shut

down. The border is only open 8 am to 8 PM. If we missed the time slot we would have to camp out and wait. At about 7 we cross paths with a Japanese guy riding a bike fully loaded. I mean he had stuff hanging everywhere, packs on packs and a red 2 gallon gas tank strapped to the top of the front rack. This was his water container. In his broken English we found out that he had started in Anchorage a month ago and wanted to go to South America. He sure had the stuff for it. He also told us the border was close but we first had to climb a big hill. Around the bend the hill revealed itself. It was the queen mother of all hills. 3 miles of granny gear standing on the pedals. At the top the road turned down and with 30 minutes to spare we pulled into the border crossing. In talking to the border guard we find out he and his family are moving to Naperville at the end of the season. The road turns down for the 4 miles to the town of Border Alaska. Border is not so much a town as a couple of buildings and a gas pump. The place is dark and looks closed. As we pull into the parking lot, three girls exit the adjacent house. The oldest, all of 10 years old, instantly takes charge. "Can I help you?" "We can open up" We look for an adult but the only adult around is this very self assured 10 year old.



She opens up the cafe portion of the building and we go inside. We ask about camping and she says sure, we can set up next to the gravel airstrip, no charge. "I can show you where" She and her two little sisters lead us down the hill to a grassy spot. As we are walking we ask her "are these your sisters?" Without missing a beat she retorts "I don't know who they are. I have never seen them before in my life." We return back to the café where we are asked if we are hungry. "We have sandwiches and they're really good." Tentatively we order a couple of sandwiches. The girls get busy behind the counter opening the pre-made sandwich packages and firing up the microwave. I get my sandwich but for some reason Todd's is taking some time. The oldest girl is manning the microwave and keeps muttering "not done yet - needs another 10 seconds." After the third "needs another 10 seconds", Todd looks up as she pulls it out of the microwave, pulls off the bun and sticks her dirty little finger into the meat. "not done yet- needs another 10 seconds." "Hey! Did you just stick your finger in my sandwich?" "noooo" she says. "I don't want that one you stuck your finger in. You might have been picking your nose." "I do not pick my nose" she says with a huff. "Then what is all that stuff on your hands?" "Oh, we were painting" she says as she holds up two splotchy hands. She adds, "your brother is polite and eating HIS sandwich." A few minutes later she says "your sandwich is done." "It's not the same one you stuck your finger in, is it?" "Nooo, here's your sandwich, smarty-pants". How can you argue with that? Todd risks it and eats the sandwich. We set up tents next to a blueberry patch, heat up some soup, and hit the sack. Rode 72 intense miles today. Tomorrow we head for the small town of Chicken, Alaska.

## Monday, July 18<sup>th</sup>

Awoke, made coffee and packed it up. The 3 little girls were sleeping in. Day 58. Left Boundary behind as we started down the gravel road. Only 1/4 mile down the road the bushes turned blue. Blueberries! We stopped and picked and ate.



Had to drag Todd out of the bushes or we would still be there. The riding was very challenging with hills to climb and slowly ride down with the brakes on. Passed the remnants of a large gold dredge, the Jack Wade. The creek that it was on was no wider than 6 feet. The miners would dam up the area they wanted to dredge and float this barge sized behemoth to where they wanted to dig. Had a very large porcupine cross the road in front of us. At first we thought it was a black bear. We passed a father and son wearing wet suits and working a modern day floating dredge in a river pool. The gold fever started running high so we stopped a little ways down the road to try a little panning. We didn't have a real pan so we dipped the soup bowl from my cook kit. Didn't find anything. We came to our destination, Chicken Alaska. Chicken is named Chicken 'cause the miners at the turn of the century wanted to name it after ptarmigan, a local delicacy but couldn't spell it. They knew how to spell chicken so Chicken it became. We rode into downtown Chicken (3 buildings) and noticed that the bar door was open with a couple people watching us roll in.



