



December 20, 2007

Okay, Everyone!

Here it is...that moment of truth you've all been waiting for. And waiting...AND Waiting...AND WAITING for. Some of you may recall, this past June I embarked on a solo-motorcycle expedition from San Francisco that led me North to that infinite domain, that tremendous frozen expanse, "The Great Land," Alaska. Passing through the ever-present greenery of Oregon and Washington, I traversed the stunning topography of British Columbia, all the while, taking in the pristine beauty of iridescent lakes, enchanted forests, and fertile river regions. Eventually, I crossed the border into the Alaskan territory, and finally terminated at the glacial waters of Prudhoe Bay (otherwise known as the Arctic Circle).

This being the trip of a lifetime, I would love to relay all of the experiences I acquired while on this mission. However, taking into account all of our busy lives and hectic schedules, I will make an attempt at brevity. The trip itself entailed 15 days of grueling, intense passage...an average of 346 miles a day, (a total of just over 5,217 mi). At one point, I covered just over 700 miles in one day, and, on another - only 60 miles due to the arduous and formidable circumstances of the road (i.e. softball-sized gravel, torrential downpours, and in the inevitable aftermath...virtually insurmountable mire. The Dalton Highway, infamous for its harsh and unforgiving conditions, limited me to little more than 20 mph at times.

Never once losing sight of the primary purpose of my mission, I found there to be several memorable highlights of the journey: Camping on deck in a sleeping bag during the 23-hour ferry trip to Bella Coola enabled me to absorb the breathtaking glory of the fjords, and to bask in the density of the thick mountain air. All of this culminating in the ride up the legendary, earthen Bella Coola upgrade.

Crossing over into Dawson City, I decided to pull over for a quick refreshing beverage at Eldorado Hotel and found myself face to face with a delicacy known only as the Sour Toe Cocktail...yes, that right. It's an actual human toe (severed approximately 34 years ago), that's been dehydrated, pickled and preserved in salt, then placed in any beverage

of your choice. The only requirement is that while downing the drink, your lips must have contact with the toe. Mmm...delicious and rejuvenating!

As I gazed down upon the vast expanse of Alaskan territory from the Top of the World Highway, it instilled in me a very real and present sense of Divine Power. Going solo on the road for what seemed an interminable amount of time, I found myself bonding to the Alaskan Pipeline (a.k.a. my steadfast companion), and it was a poignant moment when I began to hear it speaking back...kidding, but not really.

Above all, the most gratifying experience was of acquiring my towel after stepping out of the frigid waters of the Beaufort Sea (temp 34F). Pathetically, I used terry cloth to shield me from Arctic chill that was fast beginning to penetrate my bones and paralyze **all** of my extremities...a noteworthy sensation that was both comical and surreal (11F with wind-chill). Fortunately for me, locals stated, it was warm enough that the glaciers had melted just 2 weeks prior.

Discerning firsthand, the multitudes of graceful caribou grazing upon the Arctic tundra is not something that I shall soon forget. In general, the unique opportunity afforded me to commune with the Alaskan wilderness and the untouched splendor of its prolific wildlife was in a word, epochal.

As for the Alaskan locals and people all around: there was an innate concept of neighborly goodwill, making it easy for me to join up with a band of fellow motorcyclists on the return from Prudhoe.

Having camped in torrential downpour all night, then packing up all my water-logged gear and supplies, and trekking 250 miles south from Fairbanks to Anchorage in my last pair of wool socks...completely sodden, soaking wet, wool socks...I began to realize an appreciation for the simpler things in life...like cotton, wonderful, warm, **dry, super-absorbent** cotton. To top it off, it was in the balmy 30s' that day while traversing through Denali.

As with any venture, one discovers there are always a few disadvantages and mishaps along the way. Lowlights being: for example, when I dropped my 700lb. bike while attempting to avoid an altercation with a rather grumpy and aggressive bear, just outside Dease Lake...and not a sole around to assist in the situation. Subsequently, having to scrounge to gather all the shit that fell out my tank bag in the process did not exactly leave me reeling with delight either.

