

Preston And Trailer Make It To Anchorage Via Alaskan Highway's Dust, Mud, Curves

Adventurous Pair Get Mighty Tired Of Those Sardines

Below is the Pilot's first communication from Preston Matthews of Southern Pines, who, accompanied by Fred Patton of Rocky Mount, set off for Anchorage, Alaska, early in June.

We hope to have later bulletins telling of life in Anchorage, a city where Preston informs us, the Little Theatre has just put on a week's run of "South Pacific," and a room rents for \$125 a month. (Much they care—they're living in the trailer.)

He enclosed a weather report for Wednesday, July 9: low 44, high 62; sunrise 2:38 a. m., sunset 9:29 p. m.

Some months ago we decided that we would like to take a trip to Alaska and stay for a year or so. Having heard about the fantastic rents charged up there, we decided to get a house trailer and pull it to the Land of the Midnight Sun. We finally located one in Raleigh that seemed to suit our purpose. It belonged to a lady school teacher. The thing squeaked at night when the wind was blowing and kept her awake. It was just what we wanted. The trailer was a 28-foot Elcar, and its all-aluminum exterior made it ideal for Arctic weather.

We spent the next several months in feverish preparation. We located a one-ton Studebaker pickup truck to pull the thing. Spare tires and wheels were located for both the truck and the trailer, for we had been reading and hearing about the perils of the Alaskan Highway. A 1,000-watt light plant was set up on the back of the truck, along with two 50-gallon barrels for water and gasoline. A few cases of food were set aside, including a case of sardines.

Finally everything was in readiness. Neither of us had ever pulled a trailer before, and with some misgivings, we hooked up and headed north. Riding in the heavily loaded truck, and pulling the heavy trailer, gave one the sensation of riding in a rocking boat. We soon got used to that,

and settled down for the long ride to Alaska.

We took the route through Virginia and connected with the Pennsylvania Turnpike near Harrisburg. The Turnpike was ideal for trailer pulling. The hills were gradual and the roadway was wide. We zoomed along at 40 miles per hour.

Everything was proceeding according to plan. The truck was comfortable, and at night we pulled off the road to some good parking place and spent the night in the trailer.

About two days out of North Carolina, the trouble started. We had just passed through a tunnel on the Turnpike, and had started down a steep hill when it happened. We felt a terrific jolt and heard a terrible scraping sound. We pulled the outfit rapidly off the highway and climbed out of the truck just in time to see our trailer wheel rolling down across the Pennsylvania countryside.

The wheel was ruined, along with the brake drum, also the electric brake system of the trailer.

With long faces, we unhitched the truck and drove to the nearest Turnpike exit, about three miles away. We told the guard what had happened. He was frantic! "You can't park your trailer on the Turnpike," he shouted. We assured him that it could not be moved without a wheel. "But you absolutely cannot park on the Turnpike," he insisted. Patiently we explained that we had no way to move it off. "Well, if you are going to insist on parking the thing on the Turnpike, I will give you a parking permit," he finally said. That settled that.

The garage we located had none of the parts required to put the trailer back in running order. We had to drive 65 miles to Pittsburgh to get the necessary items. Everything was going along fine. We took our new wheel off the truck (the one we had so thoughtfully purchased before leaving North Carolina for just such an emergency) and gave it to the mechanic. It wouldn't fit! Once again we drove, 65 miles to Pittsburgh and with some difficulty located the proper wheel. We drove back to the trailer, and mounted our new recap tire on our new wheel.

Having spent 24 hours and \$95 beside the road and as the impatient looks from the Turnpike officials were becoming more frequent, we hooked up and headed down the highway. Some five minutes later we heard a loud "bang!" Our new recap tire had blown out.

Alaska seemed to get farther and farther away. We took off the tire, and put an old one back on the wheel. We were just 400 miles from home and troubles seemed to be coming thick and fast.

We unasily drove the entire length of the Turnpike that day, and late that night reached the Ohio border. About 11 o'clock, we decided it was time for a little rest. We found a nice spot under some big trees and proceeded to park. We started up our gasoline-driven light plant, and fixed a nice supper of fried chicken, canned vegetables, etc., listened to the radio for a while and then retired for the night.

Imagine our surprise the next morning to discover that we had parked in the front yard of a farm home. The entire family was on hand to see us on our way. No happy farewells or anything like that. Just hard looks!