Hmmm, a beer would be great. Parked the bikes and walked 10 feet to a bar stool. As our beers were being poured we notice that hanging from the ceiling was articles of clothing. Bras and panties mostly. Seen that before at other places but these seemed to be burnt, tattered and charred around the edges. Was the latent feminism finally taking hold in Chicken? Nah. It turns out that for fun they load a small cannon with gunpowder and just donated undergarments and fired. A panty cannon. The cannon was sitting in the corner of



the bar. They even took out someone's windshield once. What was in those panties? We met the proprietor, Susan Weiring, who said that for no charge we could set up our tents in a grassy area next to the café. We talked to a couple of the local miners. They were lamenting that they could not dredge their claims as the rivers were muddy from the dirty runoff that was coming from the areas that forest fires had consumed last year. We met one prospector, Billie, who had been working the area for 30 years. He filled us in a little bit how the gold thing works. We traveled 67 miles today. Tomorrow's goal, somewhere between Chicken and Tok.

## Tuesday, July 19<sup>th</sup>

Breakfast at the Chicken Café consisted of eggs and pancakes. The pancakes were huge! I tried to order a full stack but Susan wouldn't let me.



A half stack was like trying to eat a birthday cake. Finally, hubcap sized cakes! I bought a couple of plastic gold pans in case the urge came over us again. In talking to the store clerk she said that mosquito creek up the road was open without claim next to the road. As we left town we stopped at the Chicken post office to send a package. The post office is a small one room log cabin with a single worker. Pretty cool. We pulled off the road at Mosquito Creek and pulled out the pans. We started digging creek bank gravel and working it around in the pan. Gold! Todd started picking out gold flakes that were showing up in the finer gravel. We heard a 4 wheeler approach and out of the saddle hops Billy, the prospector we had met the night before. He spent sometime teaching us gold panning 101. We found a little more 'color' and a few red garnets that day. Total take was about half a bb. We were so burnt from the last 3 days of challenging riding that we only rode another 12 miles to West Fork Campground. Set up the tents and crashed. We rode a total of 17 miles today. Tomorrow we finish Top of the World Highway and head into Tok.

## Wednesday, July 20<sup>th</sup>

During the night I thought I heard something sloshing through the river or was I dreaming it? We found out the next morning that a moose had walked through the small creek just behind our campsite. Left West Fork campground and headed to Tok. Throughout this area are 'pingos'. A pingo is a small hill that is created when water freezes between the top surface and the permafrost. The hills continue to grow until they reach 30-40 feet. The road is also effected by the permafrost and is full of holes and gravel patches. Last year the forest fires had ravaged this area for miles around. Brown pine posts bare of greenery. Kept our eyes out for morel mushrooms but they are hard to see from the road. About midway through the day, I had my 7th flat tire. Todd thought he would kill some time walking through the burnt out forest looking for mushrooms. He did not get far when he stumbled onto the queen mother of all blueberry patches. Yum. He filled his plastic coffee mug to the top and snapped on the lid to go. In Tok we replenished our stores and ate heartily at the Salmon Bake. Here we had salmon, halibut and reindeer sausage cooked over an open flame. We then made our way to the Sourdough Campground and RV park.



A sourdough was another name for a miner back during the gold rush. It is also used in the pancake recipe that they use for their world famous pancakes. In the evening, the campground puts on some local musical entertainment and then caps the night off with a pancake toss. The pancakes that weren't eaten in the morning are used for the toss. The tosser stands behind a line and has two chances to make it into a 5 gallon bucket. Make it in and your breakfast the next morning is free (they cook new pancakes.) The MC makes the tosser tell their name and where they're from before tossing. Then he does a pretty good Don Rickles on the tosser to get them to break concentration. It was a pretty good show. Todd and I both missed and had to pay for our breakfast the next morning but the pancakes were pretty good. Small, but good. We rode 65 miles today. Tomorrow's goal-Slana.

## Thursday, July 21<sup>st</sup>

Wow was it cold last night. Frost on some of the plants. The locals said it got to 28 degrees. Ate all the sourdough pancakes we could eat. The sourdough used in the mix was started in 1956. Todd pulled out his coffee mug of blueberries and poured them over the top. Yeah, baby, that's the good stuff! Decided to add a couple of days to the trip and take a detour to the Slana River and try to catch some king salmon. Todd had stayed there in '97, caught fish and met some of the local folks. The scenery was getting more hilly with large snow covered mountains in the distance. We arrived at the Midway Supply grocery store at about 6 in the evening. Todd and Donn Branstrator had stayed there during a trip in '97. The store was owned and operated by Jay and Deb and by golly they are still there.



