

RV TO ALASKA
YOUR PERSONAL GUIDE TO ALASKA
BY RV



SAVE THE CARAVAN COSTS!
SEE MORE, SPEND LESS

SPECIAL TIPS ON TRAVEL AND VEHICLE
PREPARATION

MONEY-SAVING TIPS!!

EASILY CUSTOMIZED TO SUIT YOUR NEEDS

Bob and Mary Ann Cook

PRICE: \$20 US

FOREWORD

NOTE – Based on a trip made the summer of 2004, Av and Norma Tennenbaum have provided the following updates:

1. The Salmon Bake restaurant at Tok no longer offers free parking with a meal.
2. The visitor's center in Whitehorse will give you a free pin and 3-day parking pass good at any metered site in Whitehorse.
3. While in Whitehorse, stop at the Beringia Interpretive Center.
4. The Kluane Museum of Natural History does not officially allow overnight parking, but "no one cares). There are also several rest stops and pullouts on the road also.
5. Fred Meyers in Soldotna has a new policy on overnights. One area N of the building is for 1 night only. One area S of the building has 14 spaces where you can stay up to 3 days. Note that they check! Best time to find a spot is between noon and 2PM.

6. The WalMart in Anchorage no longer allows overnight parking, but the Fred Meyers and Costco still do.
7. The Fisheries Tour in Soldotna (check with the Chamber of Commerce) is highly recommended.
8. In Fairbanks, the Alaska Coffee Roasting Company on Geist Rd just west of University has excellent coffee and peanut butter cookies.
9. C2C members interested in salmon fishing should make their reservations at the Edgewater CG in Soldotna in late May or early June if you want a space in July.
10. King Salmon RV park in Soldotna is Passport in August only.
11. Gas at the Border City Lodge, about 5 mi w of the border in AK has diesel for about 20 cents a gal less than Tok.
12. Stop at BOALS near the Destruction Bay Lodge if you want some nice products made with spruce burls. You will get a better discount if you are on your way home!

We made this trip in the summer of 1999, with our three cats. We have a 1998 Discovery 36T motorhome and a 1996 Dodge Grand Caravan that we flat-tow.

This is our first RV and this was our first trip to Alaska, other than a cruise. We retired 10 months prior to making this trip, and we can't wait to go back again. We did much research prior to making the trip, which helped it go smoothly. We are sharing this with you to save you much time.

We hope that this booklet will encourage you to take a RV trip to Alaska and also to take it by yourself or with a small group of friends.

Although we have tried to answer all of your questions about travel to Alaska, if you have any further questions, you can send us an E-mail at cookrd1@juno.com. We will gladly respond.

Bob & Mary Cook

RV TO ALASKA

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SECTION 1: PRELIMINARIES

Alaska - the last frontier, land of the midnight sun. It conjures up many visions. For the RV'er, it represents the ultimate trip. The purpose of this booklet is to assist you in planning your trip to maximize your Alaskan adventure and minimize your costs and anxiety.

To Caravan or Not to Caravan

The first question that many folks ask themselves, after deciding that they want to RV to Alaska, is whether they should take a commercial caravan or "go it alone" (or with some friends).

The advantage of going with a commercial caravan company is that the itinerary and camping arrangements are made for you. The only thing that you have to do is pay the \$\$\$\$ and show up, and drive, drive, drive!

However, there are many disadvantages to caravans....

First, they are very structured. If this is Tuesday, it must be Mt McKinley. However, your chance of seeing "The Mountain" on any particular summer day is less than 20%. You will not have the option of sticking around until the skies clear up. Also, you will miss the opportunity to take many exciting side trips - helicoptering over Denali, wildlife-viewing river trips, just fishing at your leisure on the bountiful lakes and streams along the way, or even take a side trip to Russia!

Second, caravans are expensive. You are paying for activities that you may not normally do and for campgrounds that you may not need or even want to stay at. And, of course, you are paying the expenses and profit of the caravan.

Third, caravans cover a lot of territory in a short time frame. This means that you will be doing a lot of driving most days. I would not take my RV on some of the roads they go on. If you have a problem with your RV, it is up to you to get it fixed and then "catch up" with the caravan. In the meantime, you may miss some activities and campgrounds that you already paid for.

Avoid the caravan and save big \$\$\$\$. You don't have to worry about the planning because I've done it all for you. I'll give you a day-by-day itinerary that you can modify as you desire. Stay as long or as short as you want at each location. I'll give you tips for saving money on your trip that will result in much more available dollars to do the things that you really enjoy. So, let's get started!!

ROAD CONDITIONS

The first question that most people ask is “What are the roads like?”.

Generally speaking, the further north you go, the worse the roads become. Also note that almost all roads are only two lanes, and some sections do not have a shoulder. There are “truck lanes” on most hills. In the interests of preserving our motorhome and van (toad), we avoided gravel roads. (However, you will not be able to avoid all gravel as there is gravel in the road construction sections.) If you follow our route, you will find roads no worse than most secondary roads in the lower 48. Granted, there will be some frost heaves and narrow stretches and hills to climb, but these are really no problems.

The next thing that we hear is “This is the trip you take the year before you trade your RV”. If this was true, we would have turned back! You can make the trip to Alaska with a no or minimal damage to your RV by taking your time, driving slowly as the road conditions dictate. Remember, you are not on a schedule and you don’t have to be somewhere at day’s end.

Also note that some road construction zones have a “pilot car” that will take you through the construction zone. In many cases, the pilot car (and other cars, trucks and RV’s) will travel too fast for your RV. Do not be intimidated by this! Slow down and go at a speed you deem prudent as only you are responsible for any damage to your RV. We have all but lost sight of the pilot car when going through rough construction zones.

SPECIAL NOTE REGARDING “TOP OF THE WORLD HIGHWAY”

We did not travel the Top of the World Highway from Dawson City to Tok. Since many caravans include this in their itinerary, we thought it was important to let you know what others told us about their experiences on this road. Many people warned us about the road. It is narrow, unpaved on the US side and very steep. Travel during rain is especially hazardous and not recommended. We heard people say it took them 10 hours to go 65 miles. Everyone told us they would never take this road again. If you really want to go to Dawson City, take the road from Whitehorse to Dawson City and double back. However, if you elect to take this road, just be prepared for a lot of dust (and possibly mud) and a lot of slow going.

Vehicle Preparation

Regardless of what type of RV you plan to take, the single most important thing to have is a good RV Road Service Program. I would not travel anywhere without one. I have the one sponsored by Good Sams and I have also used Rapid Response. Both offer excellent service for a very reasonable annual premium. If you plan on using your present policy, such as road service that comes with your vehicle liability insurance or auto club, make sure that they will tow you with unlimited mileage to the nearest authorized service center for your vehicle. If you plan on taking your RV off the highway, make sure that they will cover a tow if you need it and you are not on the highway. Also, make sure that it covers your toad or tow vehicle.

Needless to say, you should make sure that all preventive maintenance services on your vehicle are up-to-date with the manufacturer's recommendations. Make sure that your tires, belts, hoses and batteries are in good shape. If in doubt, either replace them before you leave (it will be much cheaper) or take a spare along if you are mechanically able to make a repair while en route. Just keep in mind that there are many places on the Alaska Highway where there are no shoulders and no place to immediately pull over.

Most mechanical problems in driving to Alaska are caused by driving on gravel roads. My itinerary avoids the gravel roads.....but even the paved roads can have miles of gravel sections that are under repair. Here are some items to take care of before you leave. (Note that most of these are good common sense items that you should do for any RV trip, not just for Alaska.)

