

# AN AMAZING ADVENTURE IN THE FROZEN WASTES OF CANADA

In the **last two issues** we've been reporting on the trip undertaken by **Russell Fowler**, chief executive officer of **FuelDefend**, who trekked across the **frozen wastelands** of Canada helping deliver vital supplies to the people who live there. Here **Russell continues with his diary...**

## Day One

Breakfast with Vlad, Hugh Rowlands at Fairmont Hotel, Rick Yemm, ice road melting rapidly, afternoon monster trucks, evening drinking,

## Day Two

All meet, 24 hr runs, plot final runs, negotiate, the big drop, Henry, big cab, noon leave, long drive to Thompson, met Derek at fuelling en route. Slept outside cement factory. Drive at night if soft South rd to Wasagamack soft on Sat night. 36hrs can't stop. Tues search and rescue out for 20 trucks, IRT out to film.

## Day Three

Thompson to LL to +40kms. Thompson, blue skies, clear, meet Steve, provisions, replace fridge, last mobile signal, gravel road to Lynn Lake, refuel (last), Steve chains from The King, gravel roads for 47kms along ridge, hit winter road, Henry chained up, coffee, to +40kms. Dangerous road slide off the cliff. Steve only one chained. Out of screen washer. Winter road, slow start, wobbling load, first hills throbbing cabin No booze reservations no mobile Driver company Politics, relationships Passing nighttime convoy Passing etiquette Driver help Henry sleep Fuelling stops Sat radio cb Carry in houses school bus cement mixer Frozen lakes 15kms/hr the wave, bends to start finish. Water on top good indicator not draining. Popping & crackling.

## Overnight Tuesday 13th.

Left Lynn Lake, 47kms on gravel road to Winter Roads start. Pushed through to 50kms after 3.5 hours driving with 1.5 at night. Passed two trucks heading south from Lac



**Out on the edge:** one of the trucks prepares to set off across the **frozen wastelands**. It's all in a day's work, whatever the weather throws at the drivers

B. No snow even though predicted big storm coming in. Found pull in just after bend on slight incline after narrow crossing after long gradual hill and decline.

Parked at 9:20pm. Steve on right, Henry on left, both tight to edge to keep big lane free for passing trucks. H rolled vehicle back and forth to firm down snow and ice and to cool tyres. Cordon blue by Henry – cold crunchy carrots, now cold chicken bits in breadcrumbs and fried gammon steaks. Oreo cookies followed.

Smoked and chatted and planned day ahead. Well into the bush now but with a long way to go. Bedded down about 10:30pm. Henry took meds and was zonked immediately.

Engine on all night. throbbing. Blue lights of display but no need for curtains as case in town last night. RDF did a few notes on iPhone and lights out about 11:00pm, with

lights and rumbling of convoy about 15 mins later.

About six vehicles. Stripped to underpants and top, now four days worn, but sleeping bag zipped only to knees. Thin pillow and Timberland Alaskan coat formed a decent headrest. Mountain bag on driver's seat, camera bag on fridge and odds bag at feet.

## Day Four

105kms. Bouchet turn & blizzard overnight Nodded soon after for deep sleep until about 5am when feeling slight cold. Tossed and alarm off at 6am as planned, but no movement from Henry, nor Steve, so waited and dozed until 6:30am, then dozed again until just before 7am.

Decided on nether region wash with two wet wipes, then out for a crap. Temp only at zero, no snow, nor any overnight and slightest breeze only.

High rating Berghaus fleece over hooped WP cotton t-shirt. Walked about 100m down road wary of wolves and bears, even though not sure they're about.

Managed to lean backwards onto frozen snow berm at side of road. At these times and venues no time for a leisurely read of Private Eye. One min max and all down or as much as was likely to happen without a longer wait. Still dark so very wary standing up and wiping. Covered spoor with frozen snow – a delight for some creature or other come the thaw. In fact a reverse delight for me and felt proud it all went so smoothly shitting in the Canadian bush, which is what bears do, apparently.

Back to truck, found soap and washed hands in snow – fingers frozen quickly. Cleaned teeth and felt good.

Changed clothes entirely and felt even better. Now 7:30am and Henry still dead to the world and no lights on in Steve's. Woke both and after a coffee (following lukewarm remnants of yesterday's tea from noon) with Steve, all ready for the off.

Target was Tadoule by around six, overnight stay and back early next day. H fitted four single tyre chains, but S decided not to. All went well with H, but S stuck firm, rear wheel brakes having frozen.

Tried forward and back, but started digging in with driving wheels. Wondered about Afr experience with branches. Wondered why no mats or ladders for under wheels? H went around front and reversed to push with no luck, then drove to back and reversed to back of S while S tied snapped tow strap.