They almost lost it in the 2002 earthquake. That earthquake, a 7.9 shaker, tore up the road, destroyed their inventory, caused structural damage to their store and caused much mental anguish. They still have aftershocks, but they have persevered. Jay offered us the use of their 'Recreation Vehicle'. It was an early 70's school bus that someone had converted to a hunting cabin and stuck in the woods. The BLM (Bureau of Land Management) made the owner pull it out of the woods and this generous soul gave it to Jay. The one problem is that the porcupines had chewed through the brake lines and when pulling it out of the woods the kid driving figured you stopped the forward motion of the bus on the back of the D9 bulldozer that was pulling it. That schmucked up the front of the bus a little. It was fixed up pretty nice inside with carpet, bunk beds, table and bus bench seats. The outside was painted up in all different colors. ("Hello world there's a song that we're singin. Come on get happy!"-Partridge Family).



We couldn't resist. And the price was right- free. We rolled our sleeping bags out on the bunk beds and made ourselves at home. Jay, Deb, and their chocolate lab Griz are experts at making visitors feel at home. The Midway is a must stop along the Tok Cutoff. We traveled 68 miles today. Tomorrow's goal - To catch dinner.

## Friday, July 22<sup>nd</sup>

What a wonderfully lazy day. We hung around the store talking to the locals and drinking coffee for most the morning. A mountain of a man by the name of Canyon was busy loading pieces of bright red salmon flesh into a huge smoker. He just removed the 33 sockeye

salmon that morning from his fish wheel. A fish wheel is floating device that has a rotating set of baskets in the center.



The river current causes the wheel to turn slowly. As the fish swim upstream they get caught in the basket. The slanted basket rotates up and the fish is diverted into a side holding pen. The fish wheels are legal for residents and are part of the special 'subsistence' rules. We also met a woman that lives amongst the mountains. It takes her up to 4 hours to get to her cabin home. She drives down a gravel road, canoes a river, across a lake and uses a 4 wheeler along a narrow trail. A lot easier and quicker in the winter on a snow machine. A young bicycling couple from Britain were passing through and after seeing all the goings on, decided to stay a day. We finally got to the river and started slinging baits.



We were fishing a spot where the Kings take a left from the main river into the small creek to spawn and die. To get to this spot in the river, the salmon will have already traveled upriver a couple hundred miles from the ocean starting at the Copper River in Cordova. Threw the lure many times but only saw one King and a few Sockeye swim by. We returned to the Midway where Jay pulled 3 huge salmon fillets from the freezer and threw them on the grill. What a feast! Salmon, baked potatoes and cold beer, oh my! Canyon came in and



shared some of his fresh smoked fish right out of the smoker. It was to die for. We finally made it back to the bus, where we crashed, stomachs full and happy. We threw 1256 casts today. Tomorrow 's goal - get back on track to Fairbanks. Thanks Jay and Deb!

## **Saturday, July 23<sup>rd</sup>**

Took us a half day to pull our stuff together and say goodbye. Canyon had made the suggestion that it would be more scenic to travel to Galkona and get on the Richardson highway instead of just traveling back to Tok then to Fairbanks. It would add 40 miles or so to the remaining distance, but thought what the hey. We rode through 11 miles of rough bumpy road construction. The crew kept it watered down to cut down on the dust. Todd had a muddy streak running right up the back of his bike all the way to the top of his helmet. Needless to say, the clean shorts drying on the back were now grey and speckled. Bummer. We stopped at Sourdough State Recreational Site on the Sourdough Creek (different campground than before). We got our first glimpse of the Alaska Pipeline as we pulled in.



We rode 84 miles today. Tomorrow's goal Donnelly Creek.

## **Sunday, July 24<sup>th</sup>**

The hills turned to mountains and we were definitely going up for a long time. The scenery became spectacular with snow capped mountains all around and a large crystal clear lake.



Glad we took this route. We soon climbed up past the tree line where it is too high for trees to flourish. At that point we started down. There was a strong wind behind so we literally

flew the rest of the afternoon. The day was slightly overcast and cloudy with a dark rain cloud following closely behind. The Alaska pipeline could be seen now and then as it paralleled the highway. At the Denali fault line it zigged and zagged like a snake to give it room to move in the event of an earthquake. We arrived at Donnelly Creek State Recreation site, set up the tents, had dinner, enjoyed a lovely sunset then crashed. We traveled 95 miles today. The goal tomorrow - a campground within striking distance of Fairbanks.

