

CV DRIVER

# BUSH TRUCKERS

## AN AMAZING ADVENTURE IN THE FROZEN WASTES OF CANADA - PART 1

Russell Fowler, chief executive officer of FuelDefend Global Ltd, recently took part in a trek across the wastelands of Canada with a group of other truckers.

Here is the first of his reports...

### THE BACKGROUND

Chance bumping into each other on LinkedIn and still think each other contacted first – Vlad Pleskot, owner, VP Express, Winnipeg, Canada – exchanged info and realised Vlad was one of TV's Ice Road Truckers.

In January, after a few communications Vlad suggested I join them for a trek across the frozen lakes in March.

Agreed immediately for an adventure, not knowing what an adventure it would be. With

little more info than "it gets very cold" from Vlad, the trip was planned. To play safe Vlad advised getting there before mid-March, which was ideal as MATS followed soon after. I shipped some anti-siphons and posters to Vlad and a few weeks later headed into Covent Garden to get kitted out for some extreme temperatures and the wet.

### THE CHALLENGE

Arrived late at night in Winnipeg via Chicago. Met Vlad, Hugh

"Polar Bear" Rowlands and Rick Yemm from Ice Road Truckers for late breakfast at The Fairmont Hotel Disaster. Extraordinary heat wave hit southern Manitoba, swinging from -20C to +15C within a few days, with seasonal records being broken by 7C. Hugh, Rick and the film crews were ready to return, having got some great footage already and knowing that there was little chance of anything more.

The southern winter roads in the area to the north east of Winnipeg and south east of Thompson had already turned to soft swampy

muskeg and the frozen lakes, essential to accessing the area, were melting very fast.

Vlad apologised profusely, not that he could control the weather, but had an idea. After lunch we headed for Winnipeg's main area for an afternoon of Monster Trucks – not quite what I'd come to Canada for, but why not?

The evening was spent with Vlad and IRT team and another Welsh driver doing his first season, successfully consuming a bellyful of beers and spirits; the teams were mentally wrapping up at the end of a very short ice roads

### Steve Moorehead

Age 43, lifetime trucking, lives in Thompson, owner operator with a wife Sandra.

Looking facially like Robert Shaw the actor and with an occasional Irish twang to match. Steve is a tough nut but a truly lovable character, spending much time away from home, but devoting himself to looking after two young Native Indian children with severe handicaps arising from FAS, a condition all too familiar in the Native communities.

Steve talked at length about them. If only others had his kindness. Steve's mother was in hospital and seriously ill, but he was unable to get word from the outside world as to her condition. S is a deeply religious man, so we chatted about some big subjects, some of his stories from the bush, his contacts with The King in Lynn Lake, his ambitions for his business and that he wanted to give up smoking, having given up booze some years back.

### Henry Latkolik

Age 47 with a lifetime in trucking as driver and dispatcher and first season doing the ice roads, working for Polar Industries.

Lives in Ottawa and looking to move north. H reminded me of Mike Farrell from his MASH days. Like so many of the drivers Henry has had heart problems and smokes heavily and wants to cut down. Henry and Steve would always wind down the window for a puff as we drove, even if -20C outside, ensuring we all stayed awake if nothing else. Steve's other half Sherry was a love from many years back, separated and bumped into each other again several years ago and H and I found that we had a close bond – both being Coronation Street husbands in households when all stops for the folk from Manchester. Spent my nights in the upper bunk above Henry, so we got to know each other well over ten days.



# N WINTER ROADS

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**Vlad Bleskot**

Boss man. An extraordinary person. About 15 years ago Vlad was a professional football player for Sparta Prague second, with aspirations for the first team... broke back in malicious attack by opposing forward, year in hospital recovering, end of career, went through some tough times, seven years ago arrived in Canada with \$30 and now running a first rate trucking operation... sharp operator, been on IRT and will feature more prominently. Offered RDF chance to join - on a whim - and not just super host but drove 1,100kms to rescue and wouldn't accept a penny for costs even.

**Rick Yemm**

One of Hugh Rowland's employees, this brash, tattooed trucker, also from Kelowna, was in his second year as an Ice Road trucker during Season 1. In 2006, Rick was one of the first truckers onto the Ice Road after it opened when, according to him, the sound of cracking ice was loudest. This stressful experience almost caused him to quit driving the Ice Road right then and there. He decided to continue, however, remarking: "I was too stupid and too stubborn to quit."

