



North to Alaska and the Yukon

I love to travel by bike.

In Summer 2005, I travelled with my best friends Guy and Julie Mousseau of Vernon and (the late) Janice McMath to California by motorcycle. Discussion had taken place about another big trip in the future.

The next year I was lucky enough to go to Sturgis, South Dakota, with my brother-in-law and sister, Larry and Janice Stevens of Princeton.

There was no big motorcycle trip in 2007 but lots of motorcycle talk. The decision was made to head north in 2008.

I had enjoyed reading about the Klondike Gold Rush, so well described by author Pierre Berton in several books. I also obtained a current copy of *Milepost* magazine, said to be the *Bible* of the north and of great assist.

I left home on the afternoon of Thursday, July 3, 2008, from my home in Port Coquitlam and headed for Kamloops for an overnight stay at my buddy Larry Morrison's home. We arose early the next morning and headed out for breakfast at a local greasy spoon in the outskirts of Kamloops where Guy Mousseau joined up for a most pleasurable meal.

After breakfast the three of us headed out of Kamloops on the Yellowhead Highway, heading east toward Wells Gray Park; Larry rode a Harley Road King, Guy a Goldwing, and I was on a Harley Ultra Classic. Larry rode with us until we reached Little Fort, then he had to return to Kamloops.

Guy and I continued north.

The ride was pleasurable with comfortable riding weather until about

1 hour before Prince George when the sky opened up to heavy rain, thunder, and lightning. We reached Prince George at about 5 PM and headed for a warm restaurant to fill our bellies and warm our soaked bodies a bit.

After dinner, and because the weather had improved, we decided to ride on to Chetwynd for the night. We discovered, to our dismay, that all lodgings in town were completely booked. Fortunately, a clerk at one of the motels suggested the Sportman's Inn in Hudson's Hope. He called ahead to book the last two rooms for us.

We finally arrived for the night at about 9:30. On the way, we had both narrowly missed hitting a deer who had parked herself right in the middle of the road. We both felt fortunate to have avoided a serious accident.

Morricetown Aboriginal Fishery in BC





Buffalo on roadside on Alaska Hwy, BC

We slept like the dead and awoke refreshed. I walked around town before having breakfast in the restaurant at the motel.

We rode over to the W. A. C. Bennett Dam, which at one time was the largest earth-filled dam in the world. We took pictures, then headed toward the Alaska Highway for our next stop, Fort Nelson, to pick up Guy's friend Patrick. Pat works for BC Hydro as a technician; he keeps the 747 jet engine that supplies power to the area operating at peak-performance level. We toured the facility, then returned to Patrick's home for a cedar-plank salmon dinner.

The next morning, the three of us packed up our motorcycles and rode to Liard Hot Springs. Pat's wife and sons followed in the family van.

We had two rooms booked at the rustic lodge and arrived in the early afternoon. The hot springs are in a natural setting and kept clean. To enter, you cross the highway from the lodge, and go through the parking lot and along a wooden walkway, past all sorts of vegetation that thrives in the hot springs environment.



Boardwalk on way to Liard Hot Springs, BC



W. A. C. Bennett Dam in BC

After about 5 minutes, you see the change-room buildings and fenced area. The temperature differs from temperate to extremely hot—depending on which end you decide to enter. I highly recommend this experience.

Next morning, Pat's wife and sons returned to Fort Nelson and the three of us headed off to Whitehorse, Yukon. Along the way, we passed several herds of bison resting on the slopes at the side of the road.

We slept like the dead and awoke refreshed.

We continued to our next stop, Watson Lake, known as the signpost capital of the world. We toured the area and were amazed at the number of signposts and the countries they represented.

Then it was on to Whitehorse, Yukon, where we stayed at the local hot springs campground just out of town.

Early next morning, we headed to Braeburn Lodge for a fabulous breakfast. They make the largest cinnamon buns this writer has ever seen! It's a popular stopping place for those heading north.



Liard Hot Springs, BC



Braeburn Lodge on Alaska Hwy, Yukon

On the road north, we stopped to take pictures of the Five Finger Rapids. In our destination of Dawson City, Yukon, we rested in our hotel from our many hours on the motorcycles.