1. Get or make a protective cover for the front of your vehicle and toad. Mary made a very nice bra for our Dodge Caravan that covered the entire front, including the windshield. She made it from felt-backed vinyl that she got from the remnant roll at a fabric shop. The entire cost was around \$15. I also recommend a good rock shield for the rear of the motor home, such as UltraGuard, which is sturdy enough to protect your toad from rocks and debris. If you tow a trailer, you may want to fashion a shield to protect the front.
2. Protect your radiator(s). On my diesel pusher motor home, I had a very exposed air conditioner radiator that was mounted under the front axle. I used some chicken wire to protect the radiator from rocks and debris.
3. Protect other vital exposed components. Pay particular attention to any exposed fuel or LP lines. On my motor home, I placed an aluminum can over the sight bowl for the diesel water separator filter.
4. Get or make protective covers for your headlights. Protective headlight covers are available in Canada and Alaska for most popular vehicles and RV's.
5. Dust infiltration is a major problem in some RV's. Seal up everything as best you can, and don't forget to seal any openings in your storage bins.

RV Service

RV repair services are located in most of the larger towns such as Watson Lake, Whitehorse, and Tok, but it likely will not be warranty repair. There are some major RV dealers in the Fairbanks and Anchorage areas. Note that most RV service facilities have plenty of business and you may have to wait a week until they can get to you. Before you go, make sure you know where authorized service is available for your coach. This is another reason to make sure your RV is in tip-top shape before leaving, and also to take it easy on the rough sections of roads.

What to Take?

I will assume that you have are an experienced RV'er, so I will only cover what you should - and should not - take with you to Alaska.

First, let's cover what you need to cross the border. This is not meant to be an all-inclusive list. Some pets, such as exotic birds, require special documentation to be brought into Canada. Also, there are some items that are legal in the US, but not in Canada, and vice versa.

1. I highly recommend that you take with you an official copy of your birth certificate or passport and at least one form of picture ID. Note that an official birth certificate will have a raised seal on it.
2. Proof of insurance. Ask your vehicle insurer for a Canadian inter-Provincial Insurance Card. Check with your insurance agent to make sure that you are carrying adequate insurance coverage.
3. If you have a dog or cat, bring proof of a rabies vaccination within the last six months.
4. Canada has strict gun laws. Do not under any circumstances attempt to bring a handgun into Canada - they could confiscate your RV!
5. You must also be able to demonstrate your ability to meet your financial needs while in Canada - usually around \$150 for each day you will be there.
6. Do not bring into Canada any untreated wood or fresh fruit (especially apples). They also have limits on the amount of alcohol or tobacco that you can bring in.

It is always best to check the latest information on border crossing requirements. These can be found in many camping guides and at Canadian tourism provincial websites.

Here are some Alaska-specific items that you should have with you:

1. You absolutely need a copy of the Milepost. This is available at most book stores.
2. Deet mosquito repellent. The higher the Deet content the better, just don't use the potent stuff on children and read and follow the directions carefully.
3. Mosquito net. This is especially important if you will be taking any wildlife tours or a trip to the Arctic.
4. A good pair of binoculars and a good camera(s). Keep the camera and binoculars handy and ready to grab while you are driving!
5. I highly recommend that you take some spares with you for your vehicle and RV. Fuel, air and oil filters, belts, hoses, etc. This is especially important if you have a diesel engine as things such as belts and even filters are especially hard to find in Alaska.
6. Be sure you have an adequate supply of prescription drugs to last your trip, along with a refillable prescription from your doctor that you can use if needed.

Do I need to take my toad with my motor home?

If you normally take a toad, you will definitely need it. Alaska is a big place and it would be very inconvenient to drive a large motor home everywhere. If you are traveling with friends, you may be able to get by without one if you can share the toad.

Climate

You will need to bring clothing to deal with a wide variety of temperatures. The interior of Alaska can actually get into the 90's, although the 80's are more common. The coastal areas, including the Kenai Peninsula, will have some cool days when the temperature may not reach 60. August is the start of the rainy season and slightly cooler temperatures. **NOTE:** A winter coat or heavy jacket, along with gloves and boots, are recommended for some of the glacier excursions.

Reservations

We did not make advance reservations for anything. We had no problems getting into any campgrounds, primarily because we were slightly ahead of the caravans. You may want to consider campground reservations in Fairbanks or Anchorage, or be prepared to stay at a different RV park. We do not like to be tied down to a schedule, so we did not make ANY reservations!

Reservations are required for camping at Denali and for the bus trip. However, if you don't have reservations, you can usually get a campsite in the park for the next day(s).

Stay outside the park one night (we boondocked). Make your bus trip reservations right away also, as this will require a day's wait.

At least a day's notice is usually required to make a reservation on the Alaska Marine Highway between Haines and Skagway.

Most other boat tours and the Arctic Circle Tour required a day's notice also.

Problems we had

Everyone wants to know if we encountered any mechanical problems during the trip. Here they are:

We got two small rock chips on the motorhome's windshield on the way out, which we had repaired in Anchorage for \$40.

The van's windshield got hit with a big rock on the Glenn Highway in Anchorage, where it is a six-lane highway. The windshield has a big crack on the lower edge and will have to be replaced. Note that this happened in an urban area, and could happen anyplace. It was a fluke.

The alternator failed on our motorhome. This is a relatively common problem on the XC Freightliner chassis as the alternator is undersized, especially if you boondock and rely on your alternator to charge your coach batteries as you drive. This necessitated a trip from Soldotna to Anchorage to have it replaced. Freightliner airfreighted a new alternator to Anchorage and had it there the next day. While the technician was replacing the alternator, he broke the engine oil filter. They did not have a replacement oil filter in stock. Fortunately, I had a spare oil filter. Had I not had a spare, we would have had to wait several days over a holiday weekend. Remember to carry spares! Note that the alternator could have failed anywhere.

Somewhere before Whitehorse, we picked up a small screw in the passenger outside dual, which we eventually got fixed in Anchorage for \$28.

So there, this is all the problems we had. We saw a good number of people who had a lot of problems, particularly axle problems on trailers. We talked with many people that had problems and concluded that they were just going way too fast for conditions, as we (and others) traveled the same roads they did with no problems. I cannot overemphasize the need to go slowly on the bad portion of roads!

SECTION 2: EXPENSES

Cost

Your biggest fixed cost is obviously fuel. Once you leave the lower 48, you can figure on paying anywhere from 20 cents to 75 cents more per gallon for fuel (diesel, unleaded or propane). Any way you cut it, the fuel costs and wear and tear on your rig will be substantial. If you are going to make the trip, spend as much time there as possible.

Variable costs - such as camping, food and sightseeing, will vary widely between individuals. We did a lot of boondocking, which is a great way to save money. Boondocking opportunities will be pointed out in Section 3. Here is a breakdown of our total expenses for the 110 day journey beginning and ending in Great Falls, MT:

| | <u>CATEGORY</u> | <u>AMOUNT</u> |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| | MOTOR HOME | |
| | Diesel Fuel | \$ 1169.93 (Approx 6700 |
| miles, Note 1) | Maintenance | 78.96 |
| | LP Gas | 135.37 |
| | TOAD | |
| | Gasoline | 186.33 (regular) |
| | FOOD | 1587.76 (including cat |
| food & litter) | RESTAURANT | 344.04 |
| | GIFTS | 445.53 |
| | ENTERTAINMENT | 971.80 (Fishing gear & |
| license, sightseeing) | CAMPGROUNDS | 1047.77 |
| | LAUNDRY | 17.50 Note 2 |
| | MISC | 456.11 (Includes ferry) |
| | TOTAL TRIP EXPENSES : | \$ 6441.10 |

NOTE 1: Includes 300 mile detour (not included in trip log) to get alternator replaced on motor home.