We skirted around Chicago and headed north into Wisconsin. On Sunday, after leaving North Carolina Tuesday, we reached St. Paul, and headed north across the plains of North Dakota. Here we ran headlong into a strong wind, and for some 24 hours could not get the truck up over 25 miles per hour.

We spent a few hours exploring the Bad Lands of North Dakota. The section seems to be a miniature version of the Grand Canyon. We drove uneventfully through Montana and finally, 2,800 miles from North Carolina, reached the Canadian border. The Customs House is located at Cutts, and we arrived there too late at night to get clearance through. We pulled the trailer into a parking lot, and through the courtesy of the Canadian guard, spent a restful night.

As we were preparing to leave the next morning, we heard a "putt-putt" sound. A boy on a motorbike came driving up. He was a 17-year-old high school student from Denver, Colo.

He informed us that he was going to drive the motor-bike up the Alaskan Highway to Alaska. We laughed and laughed. The idea was absurd. He didn't have a chance of completing the trip.

is the approach to the Alaskan highway, is unpaved and is surely the muddiest, dustiest and roughest road in all of North America. We began to have serious misgivings about our ability to complete the trip, for we knew we had to travel over almost 2,000 miles of unpaved roads before reaching our destination.

We finally struggled into Dawson Creek. This little frontier town is Milepost No. 1 of the famous Alaskan Highway. We stopped over for a few hours to catch our breath and to get up nerve to go on. As we ate in a little restaurant, a stranger leaned across the table and inquired if we were from the North or the South. "The South," we proudly told him. Some moments later we realized that he thought we were from the South—in Canada. He asked us what we thought of the way "those damned Americans are handling the situation in Korea." We told him that we did not think they were doing such a good job. He beamed on us, shook our hands and went on his way.

We drove on out to the approach to the Alaskan Highway, which is about a mile from Dawson Creek. We got quite a surprise. It was a big, four-lane, smooth gravel road. Our troubles were over! We could easily pull a trailer over this fine road.

We drove about 75 miles on the highway the first night before we pulled over to park for the night. It was pouring down rain the next morning and we hit MUD the first mile. We slipped and slid all over the road for hours and hours. Then the big four-lane road suddenly dwindled into a narrow, muddy, crooked two-lane road.

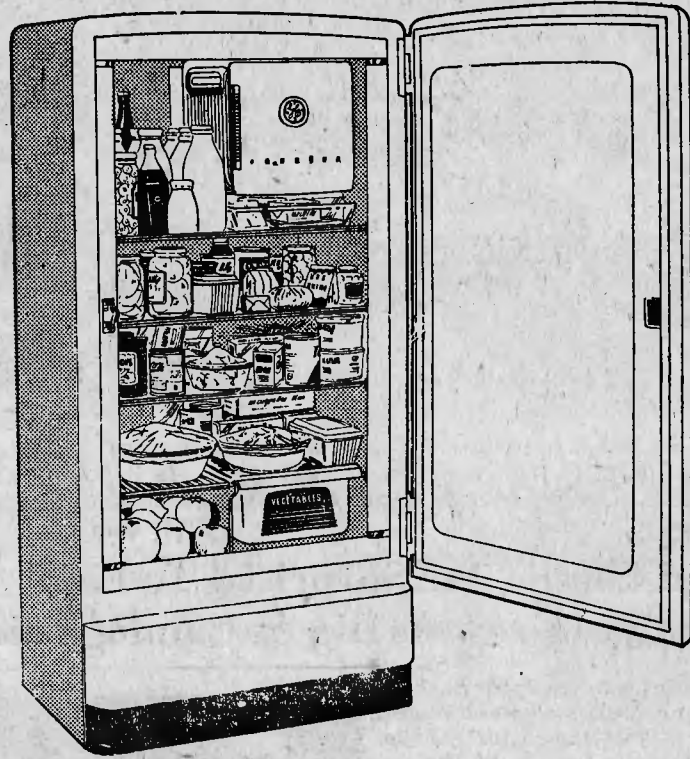
For the first 500 miles we had rain and plenty of mud. All this combined with steep mountain climbs and descents made for an exciting time. There isn't a guard rail on the entire road and the hairpin turns put to shame anything in the Blue Ridge or Great Smokies. All of a sudden we ran out of the rain and hit the dust. It was much worse than the mud. It was so thick that at times we had to turn the truck lights on to keep other vehicles from hitting us. This went on for the next 500 miles or so.

But our morale stayed high. We (Continued on page 13)

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