**Dangerous road slide off the cliff.** Steve only one chained. Out of screen washer. Winter road, slow start, wobbling load, first hills throbbing cabin **No booze reservations** no mobile **Driver company Politics,** relationships Passing night time convoy Passing etiquette Driver help Henry sleep Fuelling stops Sat radio cb Carry in houses school bus cement mixer **Frozen lakes 15kms/hr the wave.** bends to start finish. Water on top good indicator not draining. **Popping & crackling.**

**Wonder of the world:** If you don't expect the **Northern Lights,** one of the world's great sights takes on an even more magical **celestial aspect**



Easy move for 3m. Muskeg showing through and furrow only 15cm deep, but getting no traction.

Light wet snow got heavier and lighter for first hour or so. Terrain became more hummocky and hit one series of rocks unseen bouncing cab a metre or so and Steve and me 50-70cm off seats. Him grappling for steering, gears and brakes.

S running without chains so taking different lines into bends partic over hills, keeping close to inner bend to allow for degree of drift. S with 12 bags of cement (which settles and so strap checking required on tarred roads but moreso bush roads

#### Day Five

Snow drifts, checking roads ahead, slow progress and uncertain of new major drifts and whether Derek ahead may be trapped at Reserve. Overnight at around 205kms.

Many trees down from blizzard.

Lodge 125km at lake dead caribou winter hunting (latitude level with polar bears at Churchill). Ravens.

130 km desolate burned area from major burn of two years ago

Steve tales of -58C at Sag at night after awful road over two fast rivers

Aim for MIT ranger hut. S & Sandra two kids & two disabled native fostered, passionate converted religious Jesus oldest man (sun, stars, moon, earth, you'd think would be same time everywhere), grade three, ex drinker, family drinks, lost son in divorce, built own house etc proudly in detail, crafty when getting loads, scot ire ancestry, 43yrs, 5 yrs winter roads, but tiring, hydro work in summer, nickel logging with Aussies around Lynn Lake, ex petrol trucker, used to make \$1,500 selling groceries in reserves. Joking about leaving H while sleeping. Stories of natives but keeps views to self.

Disinterested MIT rangers then pushed on aiming for Silverwolf camp at 215 km by midnight.


Drove grey looking windswept snow with ripples obscuring humps. Managed 30kms with wind again, park left against trees, -14 C and wind chill. Piss to finish, glug Snapple peach, few tales from H over coleslaw crunchy carrots turkey mustard Wed night -18c, wind dropped. Reported 100km winds. Good sleep, cabin walls cold. 7:30am up, piss deep yellow, cleaned teeth, peanut butter & jam sarnies with milk from dirty cup. MIT stopped, young lads no news. Powdery roads, soon desolate haunting sun, grader pulling wheel passed soon after Silverwolf camp (on limit of Reserve?), then another MIT going south all ready to pull out.

Chase caribou

270 k(?) N58 18 967. W100 00 662 the snow drift. Four snapped towing straps. Reverse three times. RDF dig, -10C. Five mins without hat and ears frozen. Four feet drifts. Caribou and wolf spoor. RDF check 1 km ahead. S&H

heroes. Spooky sun, odd sounds, howls. Tony jack-knifing tales.

Celebratory coffee. S find some native girls for the summer. Jokes about diff getting home - haven't got in yet.

Uncertain whether following convoy will get through or been abandoned. Rd ahead drifts. And hill. Thru but more of same, moment difficult when going uphill on snow and bouncing. Natives know we're arriving? 

## Target was Tadoule by around six, overnight stay and back early next day



**Sunny side up!** The weather may look great but the temperatures are well below zero and it takes skill and courage to negotiate these roads

### The Northern Lights

If you don't expect the Northern Lights, one of the world's great sights takes on an even more magical celestial aspect.

An aurora (plural: aurorae or auroras) is a natural light display in the sky particularly in the high latitude (Arctic and Antarctic) regions, caused by the collision of energetic charged particles with atoms in the high altitude atmosphere (thermosphere). The charged particles originate in the magnetosphere and solar wind and, on Earth, are directed by the Earth's magnetic field into the atmosphere.

Aurora is classified as diffuse or discrete aurora.

Most aurorae occur in a band known as the auroral zone which is typically 3° to 6° in latitudinal extent and at all local times or longitudes. The auroral zone is typically 10° to 20° from the magnetic pole defined by the axis of the Earth's magnetic dipole. During a geomagnetic storm, the auroral zone will expand to lower latitudes. The diffuse aurora is a featureless glow in the sky which may not be visible to the naked eye even on a dark night and defines the extent of the auroral zone. In northern latitudes, the effect is known as the aurora borealis (or the northern lights), named after the Roman goddess of dawn, Aurora, and the Greek name for the

north wind, Boreas, by Pierre Gassendi in 1621. Auroras seen near the magnetic pole may be high overhead, but from farther away, they illuminate the northern horizon as a greenish glow or sometimes a faint red, as if the Sun were rising from an unusual direction. Discrete aurorae often display magnetic field lines or curtain-like structures, and can change within seconds or glow unchanging for hours, most often in fluorescent green. The aurora borealis most often occurs near the equinoctes. The northern lights have had a number of names throughout history. The Cree call this phenomenon the "Dance of the Spirits"