NOTE 2: Most laundry was done using our own washer and dryer. This is for the two times we had to use a laundromat due to boondocking. During the same time frame, our expenses for these categories would average about \$5600.00, so the incremental cost that we incurred to take this trip was about \$ 800. Your expenses will undoubtedly be different. We did not go to all the costly "touristy" attractions. Our major expense savings for us was boondocking. Also note that one of our biggest expenses, motor home fuel, was spread out over almost four months.

S ECTION 3: MONEY-SAVING IDEAS

Camping

If you like to boondock, there are many opportunities to save money. Along the highway, there are many large rest areas where you can boondock. Many gas stations will allow you to camp for free with a fill-up. There are even restaurants along the way

where you camp free - even if you don't buy a meal! Specific ideas are included in the Section 3. There are many places where you can dump and fill with fresh water for free.

As you enter each Canadian Province, get a copy of their provincial camping guide. It will list places where you can dump your holding tanks and get fresh water for free. If you must have a campsite for the night, Provincial Parks and Lions Club or Rotary Club campgrounds are economical.

Alaska State Parks will sell you an annual camping pass for \$200, which is good at most of the state parks. You can usually find a state park near where you want to be. However, check your campground directory to ensure that the park can accommodate your RV, as most spaces are only 30' long (or less). Also, note that the vast majority of state campgrounds do not offer any hookups. We did not stay in any state parks as we could usually find a free boondock site. The daily cost for state park campgrounds without the annual permit is usually \$8 - \$10.

I really recommend joining Good Sams. Many parks and some restaurants offer a 10% discount to GS members and we find this saves us money, even though we do a lot of boondocking. We also belong to Escapees, and several parks offer a 15% Escapee discount.

Food

Milk, eggs, fresh fruit and name-brands soda can be expensive. We took powdered eggs and milk with us, and an assortment of food staples to last us until we got to Whitehorse or Fairbanks. Note that you can find sales on most items that will make the price equivalent to the lower 48. We do not recommend that you take a large stock of canned goods.

Fuel

British Columbia has, on average, very high fuel prices and Alberta the most reasonable of the Canadian Provinces that you will be traveling through. Be forewarned - fill up before you get to BC on the Alaskan Highway! However, even in BC, there are fuel "bargains", particularly around Prince George.

Along the Alaskan Highway, there are many fuel stops that also operate a campground, or have a place for you to boondock. Some of these will give you a campground discount with a fuel purchase. If they don't advertise this, ASK! We camped for free at Petro-Canada in Fort Nelson, avoiding a \$5 charge for boondocking because I asked BEFORE I filled up!

LP is usually around \$1.75 - \$2.00/gallon in Alaska. It is best to ask around, as prices can vary by 25 cents/gallon in the same town. We found LP at equivalent US prices of \$0.50 - \$0.75/gallon. Fill up with LP in Canada!

In Alaska, Tesoro Gas stations usually offer the lowest prices. Ask for their "New Customer" packet, and you will get coupons good for \$1 off on your next fill-up, along

with a fuel-purchase card that gets you another \$1 off for every 48 gallons purchased.

Currency Exchange

Credit cards give you the best exchange rate when you make a purchase abroad. BUT, be aware that only MasterCard and Visa are widely accepted. Almost no one takes Discover.

Many grocery stores allow you to get “Cash Back” when you purchase groceries when you use your credit card. This is the most convenient and cost-effective way to “exchange” your currency for Canadian dollars. However, most places will limit your “cash back” to \$30 - \$100, so plan accordingly.

Mt McKinley (Denali National Park)

Since private vehicles are not allowed on most of the interior roads of Denali, you will need to take a tour bus. I highly recommend this. There are two tour buses that you can choose from. Both are operated by the same concessionaire. As noted later, the green tour bus is the one to take as it will save you over \$40/person. As a bonus, you will even see more!

Jasper, Waterton and Banff National Parks (Canada)

Get the annual pass, if you plan to be at any National Parks in the area for more than six days. There are various discounts for camping and it is good at many several other park also.

SECTION 4: TRIP PLANNER

In this section, I will give you details of our trip, including the number of days at each location. The trip is broken up into segments so that you can “cut and paste” to customize your trip.

A. GREAT FALLS, MT - DAWSON CREEK, BC

Road conditions for this segment - Excellent / Very Good

Total Miles for this segment: 860

DAY 1 - GREAT FALLS, MT

This is the “eastern access” point for our Alaskan adventure. This is also a good place to stock up prior to leaving. If you need to spend the night here, the local Wal-Mart on Smelter Ave is a good place to stay.

DAY 2 - GREAT FALLS - CALGARY, AB

Miles: 320

Be sure to stop at the first visitor information center after you cross into Canada. They offer a free dump and fresh water, along with an Alberta Camping Guide.

We did not plan on doing any sightseeing in Calgary, so we just stopped at Southcentre Mall, McLeod exit off Hwy 2. They welcome RV’ers for overnight camping.

Options: If you do not want to travel this far, Lethbridge (approx 185 miles) is an excellent stopping point, especially Park Place Provincial Park.

If you will be bypassing Calgary entirely, be sure to take the bypass south of town.

NOTE: Once you get into Canada, you will want to get some Canadian currency. The best way to do this is to stop at a major grocery store where can use your credit card and get “cash back”.

DAYS 3 & 4 - CALGARY - EDMONTON, AB

Miles: 185

This is an easy drive. Since we planned on staying in Edmonton for two days, we stayed at Glowing Embers for \$18 (Cdn) with full hook-ups, including Good Sam discount.

This is a good overnight stop, but definitely not a ‘destination’ campground.

You could certainly spend more than two days here. We did the requisite visit to the West Edmonton Mall and also went to Fort Edmonton Park, which was very nice.

DAY 5 & 6: EDMONTON, AB - DAWSON CREEK, BC

Miles: 355 miles

NOTE: Fuel costs substantially more in BC than in AB. Be sure you fill up at the BI-LO station in Hythe as fuel costs were 20 cents/liter higher in BC!

This was a long drive, but it was an easy drive over good roads. If you do not want to travel so far in one day, Valley View or Grande Prairie are excellent stops. We stayed in Dawson Creek two nights at the Dawson Creek Mall (with several other campers). They do not discourage overnight camping. The Co-Op gas station, just down the street from

the mall, has free dump and water facilities located behind the station.

Dawson Creek is the official start of the Alaska Highway. Be sure to stop at the visitor center, just after the traffic circle, and watch the film about the construction of the Alaska Highway. It only costs \$1 (Cdn). Also, from the visitor center you can walk to 10th street and take a picture of "Mile 0".

We belong to Passport America and could have stayed at Alahart RV for \$8 (Cdn), but it was too crowded for our tastes. Good alternatives for camping would be Northern Lights or Tubbys. NOTE: Tubbys also sells headlight covers and other preparations for your trip to AK.

B. DAWSON CREEK, BC - FT NELSON, BC

Road Conditions - Generally very good.

Total miles for this segment: 280

DAY 7: DAWSON CREEK - FT NELSON, BC

Miles: 280

This was another easy drive, with good roads. We stopped at the visitor center and was told that the town frowned on boondocking. We went down to the Petro-Canada gas station and they said we could boondock for \$5 (Cdn). I asked if they would waive this if I filled up, as I needed about \$200 of diesel. They gladly obliged. There is a free dump and drinking water across the visitor center, by the blue chalet.

C. FT NELSON, BC - TESLIN, YT

Road Conditions - This is the worst section of the Alaskan Highway. There is a lot of road construction, the roads are usually very narrow, windy and bumpy with frost heaves. There are also a lot of wildlife on the road. However, it is also very scenic, so take your time and drive slow.