## Monday, July 25<sup>th</sup>

Awoke to a bluebird day. The white snow covered mountains behind the campsite that had been obscured by the clouds the day before stood in clear sharp contrast to the deep blue sky.



Snaps all around. (you know - crick crick take picture - too dawg - use frash). We load it up and start down the road. Today was moose day. We saw a total of 6 moose. The first moose would have stepped out of the bush onto to the road in front of us if I hadn't yelled "moose!" She ran back into the brush. Two steps in and they are invisible. A bit further was a mama with her two babies in tow and later on, one mama with her single baby in tow. The road is up and down for the first few miles then slopes down gently to Delta Junction. The slight tailwind pushes us along. At Delta Junction, The Alaskan Highway and the highway we are on join together for the last bit to Fairbanks. We stop at a cafe' in Delta Junction. Todd is so happy to order the breakfast special that includes a fried pork chop with eggs and hashbrowns.



He has been daydreaming out loud about fried pork chops for days. Traffic picks up noticeably. We make it to the last state park before Fairbanks, Salcha River State Rec Area.

This park only has 3 lame sites so we wind up setting up in the picnic area near the Salcha River. The camp host tells us that there are King salmon and Sockeye in the river. Yeah baby! Grab the gear and head out over the bridge to the deep hole. As we cross the bridge we see a pod of 3 huge Kings swimming up river. The shore is a jumble of large rocks that have slid down the hillside and are difficult to navigate. I wind up on my back in the river not once but twice. Aargh. My fishing pole was not effected so everything is OK. Still no fish. We traveled 90 miles today.

## Tuesday, July 26<sup>th</sup>

Woke up late from a coma-like slumber. We are excited that we will reach our goal destination today. Cleaned up the bikes for our victory lap into Fairbanks. Quite a bit of local traffic today. Nice clear skies with summer-like temps and a flat road made for easy travel. Passed one more horse-sized cow moose on our right munching vegetation in a pond. Pedaled through North Pole.



The elves must be on vacation, cuz I didn't see even one. There it was, the Welcome to Fairbanks sign up on a grassy hill. We stopped to take a photo (timer with alder branch tripod). Decided to stay at Minnie B&B within walking distance to downtown. Todd walked a couple doors down to a hair stylist to get a haircut and have his billygoat beard shaved off. Since every last stitch of our clothing was in a washing machine, he walked over in a bathrobe borrowed from the B&B. Out to celebrate! Dinner was excellent, but the fancy bistro finally refused to bring us more bread. You'd think they never saw an appetite before. I can happily recommend the locally brewed Silver Gulch pilsner. Today we pedaled 40 miles. Tonight we celebrate! Bob stepped on a scale and, in spite of all the pancakes, pasta, pop-tarts, and anything else we could get our hands on, is 25 pounds lighter than the day we left. Stay tuned for a wrap up analysis of the Buck brothers Bike Tour!



## Post-Ride Thoughts

Wow, what an awesome adventure!

A fella we met asked us, "So what did you learn from this experience about yourselves and about others?" Well, he posed an excellent two-part question.

What did we learn about ourselves? We don't need a lot of material possessions to survive or to be happy. Our bodies are capable of an incredible amount of physical activity if conditioned and constantly fed. With good rain gear and a good attitude, anything's possible.

What did we learn about others? No dream is too outrageous. We found that everyone has their own comfort level and self-imposed limits of what constitutes adventure. This trip was a big adventure for us. We met people whose great adventure was driving to Alaska in an RV, 3 different parties that were pedaling from Alaska to the Southern tip of Argentina and the Feldmann family, quitting their jobs selling all possessions and cycling across Canada to re-establish a home in Newfoundland. And this is just a small sample of the people we talked to following their dream. It is simply the limits of the mind. What adventure awaits that we can't even imagine yet?

