

**Day 8, July 3, 2017**

Whitehorse, YT to Beaver Creek, YT

Early start this morning; BJ3 left at 5:00 am, SDA at 6:00 am. Gloomy and overcast for the beginning of the drive. SDA first stop was Canyon Creek Bridge. This was built originally to facilitate movement of the Klondike gold miners across Canyon Creek. We hiked across it and battled mosquitos for photos. Continued on to the Da Kų Cultural Center in Haines Junction. It's a brand new building and had lots of displays and information on the local First Nations culture and daily life. It started raining off and on as we continued on to the Tachāl Dhāl Visitor's Centre at the foot of Kluane Lake. Looked for Dahl sheep but they've all headed up over the mountains by now. Since it was cold and rainy, we passed on going up to Soldier's Summit. From here, we continued on to Burwash Landing and the Kluane Museum of Natural History. It doesn't look like much from the outside but they have a very nice display of the indigenous animals, numerous artifacts from local First Nations lives and information and examples of local minerals. It was well done and interesting. We had lunch there before going in and apparently the Bobs group passed by while we were there.

The road had had some rough spots up to this point but nothing that bad. After Burwash Landing, however, we had MANY places of roller coaster bumps, graveled patches and at least 3 muddy gravel detours where they were replacing culverts. It was a slow, rough ride. (The bad roads in this section of the highway are due to frost heaves from the permafrost. If the road bed goes down too far, the permafrost melts, wreaking havoc on any road above it.) About halfway from Burwash Landing to Beaver Creek, we stopped at the Pine Valley Bakery Crêperie. Two of us had crêpes for snacks and we all got quiche for breakfast tomorrow.

Our last stop before the campground was the Beaver Creek Visitor's Centre. Julie, at the Whitehorse Visitor's Centre, told us to make sure to check in with Sid in Beaver Creek to see his personal museum. Unfortunately, he wasn't around; the woman on duty showed us a video of his home/museum. The other two groups were already at the campground by the time we got there. Some went off to dinner while the rest of us ate in this evening. Card party was at Bob & Janet's coach tonight with a new game: Hand & Foot. Some played and some watched. Tomorrow it's across the border to Tok, AK.

**Day 9, July 4, 2017**

Beaver Creek, YT to Tok, AK

Headed out of Beaver Creek ~ 8:00 this morning, right behind BJ3. On our way to the border, they saw and stopped for a cow moose. We saw them ahead so stopped as well. Sue and Beth missed seeing it unfortunately. SDA took off first and got to the border crossing. Minimal questions for all of us and we zipped on through. Road was still roller coaster with good stretches in between. Stopped at the Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge visitor's center. Small but nice displays inside. Tons of cliff swallows feeding on mosquitos on the outside. Took a hike down to the trapper's cabin with Tim as our guide. Short, nice hike. Tim was good with the history and botany of the area. Got to Tok and the campground ~ 11:50, right before the 4<sup>th</sup> of July parade started. Watched the parade then settled in. Some did laundry, others went down to the visitor's center and the festival grounds during the afternoon to watch the celebrations.

**Day 10, July 5, 2017**

Tok, AK to Fairbanks, AK

SDA left Tok ~ 7:30 this morning before the other groups. Stopped at Dot Lake to look for birds and saw 2 surf scoters in breeding plumage (new bird for Ann & Dave). Shortly after leaving there, we saw a cow moose and her calf crossing the road. Continued on to the Delta Meat & Sausage Co. just outside of Delta Junction. Stopped to sample, then purchase a variety of sausages and meats. At the Delta Junction visitor's center, the official end of the Alaska Highway, we took pictures of the highway marker and the giant bugs outside the building. Found Sue at the quilt shop and spent some time there drooling over fabrics. We headed over to the Buffalo Center Drive-In for buffalo burgers while Sue checked out the visitor's center. A couple of us cruised through the Sullivan Road House Museum and the Farmer's Market to see what was there. Museum was quick and nice. Farmer's Market was small. BJ3 and the Bobs groups got to the visitor's center about the same time but left before SDA did.

Stopped for a quick photo at the Tanana River Bridge where the pipeline crosses the river aboveground, and saw 2 more moose along the way. Then on to the Knotty Shop. Interesting critters out front carved from wood burls; lots of gifts/souvenirs inside. We passed on the souvenirs; however, we did have an ice cream cone.