Total Miles for this segment: 521

DAY 8: FT NELSON - MILEPOST 550.9 (NORTH OF FIRESIDE, BC)

Miles: 270

This was a hard days drive. Along the way, you will definitely want to stop at Muncho Lake and Liard Hot Springs. When we were there in late May, 1999, it was still winter. We had to skip the excellent and inexpensive boat trip on Muncho Lake and we also did not take a dip in the sulphur springs at Liard Hot Springs Provincial Park. I highly recommend that you do these two things. There are many opportunities for boondocking at rest areas and turnouts along the highway. Or you could stay the campground at Liard Hot Springs for \$14 (Cdn). We stayed at an excellent rest area at milepost 550.9. It was a beautiful site overlooking the Liard River, high on a bluff. This is a very scenic drive and you must be careful of caribou, elk, moose and dall sheep along the highway.

DAY 9: FIRESIDE - TESLIN, YT

Miles: 251

Although this was only 251 miles, it was a very long drive. There several road

construction projects in progress for a total of about 90 miles. We traveled these gravel stretches at 20 mph (sometimes as low as 10 mph). Good thing we did, because an oncoming truck through a rock that hit my unprotected windshield rather hard - but didn't make a chip! A must stop along the way is Watson Lake. See the sign forest at the north end of town. This was actually started in the 1940's when an army enlistee put up a sign showing his hometown (Danville, IL) and the number of miles from Watson Lake. Since then, thousands of tourists have put up their own "sign", showing who they are, where they are from and when they were there. The signs range from plain to fancy. Be sure to bring your own sign to hang in the forest!

Another must stop is Mukluk Annies, 7 miles north of Teslin at Milepost 812. Free camping for everyone and a free do-it-yourself RV wash and a boat ride if you buy dinner. Not to be missed! Food prices are great, considering the exchange rate. We stayed the night and washed the RV and toad before leaving in the morning.

D. TESLIN, YT - TOK, ALASKA

Roads are generally fair, improving slightly when you get to Alaska. As always, beware of frost heaves.

Total Miles for this segment: 574

DAY 10 & 11: TESLIN - WHITEHORSE, YT

Miles: 72

If you took advantage of Mukluk Annie's free camping last night, you probably also didn't miss their all-you-can eat breakfast buffet - pancakes loaded with blueberries, scrambled eggs with onion and peppers, sausage, bacon, homemade rolls and coffee or tea - all for \$8 Canadian. We also took advantage of their free do-it-yourself car wash and washed the motor home and van. Consequently, we did not get out of there very early in the morning. Since we were going to stay in Whitehorse for a couple of nights, we stayed at a commercial campground - Hi Country with full hook-ups and cable TV for \$20 (Cdn) with the Good Sam discount. Another good alternative is Pioneer RV park. There is a lot to do in Whitehorse, and one of the main things is to stock up on any groceries you will need before you get to Fairbanks or Anchorage. There are discount coupons available for 2 cents off per liter at the Shell station just south of Hi Country. However, if you can go another 100 miles, you can get a better price at Haines Junction.

DAY 12: WHITEHORSE - BURWASH LANDING, YT

Miles: 172

You will be going through the Kluane National Park area today, which is very scenic. Take your time and fish, hike, or just enjoy the scenery. Be sure to stop at the Kluane Museum of Natural History at Mile 1093. They have a good but small facility that is a little pricey at \$3.50 (Cdn), but we still enjoyed it. Also, be sure to stop at the Sheep Mountain visitor center right after you cross Slim's River for awe-inspiring scenery and dall sheep on the mountain. You can boondock for free at Burwash Landing Resort and RV park which is right next to the Natural History Museum. And what great scenery you will have - snow-capped mountains on one side and the lake on the other. Also located next to the campground is Your Place, a cafeteria with an excellent view of Kluane Lake, and also the largest log cabin in the YT.

DAY 13: BURWASH LANDING YT - TOK, ALASKA

Miles: 330

The section of the Alaska Highway to the US border is in fair-to-poor condition and you have to be wary of frost heaves. The road is also wavy in sections, which further dictates a slower pace. This section of road is undergoing major improvements, which also means very slow travel in the construction areas. If you can, you should avoid buying fuel until you reach the US as prices will be significantly cheaper - approximately 30 cents/gallon cheaper at the border and cheaper at Tok. Also, if you stop at the visitor center in Tok, you can get advertisements which include discounts of 5 cents per gallon at the Texaco next to Tok RV Village campground. There are gas stations in Tok that will let you stay overnight or wash your RV free with a fill-up.

The Gateway Salmon Bake is a great place to eat lunch or dinner, and you can camp free in their campground with the purchase of a meal. While in Tok, be sure to go to the visitor center as they have a lot of info and also go to the dog sled demonstration at the Burnt Paw.

E. TOK - FAIRBANKS

Roads are generally good, beware of frost heaves.

Total Miles for this segment: 208

DAY 14: TOK, - DELTA JUNCTION, AK

Miles: 110

We had lingered around Tok until early afternoon, so we got a late start. It would be very easy to go all the way to Fairbanks in one day. An excellent and free stop along the way is at the Alaska State Park, Rika's Road House. It is just north of Delta Junction. An excellent place to boondock is just north of Rika's Road house, at a large rest area just south of the bridge over the Tanana River. You can also camp without hookups in the parking lot at Rika's Road house for \$8. There is also an excellent private campground just north of Delta Junction (before you get to Rika's Road House) if you need full hookups.

DAY 15 - 23: DELTA JUNCTION - FAIRBANKS, AK

Miles: 98

Fairbanks is your chance to stock up on supplies and fuel. Your only better prices will be

in Anchorage. If you prefer boondocking, the local Fred Meyer store and Sam's Club will let you stay as long as you wish. There is a free public dump and potable water near the downtown area. We stayed one night in Fred Meyer's lot which allowed us time to check out the commercial campgrounds. We decided on River View campground, just south of Fairbanks off the Richardson Highway (AK 2) on Badger Road. They offered a weekly rate (\$140/week or \$24/night and a Good Sam discount), have free cable TV and have gravel interior roads and level gravel sites and free RV wash. An added bonus was a female moose with her newborn calf wandering through the campground early one morning. Just remember that wildlife can appear almost anywhere in Alaska and be alert for it. There is also an excellent paved bike trail that runs by the park - a great way to get some quick exercise if you brought your bike.

There is so much to see and do in Fairbanks that we spent a week. Be sure to visit the University of Alaska at Fairbanks. They have an excellent museum, geological center and northern lights show. We also enjoyed a drive tour to the Arctic Circle with Northern Alaska Tour Company, which cost \$110 per person. Although this was only a 400 mile round trip adventure, it took 17 hours. Everything is included except the evening dinner. We were certainly glad that we did not attempt this drive with our toad. The Dalton Highway is a rough gravel highway and most rental companies prohibit you from taking their vehicles on it. There are also other tours available that will fly you up to the Arctic Ocean if you want, but these are very expensive. Also while in Fairbanks, go to Alaska Land (free), the Creamery Wildlife Refuge (free) and the Discovery River Boat (\$40/person). If you have never been to a gold mine before, there are opportunities nearby in Ester and Fox, priced in the \$20 - \$25 per person price range. An excellent, and reasonable, place to eat is the Royal Fork restaurant, located off Alaska 2 on Third Street, just north of the Chena River. They offer a noon buffet for \$7 and an evening buffet for \$9.75, beverage and dessert included. On Friday nights, they have scallops, clams, shrimp and oysters.

If I had it to do over again, I would not have spent so much time in Fairbanks, but it was nice to relax at a nice park, clean up the coach and toad, and get some rock chips fixed in the coach's windshield. Expect to pay about \$30 for the initial chip and \$10 for each additional chip.