This trip restored our faith in humanity. We experienced first hand an overflowing amount of generosity and genuine kindness freely given by strangers with no expectation in return. It is easy to become scared and cynical of strangers' intentions when reading the news because the news entertains with all the bad they can find instead of focusing on the good. Here is a list of some of the kind acts we experienced before the trip and while on the road:

- All the Donors and sponsor's support! Thanks to WestfaliaSurge, Dr Daniel Coffey, Don Mayor, Larry Larson, Richard Buck and Sue and Gary Jensen for financial support.
- All the fine folks who showed up Sunday morning to see us off. The big tent and sign from neighbors Mary Pat, Jim, Nicole and Tony was awesome.
- Homemade power bars and signs of encouragement made by cousin Connie and family.



- Wonderful dinner, breakfast and lodging at the Colby ranch.
- Janet for doing the Weblog! Huge.
- Jill for forwarding the email updates.
- Janet for sending a great care package full of goodies and new chains.
- Free night at the Crazy Horse Campground in Brodhead, WI (no, we didn't sneak out).
- Aunt Annie and main squeeze Al - Thanks for the great meal, hot showers, Scottish oatmeal and place to bunk! (still picking scrambled egg out of my ear.)
- Ralph and Julie Rottier - The great lodging, meals and fishing trip. Wow, I couldn't eat another bite. Thank You!
- Stacy, thanks for sharing Donn for the week and putting up with us for a couple of days. The food and lodging was great.
- Ron North donating equipment for our trip, including large water bottles, a pressure gage, and bear rope. Used 'em every day.
- Wheel and Sprocket in Hales Corner, WI donating extra parts, bomb proof tires and rack.
- Karl, Clay and Eric from Smith's Cyclery in LaCrosse coordinating with Trek in expediting the replacement back wheel to Lake Louise, Canada just in time.
- Thanks to the guy from Inuvik who came to our campsite with 2 cold beers as we pulled in.
- Louie from CMP sports in Fort Nelson that paid the postage and forwarded the package of bike parts and food to Liard River Lodge after Fed Ex dropped the ball.
- Discount on the yurt at Wasa Lake after a day of riding in the rain.
- Elke, Hazel, Jerry and Bud for sharing their food and drink with us. Great Christmas schnitzel.
- To the North Carolina Couples who made us come over and eat their food cause they made too much. It was awesome.
- To Germans Thomas and Karl that shared their fermented 'Bavarian Bread' with us.
- Jay and Deb from the Midway in Slana. They gave us everything. Thank You!
- Canyon sharing his beer and fresh smoked salmon. Mmmm...a mouthful of heaven.
- Musreau Lake campground host Helen who made a donation and called the radio station to promote our trip.
- Ken at Stephenfield Campground who brought us a pile of free firewood and an axe.
- Carol at Belmont Hotel in Watson Lake that let us use internet even though we weren't staying there.
- The Kerschers who stopped and gave us a donation, water, and power bars.
- Elderly couple who brought us a can of salmon to add to our noodles, then following up with a bag of cookies and orange juice.
- Border Crossing guard who filled our water bottles and took our photo for us.
- Big discount at Hammerhead restaurant in Grand Prairie.
- Free muffin at bakery in Fernie.
- Penny's Place in Pelly Crossing gave us free ice cream and bottles of water.
- Best Buy for discounts on digital cameras
- The newspapers that thought enough to write about our trip.
- Ed at Prophet River for lodging, peanut butter ice cream cake, cool hats, and his last beer in a dry community.
- Jordon and Rusty for the mobile camp tour.
- Gold mining 101 from miner Billy Hunt.
- Free showers at Dawson Peaks (no, I'm not offended).
- Maple Creek info center for internet use.
- Discount at Sourdough Campground.
- Happy honks with a friendly wave or a thumbs up from passing well-wishers.
- Our wives for supporting our dream and letting us go.
- And many more...

To all a heartfelt thank you. We hope we get the chance to repay the acts of kindness and generosity forward.

## **Fish Prints For Sale**

In an attempt to raise a bit more money for the Make-A-Wish Foundation, we are making available a very limited quantity of original hand made ink prints of a salmon suitable for framing! Each print is as unique as a fingerprint. Get'em while they're hot! These one-of-a-kind masterpieces have been created on the shores of Alaska's wilderness waters using permanent inks and high quality rice paper.



Each print will be signed by Bob and Todd. The cost will be \$50 plus \$6 shipping and handling. All proceeds will go to Make-A-Wish. You can reserve one of these fine original prints by emailing [bbuck@centurytel.net](mailto:bbuck@centurytel.net). While supplies last.