Our next stop was Santa Claus House in North Pole, AK where we met up with the other 2 groups. Huge Christmas-based gift shop. Jack sat on Santa's lap (then Santa went out to feed his reindeer). Sent post cards to family and got a Christmas ornament there before heading on to Fairbanks. Coming into Fairbanks, SDA went north to the pipeline viewing spot northeast of the city. There were some information panels about the pipeline and you could see on the north end where it came out of the ground. Headed back to Fairbanks to check into the campground. Had a group gathering at ~ 5:15. We snacked and visited for about an hour before folks went off to have dinner.

**Day 11, July 6, 2017**

Fairbanks, AK

Bob N. had arranged for the group to go on the Discovery III cruise down the Chena River, leaving the campgrounds at 8:00. We took a shuttle from the campground to the tour center and explored there until boarding the boat. They had all kinds of gifts/souvenirs, a set-up to take a photo with Susan Butcher and her sled and a -40° (F or C, they're the same at -40°) room where you could experience what it feels like when it's that cold. The boat loaded at 8:45 and off we went. The commentator did a very nice job as we traveled down the river. We passed by a couple of note-worthy houses and our first stop was at Susan Butcher's place. Her daughter explained their dog training methods, showed us how they work with the very young puppies and gave a team running demonstration using a 4-wheeler. Interesting and fun to see. The boat continued down to the Chena River Village where an Athabaskan/Eskimo girl gave a demo on salmon cutting and described how it was cut and cured for humans and dogs. We continued on down to where the Chena empties into the Tanana River. The Tanana was light brown and really silty. You could see the silt swirling in the water where it encountered the Chena river water. The ship turned around and headed back upriver, this time stopping at the Chena River Village. Here we got presentations on Athabaskan hunting, trapping, fishing and the differences in their lives before whites came compared to after they had arrived. They talked about the reindeer and the difference between salmon for dogs and for humans and how it was prepared. One of the dog trainers from Susan Butcher's place was also there with some dogs to answer

questions. We spent about an hour at the village, then headed back to the dock. It was a very nice, informative trip. Saw 3 bald eagles on the way down river and 3 beaver and perhaps some otter at the dock before we left.

After lunch at the campground, SDA went up to the Large Animal Research Station of the University of Alaska to see their musk oxen and reindeer. Took the 2:00 tour and learned about musk ox in general and how they came to be in Alaska. Also learned about their coat and the attempts by the LARS to domesticate them enough to harvest their qiviut (soft under-hair). Learned about how reindeer came to be in Alaska as well. Very interesting.

Saw a flock of sandhill cranes land as we were driving from LARS to Pioneer Park. Spent about an hour at Pioneer Park, then came back to the campground to cool down until dinner. Dinner at the Alaska Salmon Bake connected to the Pioneer Park. Salmon, fried cod and roast beef were available, along with salad bar, drinks and dessert. It was an all-you-can-eat buffet. SDA ended up at a separate table and chatted with 2 couples from Albuquerque about a whole variety of topics during dinner. After dinner, came back to the campground, cleaned up, played some Rummikub with Jeanie, Jim & Brandon, then off to the showers.

## **Day 12, July 7, 2017**

Fairbanks, AK

Brandon, Dave & Ann headed out ~ 8 for Chena Hot Springs. It's about 1 ¼ hrs. out to the hot springs, which is at the end of the road. The first 20 miles or so were a bit roller coastery but after that it was better. Signed up for the Ice Museum tour, then hit the hot springs. They were really HOT! Hotter than Liard River Hot Springs. Locker rooms were like a sauna, then you walk to the inside pool room and 2 hot tubs. Outside is a large hot tub then a covered walkway out to the hot springs pool. There is a ramp down into the water which takes you through some very hot water. To avoid that, one could climb over the railing into a slightly less hot area of the pool. The pool also had a "cool" water umbrella fountain that felt really nice and a fire hose type water spray that was warm rather than hot and was powerful enough to act like a massage. We managed about half an hour in the pools before we had to get out. Tried the large hot tub outside which actually felt cool after the pools. Showered, then headed over to meet for the Ice Museum tour. It's inside a refrigerated, Quonset-style building with a peaked roof. They open the doors as infrequently as possible and keep the lights off when no one is inside to prevent the ice sculptures from thawing. There were about half a dozen large free standing ice sculptures but lots of columns, decorated globes of ice, a bar and lounge area; also four bedrooms, a "chapel" and a music igloo. Many of the structures had colored lights incorporated into them which made the whole place very attractive. We spent about half an hour in there because we chose not to have the appleinis in ice glasses. The museum was very helpful in cooling us off after the hot pools.