F. FAIRBANKS - MAT-SU VALLEY

Road conditions: Very good, some frost heaves

Total miles for this segment: 338

DAY 24: FAIRBANKS - DENALI NATIONAL PARK

Miles: 122

We stopped at Neana along the way, about 55 miles south of Fairbanks. This is a typical Alaska town, but here you can bet on the date and time of the ice breakup on the river. Last year, the prize was worth \$190,000, so it may be worth your time to stop and place your bet.

Unless you had called ahead and made reservations for a campsite at Denali (\$12 per

night plus a \$4 reservation fee for a dry campsite), you will have to spend at least one night outside the park. There are commercial campgrounds near the park entrance, but they are nothing to write home about. The nicest one is Riverview, right on the banks of the Neana River, about four miles north of the park entrance. We decided to boondock and found a nice spot about seven miles north of the park entrance (Milepost 244.1), high on a bluff above the Neana river. There are several good boondocking spots south of the park entrance. There is no camping allowed in turnouts within about six miles north of the park entrance.

There are three campgrounds in Denali for RV's. Riley Creek is close to the visitor center and is nestled amidst many spruce trees. It is a nice campground, but there are no mountain views - just trees. Its main attraction is its proximity to the visitor center and the free shuttle buses that will take you to the visitor center, hotel and train station. Riley Creek also has the only dump station. Savage River campground is located at mile 13 and the road is paved. It offers much better mountain views, but it is not as convenient to the visitor center or hotel, where many ranger-led talks and activities take place. Also, it costs \$2 to ride the bus from Savage River campground to the visitor center (round-trip). Teklanika Campground is the last campground accessible by RV. The minimum stay at Teklanika is three days, and you must use the shuttle buses for transportation from your campsite once you are there. Bus passes cost \$15.50. Also note that the road to Teklanika is not paved past mile 14, and it is rough and dusty.

Individual campsites are not assigned - you choose your campsite on a first come, first served basis. This can sometimes be a problem, as only a few of the campsites can accommodate a large RV with slideouts. In Riley Creek, we had our rear ladder against a tree, and the driver's mirror stuck out on the edge of the road - and this was one of the largest sites available. At Savage River, after much maneuvering we were able to get into a pull-through site and still have enough space to use the slide-out on the drivers side. If you have a slide-out on both sides of your RV, you will find few sites that will accommodate your slide-outs.

If you decide to stay at Savage River, the best sites are on the road to your left as you enter the campground, sites 21 - 34. Most of these sites have a view of the mountains.

When you book your campground, be sure to also book a seat on one of the tour buses that go into Denali. Private vehicles are not allowed past mile 13. This is a great way to see wildlife and the park. Mt McKinley is not visible until approx mile 9 within the park - even then, it will be 75 miles away. But still, what a magnificent site. If you want to see the mountain up close and personal, then you may want to book a flightseeing adventure at Talkeetna.

Note that there are two bus services in Denali. The green buses are the shuttle buses. These buses stop for you to observe wild animals, and the bus driver gives a great narration. The tan buses are tour buses that also stop to observe wild animals and the bus driver also gives you a narration. Note that there are some big differences between the

green shuttle buses and the tan tour bus. You can get off a green tour bus anytime and catch a different green shuttle bus. You can not get off a tan tour bus and catch any other bus. The tan tour bus provides a box lunch and drinks whereas you have to bring your own on the green shuttle bus. The tan tour bus goes to mile 53, Toklat, costs \$64. The green shuttle bus that goes to Eielson Visitor Center costs \$21. Take the green shuttle bus and save money, see more and do more. Taking a trip on the green shuttle bus is a MUST for your visit at Denali.

While you are at Denali, also be sure to see the free sled dog demonstration at the kennels near the park headquarters. There are free buses that will take you there from the visitor center or Riley Creek.

Your chances of seeing Mt McKinley on any give summer day is about 20%. Keep in mind though that there can be long stretches when the mountain may be obscured by clouds. This is the nice thing about seeing Alaska on your own - you are not tied to a schedule like you would be with a caravan.

We spent four days at Denali and could have easily spent a week here taking various hikes. After dumping our holding tanks and filling our water tank, we boondocked at a wonderful paved turnout at Mile A218.6, on the banks of the Nenana River with snow-capped mountains in the background. Absolutely wonderful. We chose this spot for its beauty and its proximity to Cantwell, as we had to pick up our mail there the next day.

DAY 28 - 29: DENALI - TALKEETNA - HOUSTON

Miles: 181

Talkeetna is the town that the TV series Northern Exposure was based on. It offers a great view of Denali on a clear day. There are many tour operators here, so if you want to flighsee to Denali, go on a rafting adventure, a boat tour or fishing, this is the place.

This region of Alaska, from Talkeetna down to Wasilla and Palmer is known as the Matanuska-Susitna valley, and is rimmed by the Alaska Range, Talkeetna and Chugach Mountains. The valley is very picturesque and offers many recreational opportunities.

We decided to continue further into the Mat-Su valley, and stayed the night at Riverside RV Park in Houston. They offer a Good Sam discount and let you wash your RV for free at your site. We took advantage of this along with the full hook-ups and also did laundry. Cost was \$16/night.

DAY 30 - 35: HOUSTON - PALMER

Miles: 35

There is a lot to do in the Wasilla - Palmer area and we stayed a few extra days because of the rainy weather. This is a very scenic area and there are several campgrounds with excellent views. Be sure to visit the Iditarod Race Headquarters in Wasilla on Knik Road. It is free and offers an excellent film on the Iditarod race and the life of a musher. You can also take a short ride on a dogsled, pulled by a team of huskies, for \$5.

Another must see is the Independence Mine State Historical Site at Hatcher Pass, just north of Palmer. The last 13 miles are on a very rough dirt road and are not conducive for taking a large RV. You can pan for gold for free here and they will even loan you a pan.

While we were in Palmer, we stayed at The Homestead Campground because it was a CCA park and we could stay there for \$5/night. However, it only offered water and electric, and the CCA sites did not have a view. If you are not a CCA member, there are several parks in Wasilla that offer full hookups and have an excellent view. There is also a Wal-Mart in Wasilla, and a nice campground next door with full hookups for \$16.

Wasilla is a great place to stock up. We found diesel for \$0.99/gallon. They have a Wal-Mart on the east end of town and a great store called Save-U-More which is located on Parks Highway about 1.5 miles west of the junction of Glenn Highway. Also, Safeway is a decent place for groceries, especially if you get their free discount card.

Note: If you want to save some time, three days are adequate for the Houston-Palmer area, but you just may want to linger longer and enjoy the great mountain scenery from the valley. We stayed a week so that we could attend the annual Founder's Days Festival in Palmer in late June.

G. KENAI PENINSULA

Roads are excellent from Palmer through Anchorage to Seward, but the road becomes a little rough and narrow as you get towards Seward. The road towards Homer is bumpy and narrow initially from the Sterling Jct towards Sterling, improving to very good from Sterling to Homer.

Total Miles for this segment: 340

DAY 36: PALMER - PORTAGE GLACIER

Miles: 95

You will now be entering the Kenai Peninsula - Alaska's vacationland. This is an extremely scenic area. You must drive with your headlights on AND you must not allow more than 4 slower vehicles behind you - or you will get a ticket! If you can, avoid travel on weekends on the Kenai Peninsula because of the traffic.