Our activities in town included the show at Diamond Tooth Gertie's; a walking tour of town; and a visit to Robert Service's Cabin, the Jack London Interpretive Centre, and the home where author Pierre Berton was born. We also viewed Discovery Creek and an old dredge.

The next day we took the ferry across the Yukon River and rode up a few miles on the Top of the World Highway, which leads to Tok, Alaska. We didn't continue further because it was raining; the road is said to be very dangerous to motorcycles when it's wet.

On the return, I took a side road and discovered the Top of the World Golf Course. Where were my clubs?!

Back down to the river, we entered the campground and rode to the north end. After a short walk along the shore, we found three beached riverboats in varying degrees of decay. They were absolutely huge.

After a few wonderful days, we left Dawson City to return to



Three Finger Rapids, Alaska Hwy, Yukon

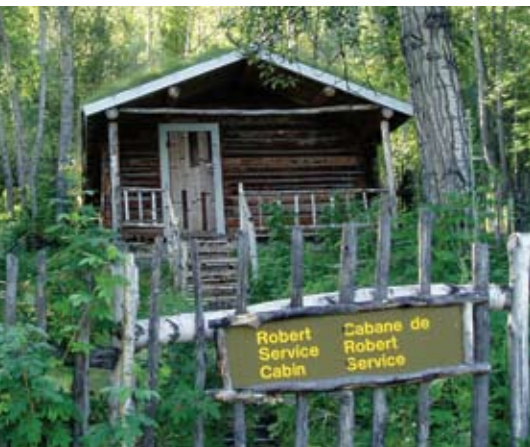


Bunkhouse Lodge, Dawson City

the Robert Service Campground in Whitehorse—a vast improvement from the one where we stayed on the way up. After hot showers and a fine meal in town, we huddled close to our campfire till bedtime.

Early to rise the next morning, we headed off to Skagway, stopping for Pat to do a little riding at Carcross Desert. I never expected to see desert way up there. The scenery was beautiful as we climbed in altitude. When we reached The Cabin at the top of the famous Chilkoot Pass, the temperature was a balmy 4 degrees Celsius. Chilling, I'll tell you.

Down at Skagway, we visited a local pub for some chowtime and a brew, then rode to the Gold Rush Cemetery where we saw the gravesite of Soapy Smith and others of that era. We made a quick ride to the ferry terminal to see the cruise ships in port, then rode back to Whitehorse, which made for a very long day.



Robert Service Cabin, Dawson City



Watson Lake Signposts in BC

Next morning, Pat returned to Fort Nelson and Guy and I decided to ride to Haines, Alaska. Our ride took us through Kluane National Park, past a grizzly bear at the side of the road, golden eagles, deer, and some of the most majestic country I have ever seen. I want to visit this area again and maybe do some camping.

I want to visit this area again and maybe do some camping.

Four hours later, we arrived at Haines, a lazy port town. After a quick lunch, we started our return trip, arriving back in 3 hours. We made better time on the return trip.

After a hearty breakfast in Whitehorse, we rode to Watson Lake and down the Stewart Cassiar Highway to our overnight stop at Dease Lake. Next morning we rode to Bell 2, a heliskiing destination, where we had the best lunch of the whole trip. The setting is like a Bavarian Village with grass-topped cabins surrounded by mountains. The helipad is next to the Lodge.



Skagway, Alaska



Discovery Creek, Dawson City

Then we rode to Mezadian Lake and into Stewart, BC, and Hyder, Alaska, to view the bears and eagles feeding on the spawning salmon, but it was too early in the season.

After a short visit, we rode down to Kitwanga and on to Hazelton for the night. Our next stop was Morricetown, to view the renowned Aboriginal fishing sights, then on to Fort Saint James to see the Hudson's Bay Post. We stayed overnight at Stuart Lake Lodge, overlooking the lake. For dinner, we wolfed down steaks with all the trimmings, and had a few beers at the local pub.

The next day, it was a long ride to Vernon to conclude our trip and clean the dirty bikes. What an adventure—9000 kilometres in 13 days.

Where to next??? ▲

James Robinson is a Notary Public who practises in Coquitlam, BC.

jrobinson@notaries.bc.ca



Jefferson (Soapy) Smith's grave in Skagway