Headed back toward Fairbanks and on the way, Dave saw a grouse alongside the road and we all saw the moose beside the road before she headed into the woods. Got to Gold Dredge #8 in good time, checked in and waited around for the tour to start. First was an introduction/explanation of the oil pipeline as it runs across the entrance to the Gold Dredge site. We then took a train part way around a loop of track and received commentary on the various pieces of equipment alongside the track and a bit of history of mining in the area. Stopped in front of the gold dredge and it was explained how this worked and why it was used over other methods. We also got a lesson in panning for gold. A little further down the track, the train stopped to let us off. Everyone got sacks of gravel and found a place

on the long benches to try our hand at panning for gold. It's tedious, at least for a beginner. Brandon found ~\$20 of gold, while Ann ended up with \$45 in gold. Dave found 1 flake, which got added to Ann's poke. We then explored the gold dredge and, having nothing better to do while we waited for the return train, shopped for souvenirs in the convenient and large souvenir shop. They also provided cookies and coffee for us. A quick train ride took us back to the station.

We gathered ~ 5 to chat and snack. Bob N. presented plans for tomorrow's travel and after chatting a little more, folks went off to make suppers.

### **Day 13, July 8, 2017**

Fairbanks, AK to Healy, AK

BJ3 headed out ~ 7:30 this morning. SDA left about 8:30 to head to the Museum of the North at the University of Alaska – Fairbanks. It covered heritage and culture of the First Nations people of the various regions in Alaska, along with the wildlife of the area and the arrival of whites to the various regions. It was interesting and well done. Also discussed and displayed were remains of dinosaurs found in the state as well as preserved remains of woolly mammoths and Steppe Bison. We headed out ~ 11:30 towards Nenana. Stopped at the Nenana Visitor Center and chatted with the welcome lady there about the Ice Classic. She told us all about betting on the ice break-up and how the exact day and time are determined. We were encouraged to purchase tickets (i.e. place our bets) which we did. After that we drove down to the train depot, checked out the Ice Clock Tower and the Depot Museum then had lunch in the coach before continuing on.

Got to Healy, checked in at the RV Park then drove down to Denali to check things out. Drove through the Wilderness Access Center to make sure we knew where it was, then went to the Visitor Center. Very extensive display of wildlife and history on 2 levels in the visitor center. Checked it all out, then went next door to the bookstore for patches, etc.

Group meeting at 6 to learn when we need to be at the bus stop in Denali. Learned we need to meet there at 9:45 and will be back around 9 in the evening. That makes for a long day on the bus. Started raining about 9:30 and the wind kicked in around 2:30 am. The gusts were enough to rock the RV.

### **Day 14, July 9, 2017**

Healy, AK

Met at Jack's coach at 9:15 to head to the park. All of us went in his coach, making it a bit cozy. A couple of us got in line for the 10:15 bus to Wonder Lake, enabling us to get seats in the front. It was a beautiful sunny day but still really windy. Made the standard stops on the way out at Teklanika, Polychrome Pass, Toklat, Eielson Visitor Center and Wonder Lake. We stopped several times to observe and photograph Denali which could be seen relatively well (making us members of the 30% Club). On the way to Wonder Lake, we saw a moose, a large ptarmigan family, 2 golden eagles, a caribou, another moose, a grizzly and cub, another ptarmigan family with smaller chicks, 2 more caribou, a grizzly with 2 cubs and a long-tailed jaeger. We stopped for about ½ an hour at Eielson to explore the visitor center and take the short loop hike. The scenery was beautiful.

Wonder Lake was relatively mosquito-free. By this time, Denali was hidden by clouds so we enjoyed the lake scenery. We saw a couple of gray jays. We spent about ½ an hour here before heading back to the park entrance. (We had a little excitement leaving because two people on the bus ride out weren't on the bus for the return. After waiting and waiting, the driver radioed in that we were leaving without them. We encountered them walking down the road on our way out of the Wonder Lake campground. It turned out that they misunderstood the driver's instructions when we got off the bus. We returned to the park entrance with our full complement of riders.) On the way back, we had less traffic, so were able to travel more quickly. We also made shorter stops. During this part of the trip, we saw a bull moose, the same long-tailed jaeger, a caribou up near the road, 3 Dall sheep, a grizzly, 3 more caribou and 4 northern hawk owlets.

Overall a beautiful trip with very nice weather.