Also, it is very important that you fill up with diesel / gas before leaving Anchorage. You will be driving south on the Glenn Highway into Anchorage, where you will go south on the New Seward Highway. Fill up at the Mapco station on the left by the Merrill Field Airport, or at the Tesoro station further down the street where you turn south on the Seward Highway (note that this location is not good for large RV's). Fuel on the Kenai can easily cost \$0.25/gallon more. This could easily mean a \$25 savings if your RV and toad hold 100 gallons.

There are many places to stop and explore along the way, such as Girdwood. There are few commercial campgrounds along the route, but there are several state parks, if you arrive early and can fit in the sites. However, there are many turnouts, so boondocking is

also an alternative.

Be sure that you take the Portage Glacier Road and go to the Portage Glacier State Park. The visitor center is on Portage Lake and offers an astounding view along with an excellent display at the visitor center. This is Alaska's #1 attraction, and this is not to be missed! There is an excellent USFS campground about a mile prior to the visitor center that can accommodate any size RV, but it offers no facilities other than pump water (and an outstanding view!). However, there is not even a dump station at the campground, so you may be reluctant to spend the \$12 for a night. There is a nice turnout/trailhead access about a mile beyond the visitor center (veer to the right), just before the Portage Glacier boat ride, on the right side of the road. Also, there are many great scenic turnouts south of Portage.

Also, just north of Portage Glacier Road is the boarding point for the Alaska Railroad trip to Whittier. They are presently building a road linking Whittier to the Stewart Highway, but it was not completed in 1999. The train ride costs \$20 round-trip, and is a nice scenic ride through two tunnels. If you are not going to Valdez, this will be your only chance to see Prince William Sound. There are several nice glacier cruises available from Whittier, but be sure you make your reservation before you leave Anchorage.

Note that there is also a boat ride that you can take at Lake Portage to see the Portage Glacier. This is the only way you can see the glacier as it has retreated substantially since 1992. The cost is \$25 for about a one hour trip. If you are interested in this trip, check with the tour operator as the boat is often booked to capacity by tour busses. You may have to wait a day to take the trip.

DAY 37 - 40: PORTAGE GLACIER - SEWARD

Miles: 80

This is also a spectacular, scenic drive. Take your time, as portions of the drive are narrow and twisty. If you want a campsite with full hookups, you will have to stop 6.5 miles north of Seward at one of two commercial campgrounds. If you continue on to Seward, your choice is a crowded commercial campground in town with water and electric for \$15, or the beachfront campsites (also crowded) that the City of Seward operates. No hookups (about 300) cost \$10 and water and electric sites (23) cost \$15. However, the water and electric sites are at a premium, and difficult to obtain. If you want to boondock for free, turn left on Nash road (just as you enter town). Continue down Nash road about three miles and you will come across a small gravel turnout with a great view overlooking Seward and the bay.

While you are in Seward, you will definitely want to go to Exit Glacier which is just North of town. This is the only glacier in Alaska that you can actually touch (without paying big bucks to take a helicopter). However, the last nine miles of the road are not paved, and the road has a washboard surface. If at all possible, don't take your RV on this rough, dusty road. This is an absolute must see attraction.

Also, the Alaska Sea Life center has a nice exhibit, if a little pricey (\$12.50). The University of Fairbanks also has a Marine Research facility with tours (\$3). There are many charter boat operators if you like fishing. And if you want to visit Kenai Fjords National Park, you must take one of the tour boats on an excursion to the park. Several tour options are available. If you opt for an all-day cruise, Major Marine operates a nice tour that includes an optional (\$10) all-you-can-eat salmon and fried chicken buffet. This is a fabulous treat and is well worth the price.

There are so many things to do in Seward, and the scenery is so beautiful, that you will find it difficult to leave.

Note - approximately 20,000 - 30,000 people come to Seward over the July 4 holiday weekend. I highly recommend that you avoid this area at that time. It is also a good idea to avoid driving anywhere on the Kenai Peninsula on a holiday weekend.

DAY 41 - 62: SEWARD - SOLDOTNA

Miles: 91

Along the way, you will pass the Kenai River. It is an absolutely beautiful spot, and an excellent area to fish. However, if you plan to stay here during one of the salmon runs, it really gets crowded. There are many state parks and private parks in the area that really cater to the fisherman. A lot of these campgrounds cannot accommodate a large RV. However, there are a lot of turnouts affording numerous boondocking opportunities. Kenai Princess has a nice RV park in the Cooper Landing area, and you get to use the amenities at the lodge.

A great place to boondock is at Fred Meyers in Soldotna. Even if you don't plan on boondocking there, you have to stop. A good portion of the parking lot is taken over by boondocking RV's, and it has the atmosphere of a tailgate party. They even have water

and a dump station available.

A great place for extended boondocking is adjacent to the airport. To get there, take Funny River Road east approx 1.5 mi to the airport. Just before the S bend, there is a large gravel parking area. There is access to the Kenai River from here by following the dirt road at the east end of the parking lot. Many RV'ers return to this spot every year for free camping and fishing. This is an excellent free camping and fishing spot, and the other RV'ers here are very friendly and helpful. You can probably find someone to help you smoke or can your catch!

The main attraction for this side of the Kenai Peninsula is fishing. If you are not interested in fishing, you could save time and skip this portion. However, if you have time, it is well worth the trip. If you have your sport fishing license, there are some great clamming spots south of Soldotna at Clam Gulch State Recreation Area and at Ninilchik. Pick up a free copy of the tide book at Fred Meyers (ask for it at Customer Information) as it will list the best times for clamming, which is low tide.

DAY 63 - 66: SOLDOTNA - HOMER

Miles: 74

If you have come to the east side of the Kenai Peninsula, you must take a trip to Homer, even if you aren't a fisherman. Homer exists primarily for fishing, as there are numerous sportfishing charters available. However, if you are here just for sightseeing, you are in for a real treat.

As you head south of Soldotna, there are numerous places to stop and places to camp, which will afford you an easy drive to Homer. Just south of Ninilchik, there is a state beachfront campground (Deep Creek SRA), which charges \$10/night. Although there are no hookups, you camp right on the beach, overlooking Cook Inlet and several volcanoes. Also here is a commercial campground where you can camp high on a bluff with full hookups. About a mile further south, there is a free place to camp that is also on the beach.

Continuing further south, Anchor Point is an excellent place to stop, especially at the state park. You will drive on the most westernly road in the US and will end up on a beach where they use tractors to launch fishing boats. There are many bald eagles in the area and they feed on the numerous fish carcasses that wash ashore daily. Dry camping is available at the state park for \$10/night.

Continuing on to Homer, there is boondock camping available on the Spit for \$10/night, about two miles onto the Spit. Just south of there are boardwalks and shops and numerous fishing charters. Most fishing charters are \$150 - \$200. Be sure to take a ride to East Skyline Drive for a dramatic view of Homer and the Spit, high above the city.

H. ANCHORAGE

Road conditions: Good, except between Sterling and the Seward Highway which is narrow and rough.

Total miles for this segment: 222

DAY 67 - 73: HOMER - ANCHORAGE

Miles: 222

RV parks in Anchorage are nothing to write home about. Probably the nicest one is Anchorage RV Park, just north of the Glenn Highway on Muldoon. It is relatively expensive and they do not cut the grass at the sites. Also, they do not allow you to wash your RV. Reservations are recommended, especially if you want to stay a while.

Although Anchorage has a city law against overnight RV parking, it is not enforced. However, the Wal-Mart just south of Dimond on the Old Seward Highway, is technically south of the city limits. There are many RV's parked in their lot. This location is very convenient to many stores and RV service facilities. Free RV dump and water is available at the Tesoro station, next to Fred Meyer on Gambell/New Seward Highway.