A veteran of the Canadian ice roads, Rick isn't short on confidence, and he'll need it every minute of every day on the Indian roads. Sporting his bright blue Mohawk, he's not afraid to announce he's out of his element, but that won't stop him from saying or doing what he wants, all with the goal of becoming king of the road.

season - financially not good for anyone. Gradually, it was dawning on me that I'd put myself in the hands of Vlad with total trust,

yet knew very little of the trip to come. We wouldn't be trucking to any mines or pipelines, but delivering supplies to one of many Native Indian Reserves

scattered around mid and northern Manitoba.

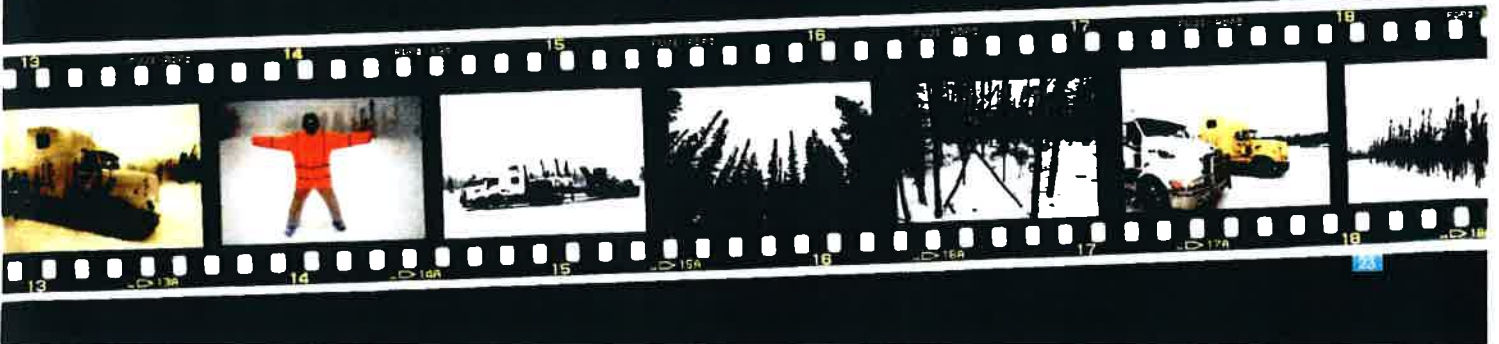
**THE TRUCKS & DRIVING**

Henry - 1.7 million miles 1998

**Freightliner**

Steve - 2.0 million miles 1994 Peterbilt

Trucks have to be old and basic. Basic to be able to enact bush ▶



# BUSH TRUCKERS ON WINTER ROADS



repairs with limited means. Old in case of getting stuck in the bogs or broken down and irretrievable, knowing that in the ten months between freezes the truck would either become submerged or cannibalised. No satellite communications

(only CB radios with a surprisingly limited range), no winches nor ladders familiar to me from my days in Africa to escape deep sands and mud, limited tyre chains (some borrowed by Steve from Lynn Lake) Bits falling off – Henry's

window winder – spent trip with mole grips clamped to spindle for super slow action; a worsening crack across the windscreen.

Trucks take a massive pounding, spending 14hrs a day bouncing and regularly hitting snow covered rocks on the run up to hills. Sometimes hitting rocks so hard that, despite bracing with arms and legs, was lifted off the seat into a standing position. Damage to mudguards and skirts, wheel rims.

Driven with great skills – often with tall loads making cornering precarious, uphill around a bend on an angles road, keeping momentum, but also avoiding braking, taking carefully judged lines. Driving through driving snow, sometimes in darkness. Always judging the length and amplitude of hardened waves and ripples of snow and ice comprising the road, judging the effect on a fifty foot trailer

behind, sometimes having to brake hard, but mindful of avoiding jack-knifing. Henry being new chained up at start of the winter roads, while Steve being a veteran and with own truck being concerned about tyre wear and avoiding chains until absolutely necessary.

