



The midnight sun greets us at our campsite in Inuvik

July 17th to July 21st



Inuvik to Tuktoyakyuk (boat) 6 hours
Tuktoyaktuk to Inuvik (plane) 30 minutes

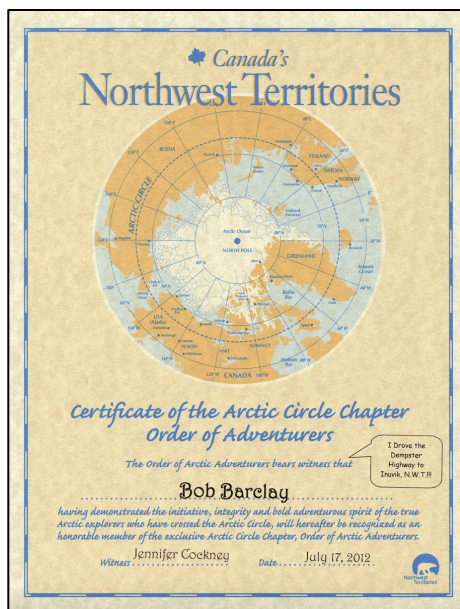
Chapter Nine

Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk

After our late arrival and celebration the previous evening we spent some time over breakfast, reflecting on those early dreams of coming here in our new RV. While we always believed we could do this, we did question whether we *would* actually do it. And here we were in Inuvik on Bob's birthday, the pinnacle of our hopes and dreams.

The first task was to find the booking agent for our trip to Tuktoyaktuk. After all, we had come so far that we couldn't miss seeing the Arctic Ocean. We found the Up North Tours booking agent in the lobby of one of the local hotels, made a booking for July 19th, and learned that the trip would start at 6:00am at the Up North Tours office. The tour guide would be taking us by boat to Tuktoyaktuk, and after a tour there we would be dropped off at the airport and fly back to Inuvuk, where we would be met on our return. We were pleased to learn that Up North Tours is an entirely aboriginal-owned company.

The booking done it was time to go shopping. Bob had requested beef bourguignon for his birthday dinner, so our next stop was the grocery store where we were pleasantly surprised at the prices. After picking up the needed items we set off to the Western Arctic Regional Visitor Centre where we received the official documents certifying our arrival above the Arctic Circle.



Our certification as visitors to the Northwest Territories



The Western Arctic Regional Visitor Centre with a sculpture in the foreground



The famous Igloo Church was the next stop, and after that we just wandered around the town noticing how different things were here. For example, we were fascinated by all the exterior plumbing. Because of the permafrost, all the conduits bringing water and electricity to the houses and removing waste water were insulated and above ground. This, together with raising the houses on mini stilts, is a practical way of coping with the permafrost.



*The Igloo Church
(left)*

*Aboveground
plumbing and
houses on stilts
(below)*



Our campground was the only one in the centre of Inuvik, so we were happy to meet our friends Sandy and Brett when they arrived. They had stopped earlier than us the night before, and had stayed in a campground a little way outside Inuvik. Other campers happily told us about the air show the military were putting on that evening, just for Bob's birthday apparently! The campground actually overlooked the airfield, which meant we had prime seats for the show.

Another couple were towing a very fancy rowboat, and told us about their son and three friends who were about to row across the Arctic Ocean to Russia. These four guys were extreme adventurers; rowing across the Atlantic, climbing Everest, swimming across the English Channel, etc. We took a good look at the boat, which was equipped with

Janet Barclay

all the most up to date mod-cons including solar panels, wind generator, sat phones, a GPS that sent their location automatically every 15 seconds, and so on. The team left Inuvik on July 17th and arrived at Port Hope, Alaska 41 days later having rowed over 1,000 miles. They were short of their goal, but given the terrible weather they encountered, it was a phenomenal achievement.



*The rowboat
for a trip to
Russia*

Back at the campsite we encountered a figure we recognized. During our drive up to Inuvik, we had come upon several cyclists. Given the conditions, they were either splattered unrecognizably with mud or vanishing into clouds of dust. We had noticed this guy while waiting at the Peel River ferry. He had panniers either side of his front wheel, matching panniers at the rear, a rack across the back, and the frame festooned with bottles and bags. At that time we commented on the dedication of cycling this road. Two days later there he was at our campsite in Inuvik. He told us he had pedaled from Tacoma, Washington and didn't make much of a big deal of it, saying he had the time to travel slowly, which allowed for his perceived lack of stamina. He just thought if you're in no particular

hurry to get anywhere you can take your time, which he did. Just the thought of contemplating those distances was simply exhausting, and we admired his dedication in riding all this way. After all, he had to face the ride back, all 730km of it.

Roman, our erstwhile hitchhiker, had found a tenting spot in our campground where he met a number of other hitchhikers, cyclists and young people traveling light. It was interesting to note that the 'tenters' didn't sleep on the ground, but had raised wooden platforms with anchors for guy ropes, yet another accommodation for the permafrost.

Suddenly we were back in the social whirl. After Bob's birthday dinner we watched the air show while chatting to a number of campers. The air show itself was really good; mainly military aircraft: helicopters, fighter jets, an Aurora search and rescue plane, and a Twin Otter. There were parachute jumpers and the show naturally finished off with the Snowbirds. After the show Roman invited us out for a drink to thank us for driving him up here. So, once the Snowbirds had flown away, we went off with him to the Hotel Mackenzie, one of the better bars in town. We were soon joined by a couple of young women, who were also hitchhiking their way around the North and had already met Roman, so we chatted with them for a while as well. On our walk back to the RV that night we realized we were already adapting to the long days and staying up much later than we would do at home.