Anchorage is a cosmopolitan city, with several museums and other attractions. Consult the Milepost. Be sure to visit Earthquake Park and Shipp Creek. The Gold Mine restaurant and the chocolate waterfall across the street is a worthwhile stop. A local bank downtown has a good collection of native Alaskan artifacts, and admission is free. There are several Wal-Marts, Sam's Club and Fred Meyer stores to choose from if you need to stock up. Be advised that fuel costs more the further south you go in Anchorage. The best price we found on diesel and gas was at a Mapco Express, on the Glenn Highway by Merrill Field (Airport).

We also enjoyed visiting Potter Marsh on the southern edge of Anchorage and the snowplow train display just a little further south.

I. ANCHORAGE - VALDEZ - TOK - HAINES - SKAGWAY

Road conditions: Good except for the section between Palmer and Glennallen and the US portion of the highway into Haines.

Total miles this segment: 1024

DAY 74: ANCHORAGE - GLENALLEN

Miles: 179

Portions of the Glenn Highway on this route are being modernized, and there were numerous construction zones and pavement breaks between Palmer and Glennallen, altogether making this a slow day. However, there are numerous sightseeing and blueberry picking opportunities (in early August) that also made for a short-distance day. There are numerous RV Parks in Glenallen, along with many picturesque pullovers. We stayed at the junction of the Richardson and Glenn Highways at the visitor center and enjoyed a magnificent view of the Wrangell Mountains.

DAY 75 - 82: GLENALLEN - VALDEZ

Miles: 115

This is one of the most scenic drives in Alaska, along with the drive from Anchorage down the Turnagain Arm to Seward. However, be sure to fill up with fuel in Glennallen as fuel is much more expensive in Valdez. Along the way, you will see waterfalls, snow-capped mountains and raging rivers fed by glaciers. There are numerous turnouts along the way that offer boondocking with a great view. However, DO NOT take a large RV into Blueberry Lake state campground as the road is VERY rough. Worthington Glacier is the most impressive glacier on the route, and a stop at the Worthington State Recreation Area is worthwhile. If you are here to fish, the best shore fishing is on Allison Point, on the other side of the bay from downtown Valdez near the oil terminal. This road is about 8 miles north of downtown Valdez, just south of the truck weigh station. There is a campground located along the shore and you can boondock there for \$10/night as there are no hookups. As an alternative, there are several campgrounds with full hookups in downtown Valdez for around \$20/night. Bay View and Eagle's Rest are highly recommended, and Eagle's Rest has a Good Sam's discount. There are many things to do in Valdez and you can easily spend a week here. We enjoyed the bus tour of the Alaskan Pipeline terminus (get your tickets in town), even though it was expensive at \$15/person.

DAY 83: VALDEZ - TOK

Miles: 388

The Tok Cutoff between Glennallen and Tok has a lot of frost heaves and is narrow in some places, so it is best to take your time and travel at a reduced speed. Be sure to fill up at Tok, as these will be the best prices on fuel for a while. As we did on the trip up here, we ate at Gateway Salmon Bake and boondocked in the campground, which is free with dinner.

DAY 84 - 86: TOK - HAINES, AK

Miles: 330

There is a lot of construction and frost heaves on this stretch, so you may want to shorten

your day and stop at Haines Junction, which offers several commercial campgrounds and boondock opportunities. Also, the fuel prices at Haines Jct are on par with the fuel prices in Haines, with the current exchange rate. Since you will be driving in Canada today, remember to drive with your headlights on. The Hitch'em Up Campground, Alaskan Eagle and Oceanside RV Park are the major commercial parks in Haines. The Hitch'em Up Campground is the prettiest and the most expensive and they do not allow vehicle washing. Oceanside and Alaskan Eagle both allow vehicle washing and are less expensive. Oceanside has the best view, being right on the ocean. However, it is not much more than a parking lot with hookups (including CATV), and the road behind it is dusty. Alaskan Eagle also has an on-site restaurant with excellent food prices. There are some great boondock opportunities right along the water. At the end of Main Street, turn left (north) on Front Street and go about a mile to a large gravel turnout that will accommodate at least three large RV's. Further down the road are additional turnouts, some of which are small. There are also several state campgrounds in the area. The scenery here is magnificent.

DAY 87 - 88: HAINES - SKAGWAY

Miles: 12

The best way to get to Skagway from Haines is by ferry, and we made a reservation on the Alaska Marine Highway ferry for this trip. The cost is based on the length of your vehicle(s) and the number of people. The cost of our 37' motorhome was \$98, our Grand Caravan (16'6") was \$19, and \$20 per person. Since we were here late in the season, we were able to make our reservation only a day in advance. They will shut off your propane supply, so beware if your refrigerator only operates on propane. Your propane will be off for about 3 hours.

The best place to camp in Skagway is at Garden City RV park on State Street, as it has FHU for the same price as the city park, which only offers water and electric. However, the city park is adjacent to downtown shopping. There are also boondock opportunities within 5 miles north on the Klondike Highway.

If you have not been to Skagway before, you WILL want to spend more time. Unless you are a railroad buff, you may want to bypass the White Pass & Yukon Railroad ride, as it is relatively expensive and the train route pretty much parallels the Klondike Highway that you will be taking when you leave Skagway. Take the drive to Dyea and stop and read some of the tombstones at the cemetery. You may also want to see the Soapy Smith show.

J. SKAGWAY - TESLIN, YT

Road conditions from Skagway to the Alaskan Highway are very good with some frost heaves. The section from Klondike Hwy 2 to Teslin was generally fair, but you must beware of frost heaves. There is a lot of road construction, the roads are usually very narrow, winding and bumpy with frost heaves.

Total miles this segment: 180

DAY 89: SKAGWAY - TESLIN, YT

Miles: 180 (Klondike to the Alaskan Highway due to rain)

You have two options on your route. You can either take the Klondike Highway to Carcross and then go east on the Tagish Road to Jake's Corner. This route will save you about 40 miles, but about 14 miles on the Tagish Road is gravel. It is a good gravel road, but you may wish to avoid it if it is raining due to the mud. You may also want to visit Whitehorse again, in which case you would continue north on the Klondike until you get to the Alaskan Highway. We used the morning to continue our visit to Skagway, and we did not want to arrive too early for dinner at Muckluk Annie's tonight, about 7 miles west of Teslin. Remember, they offer free boondocking to all, and a free boatripe and carwash if you have dinner. The meals are a great bargain for US citizens due to the 1999 exchange rate.

K. TESLIN, YT - FT NELSON, BC

Road conditions: This is still the worst stretch of the Alaskan Highway. There is also a lot of wildlife on the road to be wary of. However, it is also very scenic, so take your time and drive slow.

Total miles this segment: 521

DAY 90: TESLIN, YT - FT. NELSON, BC

Miles: 521

This is the worst stretch of the Alaskan Highway, but it also has the best wildlife viewing opportunities. We saw bear, bison, dall sheep, deer, caribou and moose, all in one day. We boondocked at a truck weigh station that was closed for the evening on the south side of Ft Nelson. In the morning, we weighed our motorhome and toad as the scales had been left on.

Note that on our trip TO Alaska, it took us two days to go from Teslin to Ft Nelson and the return trip only took one. The reason for this is twofold. First, there was not as much construction on the return trip. Second, we had spent so much time fishing that we were now trying to cover as much ground each day as possible. You would be advised to make this a two-day trip.

L. FT. NELSON, BC - JASPER - LAKE LOUISE - BANFF

Road Conditions: The section from Ft Nelson to the Hudson Loop road is generally very good, but it is recommended that you do not take the Hudson Loop road as it is very steep, winding and narrow in many places. Instead, if you are going to Prince George, go via Dawson Creek. The roads from Prince George to Jasper and Banff are generally very good, but there are some minor frost heaves.