Truck engines kept running for a week to avoid freezing at night and to heat the cabin as temperatures plummet. 4x4 FLT from Ryder at Thompson on flatbed also kept ticking over for immediate use at Tadoule in expectation of little help or use of equipment from the villagers. Parking up at night on the flat without applying brakes to avoid overnight freezing, but even then Steve having problems on first morning in bush. Moving trucks back and forth while holed up through the blizzard to avoid being snowed in. Judging line and speed to take driving over softening

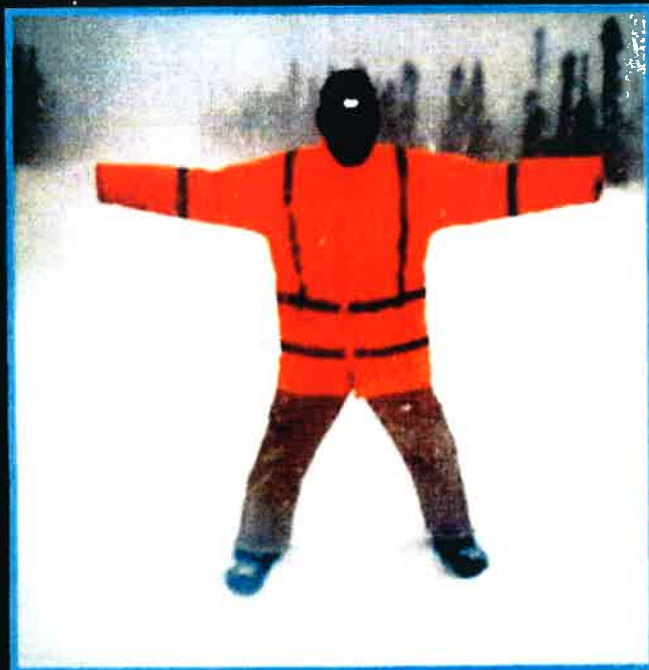
## *Hugh Rowland*

*Hugh's trucks all have the emblem R&R Hoo Service on the doors - the company Hugh owns in Winfield, BC. Rick runs as a trucker for the 10 months outside the IRT season. Both are well involved in the Deadliest Roads spin off. Hugh "The Polar Bear" Rowland has been on every season of Ice Road Truckers thus far. A very rough-around-the-edges 20-year veteran of ice-road trucking, Hugh (born 1957) is based in Kelowna in southern British Columbia. He claims to be known by the Ice Road trucking community as "The Polar Bear," which he says is a reference to his strong personality, bearish attitude, stamina and consistently high number of loads delivered per season. Hugh owns four trucks and drives one while the other three are manned by ice road rookies Drew Sherwood and Todd White, as well as friend and year-round employee Rick Yemm.*



roads with muskeg showing when streams enter and leave the frozen lakes, and same across iced sections with no snow on top to provide grip. All this hard enough in a 4x4, let alone a full length trailer. More, when approaching a deep snow drift, reversing a 100m, judging a line and taking at full speed, grinding to a halt as the undercarriage gradually becomes bogged in the deep snow, only to have to be pulled out (by the second truck with a long loaded trailer, itself struggling to get a grip in reverse ordinarily), to take another run, to be pulled out again and to take a third and finally successful run only to have to face hour

after hour of careful driving through deepened snow along a tortuous track, snowdrifts pulling the steering left then right, drivers being careful not to overcompensate. Learnt plenty about the trips on frozen lakes; keeping to a maximum of 15kms/hr to avoid the subsurface wave overtaking the truck and bursting through weaknesses in the ice ahead of the vehicle; listening carefully to the cracking and crunching of the ice below; taking the long sweeping curves as leaving the lakes to avoid forming a wave breaking on the shore. Yuri the blue Volvo, Paul the black Kenworth, Daniel the white Volvo.



Joey "The King of Obsolete" Barnes  
Lives in Lynn Lake with his young daughter. Author of two books and authority on the original CAT-trains; the Sigfussoy Company started the winter road network for fishing and freight initially. There was a railroad 650 miles north from Winnipeg to a mining town called Flin Flon which acted as the gateway to the north. They transported trains consisting of cats and sleighs over ice. The equipment included: 2 cats, various tractors and International TD6s weighing 4 tons each. The 2 cats had forged ice grousers to move more efficiently through the snow and ice. The lead tractor (plough cat) had a Lake Winnipeg plough. "Cat trains" consisted of tractors, cats and swings. Each cat pulled 2-3 cargo sleighs, which resembled farm wagons on runners. When the road breaking crew encountered cracks in the ice, they would bridge the cracks in the ice with wooden wedges. Several machines and men sank; drowned through the ice.

## TO BE CONTINUED IN THE NEXT ISSUE

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