And of course, there's nothing like a non-breathable, plastic, riding suit hermitically-sealed over the top of all your body gear to truly give you the sensation of being in your own, personal, mobile sauna. Nothing imparts a deeper sense of mortality than when you find yourself scrambling for shelter while being trapped in a hailstorm near Sign Post Forest, utterly and completely exposed to the elements.

After conferring with locals, I discovered that it would behoove me to invest in a Lysol-sized can of bear spray...this should last all of 2 minutes or so, they say... long enough for me to grab the bike and test record-breaking speeds never seen before on the BMW. Also, I purchased an 8-inch survival knife, good for defending against any miscreants of the wild, skinning my next meal, or more likely, cutting an escape route out of that damn pressure-sealed rain-suit! Sadly, I learned that you simply cannot manufacture enough Deet to combat the masses of omnipresent, golf ball-sized mosquitoes that are the bane

of Alaskan summers and motorcyclists everywhere. At one point stopping to get fuel at a remote location became a bad version of musical-mosquito slapstick...pump a gallon, stop, drop nozzle, run around bike trying to elude those relentless hematophagites, pump – stop –drop –run, etc.

During the final stretch to Prudhoe Bay I made the customary stop at the last gas station, a small, remote place known only as Cold Foot (*fitting! - winters approaching -82F*). It's approximately 250 miles from Cold Foot to Prudhoe Bay, and it's with a smarting sense of irony that you realize you can't pump enough gas to get you all the way to Prudhoe Bay. Needless to say, carrying extra jerry cans is simply a given. I was gambling with fate by choosing not to carry extra tires, as the potential was always there to blow a tire from one of the many sharp, jagged rocks littered all across the Dalton Highway (nicknamed, "the Haul Road").

One of the challenges I discovered along the way was that the truck drivers harbor a bit animosity towards bikers, and in passing one, tended to kick up monolithic bits of gravel as they flew by. Each time this happened I found myself bowing my head and praying that some jagged rock wouldn't come up and split my helmet or **WORSE, hit the bike!** I learned that a good portion of the bikers on this journey tend to return with busted headlights and broken windscreens from the hazardous conditions of that rigorous 900+ mile stretch.

Along the way, I discovered just how much we urbanites truly take for granted in our everyday lives. We've become so accustomed to such basic essentials as fuel, food, shelter, general companionship and safety...that to travel in solitude for 300 miles with no sign of civilization or even accessible emergency help, conveys in a way I cannot describe, the quintessential spirit of the, "Last Frontier." It really put things in perspective as to just how vast and untouched the Alaskan territory still is. Everything becomes a tactic of survival just to get from point A to point B. Many parts of the trip I found myself overwhelmed with a sense of loneliness...at times cracking jokes, asking myself questions, and subsequently answering them. I discovered what odd, little people we can be when taken out of our own familiar elements and removed from society. There were moments along the way when passing through remote areas like Tok, Alaska that I found myself in scenes reminiscent of "Deliverance." Not long after running out of things to talk about with the Alaskan Pipeline, the 1,200 songs in my ipod became very mundane.

Digressing, I would like take a moment to sincerely apologize to all of you who have patiently awaited this follow-up to the Prudhoe Bay tour, as well as the donation information. I can't begin to express my gratitude to each and every one of you that has found it within your heart to contribute to this important cause. As I embarked North from San Francisco I encountered many individuals that were equally moved by the premise of this mission and chose to contribute as well, including a few highway patrol officers who were benevolent enough not to give me any speeding tickets that were rightfully deserved. I realize that I have been somewhat remiss in my rejoinder of this; however, sometimes it is very easy to allow the hassles of our daily lives and personal affairs to detract from the primary purpose at hand. Nonetheless, it's no excuse.

To those of you, who are receiving this as your initial e-mail to the Prudhoe Bay expedition, please see following attachment. Once again, my deepest thanks to everyone for helping us gain mileage on cancer!

Donation information:

In loving memory of my dear friend, Matt Carson, whose mother, Albie, lost the battle to breast cancer 5 years ago on the 4th of July.

To Make a Donation, click here: http://albieaware.org/how_to_donate.html

If you did not receive the e-mail to view the photos, please e-mail mike@tri-bay.com and I will forward to you.

Happy Holidays!

Mike Faibisch