Total miles this segment: 905

DAY 91: FT NELSON, BC - PRINCE GEORGE, BC

Miles: 490

If you need fuel, avoid purchasing it in Ft Nelson if possible. It is 3 cents/liter cheaper about 120 mi south. Fuel prices are cheaper yet in Chetwynd. The best fuel prices are about 60 miles north of Prince George (especially diesel).

We took the Hudson Hope Loop from the Alaskan Highway at Milepost 53.7 to Chetwynd, and then Hwy 97 to Prince George. This was a mistake as the Hudson Hope Loop has numerous 10% grades and frost heaves. The result was slow travel and unnecessary wear and tear on the nerves and the RV. **DO NOT TAKE THE HUDSON HOPE LOOP!** Instead, take the Alaskan Highway all the way to Dawson Creek and then take Hwy 97 to Prince George.

At Prince George, we stayed at Hartway RV Park which is very nice. FHU and CATV for approx \$14 US.

Note that this was a long day's drive. It would be much easier to go via Dawson Creek and either stay in the mall parking lot, at a turnout or at an RV park in Dawson Creek.

DAY 92 - 96: PRINCE GEORGE, BC - JASPER, AB

Miles: 238

This is a good road, with only a few bumpy spots. Note that fuel is relatively expensive in Jasper and the remainder of the Lake Louise/Banff area, so fill up before you get here.

When you enter the park, you will get several brochures to help you plan your itinerary in the Jasper/Banff area. Admission to the Canadian National Parks is \$5/person/day, or an annual pass is available for \$35/person or \$70/group up to six for the Western National Parks, including Jasper, Banff and several others in the area. You could easily spend several weeks in the area.

Camping in this area is **ONLY** in designated campsites in the National Park. Fees vary from \$10 - \$24 (CDN), with most sites being boondock sites. There are no reservations taken, strictly first-come, first-served.

There are numerous campgrounds in Jasper, but only a Whistler campground offers a limited number of FHU sites. When you first arrive at Whistler, you will likely be assigned a site with no hookups. If you desire a site with hookups, come back to the camper registration station about 8:30AM the next morning and wait until a site becomes

available. Get there early to get in line as all sites are first come, first served.

There are many things to see and do in Jasper National Park. Our favorites were Maligne Canyon, Athabasca and Sunwapta Falls, and the drive to Maligne Lake. The drive to Mt Edith Cavell is very nice, but do not take your RV (unless it is a small Class C).

DAY 97 - 99: JASPER, AB - LAKE LOUISE, AB

Miles: 142

Roads are very good. If you have not visited the Columbia Icefield yet, stop on your way to Lake Louise. Visit the Icefield Center and take the Brewster Snocoach for a drive onto the Athabasca Glacier - just be sure you dress very warmly, with boots and waterproof shoes due to the ice and slush. Also, take a cup to sample the great, pure glacier water! Continuing on your way to Lake Louise, you will pass many spectacular glaciers and beautiful lakes.

While at Lake Louise, be sure to stop and see the Lake and also take the drive to Moraine Lake. Avoid weekends as it tends to get very crowded. Do not take a large RV to Moraine Lake, and avoid taking a large RV to Lake Louise if at all possible. Also, be advised that groceries are VERY limited and expensive at Lake Louise Village.

Camping at Lake Louise (Village) is limited to the Trailer Park. It has Electric only for \$22 (Cdn). Plan to get there as early as possible on an August weekend to get a site.

DAY 100 - 104: LAKE LOUISE, AB - BANFF, AB

Miles: 35

The town of Banff is a quaint little city of about 7000, with many sights to see and things to do. There is a Safeway for groceries, with reasonable prices on most items. There are numerous camping opportunities, all in the National Park. Tunnel Mountain Trailer Court is the only campground that offers full hookups, for about \$24 Canadian.

M. BANFF - GLACIER NATIONAL PARK - GREAT FALLS, MT

Road Conditions: Very good roads from Banff, AB, to St. Mary, MT. Initially, narrow, somewhat steep and winding roads east from St Mary improving to good roads to Great Falls.

Miles this segment: 429

DAY 105 - 107: BANFF, AB - ST. MARY, MT (GLACIER NATIONAL PARK)

Miles: 255

If you have the time, we recommend that you also stop at Waterton Lake National Park in Waterton, Alberta. We did not stop and we have regretted this decision. Your annual Alberta Park Pass will also admit you to this park.

We stayed at Chewing Blackbones RV Park about 7 miles north of St Mary because it was a Passport Park. \$10 for FHU, with a maximum stay of one week.

We drove the Going to the Sun Road, and it was spectacular. Note that it is limited to vehicles with a maximum width of 8 feet and a maximum length (combined with any trailer) of 21 feet. Needless to say, we drove our Caravan. There are numerous hiking and sightseeing opportunities along this road, but you must take the Trail of Cedars near Avalance Campground.

After we drove the Going to the Sun Road, we took the southern route along the edge of the park back to St Mary, which made for a long drive. Along the way, we took the Two Medicine Lake road and a short hike to Running Bear Falls, which was nice. We also took the Many Glacier scenic drive at Babb. Compared to what we saw at Jasper and Banff, these glaciers were a real letdown!

Note that groceries in and near Glacier National Park are limited and expensive. The closest real grocery store is in Browning, MT, which is a long drive for groceries!

DAY 108: ST MARY, MT - GREAT FALLS, MT

Miles: 174

This was the official end of our trip. This time, we stayed in the Sam's Club parking lot as the Wal-Mart parking lot was all torn up. We had the trip of a lifetime and can't wait to go back!

SECTION 5: CUSTOMIZING YOUR TRIP

Even if you follow our route, you may want to modify the amount of time you spend at each place. This is easily done. If you are interested in salmon fishing, be sure you are on the Kenai Peninsula and/or Valdez in early-mid July for the reds, early August for the pinks, and early September for the silvers. If you want to fish for Kings, it is best to take a charter during June. Note that these timeframes are approximate and vary each year.

If your constraints will not allow you to follow our route, the first thing that I would cut out would be the trip to Haines and the ferry to Skagway. I would definitely go to Skagway as it is not too far from the Alaskan Highway and is a beautiful drive. If you really want to see Haines, leave your RV at Skagway and take the ferry. This is also considerably less expensive than taking your RV on the ferry. Downtown Haines is within walking distance of most ferries (except the Alaska Marine Highway Ferry) which will allow you to see most of the sights.

The next thing that I would cut out would be Fairbanks. Instead, I would go from Tok to Anchorage and drive north from Anchorage on the Parks Highway to Denali National Park, which I definitely would not miss!.

We found the side trip to Jasper, Banff (CDN) and Glacier (US) National Parks to be outstanding. Of course, this can also be covered in a separate trip if you do not have the time. I would not cut short my time in Alaska just to go to Banff, Jasper and Glacier National Parks, simply because of the distance and expense of getting to Alaska. But I would certainly go back here on another trip.

Our personal favorites for sightseeing were Denali, Seward / Kenai Peninsula, Valdez and Skagway. If you have limited time on the Kenai Peninsula, at least go to Seward and Exit Glacier. If you want to do some serious fishing, visit Soldotna, Kenai and Homer. These are also fine sightseeing trips if you do not want to fish.

Another option would be to go down the Cassiar Highway to the towns of Stewart and Hyder. Note that there is about 130 miles of gravel to deal with. This road is not too bad if it was recently graded (travel at 35 mph is possible), although it will be either dusty or muddy - or both! However, this is an outstanding, scenic route and you will likely see many bears at Hyder. From there, you can either go east to Prince George and continue to Jasper and Great Falls, or continue south to Vancouver and Seattle.