

Bush Truckers on Winter roads

In the last three 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 **finally finishes his gruelling journey...**

Day Six

Late start, team tired. 295km @ 3pm two hr delay. Turned into 6hrs delay. H stuck on the big drop. Convoy caught up behind. Derek stuck on hill and long wait for excavator. The Northern Lights. Derek tales. Passed Silverwolf camp at 225kms, soon into reserve, roads worsen, more topography, the big drop and rollercoaster, then bend to right and sharp hairpin to left before run-up to big hill and very sharp right hand bend. Derek stuck, Northern Light, Tadoule Lake at 328kms at midnight. Difficult to find level parking. Convoy came in over next hour.

Day Seven

Hell on earth for a Winter Road trucker at about the 315 kms mark and some 20 kms from the Tadoule Lake Village.

The Big Dipper, Left Elbow, Right Elbow and the monstrous Hairpin Hill.

Travelling in from the north-west the driver is confronted with a series of steepening hills, then the Big Dipper where the truck and trailer plummet into a steep dip and to be faced with another climb seemingly before the end

of the trailer has reached the bottom of the dip, turning then into a gentle right hand bend before a very tight left hander and a steep drop into the stream valley linking Shewfelt Lake some kilometres and an interlinking small lake on the northern side with the large Merrifield Lake.

Passing a narrow bridge picking up enough speed to run at a steep climb with a right hand bend, large granitic blocks defining the inner curve, before flattening out after 100m, giving time enough to push to maximum



Getting stuck in the snow is all part of a day's work for the truckers in the frozen wastes of Canada

The skies were laden with snow but little was falling. After several hours the blizzard came in from nowhere!

speed before launching at a tight left hand bend and a run up a steep hill for a few hundred metres, curving left again as momentum disappears before reaching the wide flat crest of the hill.

On our run, Derek's lead truck, a day or so ahead, got stuck on the very tight right hander at the base of the big hill, causing Steve leading our two truck convoy to brake hard after the sharp left hander before the base of the hill, while immediately alerting Henry on the CB to hit his brakes, causing Henry to get stuck in the middle of The Big Dipper.

Six hours later, seven more trucks in our convoy caught up. Part-Native Indian Derek was well ahead and had a reputation for driving very hard and long, but had been stuck for some days. Not knowing when, nor whether, the rest of the convoy would catch up, Derek decided a long walk to Tadoule Lake, knowing the area well.

The skies were laden with snow but little was falling. After several hours the blizzard came in from nowhere, leaving Derek in great difficulty to find the track ahead.

For three or four hours he pushed on before glancing back to see a wolf crossing the road behind him, then noticing one to his side, then becoming aware of perhaps six or eight wolves. Derek knew he could not sit to rest and so pushed on for several more hours until coming to the Tadoule Lake village and summoning help.

Several 4x4s returned him to his stranded truck, but attempting with no luck to extricate him. That's when we caught up with Derek. They returned to the village arrange a large

The Wildlife

The reindeer (*Rangifer tarandus*), also known as the caribou in North America, is a deer from the Arctic and Subarctic, including both resident and migratory populations. While overall widespread and numerous, some of its subspecies are rare and one (or two, depending on taxonomy) has already gone extinct.

Both sexes grow antlers, though they are typically larger in males. There are a few populations where females lack antlers completely.

Wild reindeer hunting and herding of semi-domesticated reindeer (for meat, hides, antlers, milk and transportation) are important to several Arctic and Subarctic people.

The reindeer is a widespread and numerous species in the northern Holarctic, being present in both tundra and taiga (boreal forest).

The females usually measure 162–205 cm (64–81 in) in length and weigh 80–120 kg (180–260 lb)[14] The males (or "bulls") are typically larger (although the extent to which varies in the different subspecies), measuring 180–214 cm (71–84 in) in length and usually weighing 159–182 kg (350–400 lb), though exceptionally large males have weighed as much as 318 kg (700 lb).

The colour of the fur varies considerably, both individually, and depending on season and subspecies. Northern populations, which usually are relatively small, are whiter, while southern populations, which typically are relatively large, are darker.

This can be seen well in North America, where the northernmost subspecies, the Peary caribou, is the whitest and smallest subspecies of the continent, while the southernmost subspecies, the Woodland Caribou, is the darkest and largest.

The coat has two layers of fur: a dense woolly undercoat and longer-haired overcoat consisting of hollow, air-filled hairs.

Russell Fowler

Chief Executive Officer
of FuelDefend

Hell on earth for a **Winter Road trucker** at about the 315 kms mark and some 20 kms from the **Tadoules Lake Village**. **The Big Dipper**, Left Elbow, Right Elbow and the **monstrous Hairpin Hill**. Travelling in from the **north-west** the driver is **confronted** with a series of **steepening hills**, then the **Big Dipper** where the truck and trailer **plummet into a steep dip**

excavator to make the journey, arriving some four or so hours later. The huge machine took an hour to drag Derek up to the straight flat section half way up the large hill. I returned to Steve's truck. He reversed back only 20m up a slight incline before the wheels spun. Steve launched the truck into full speed over the narrow bridge and up the first section of incline before yanking hard to the right around the large granite outcrop, desperately trying to keep momentum up until the slope levelled off and the road straightened, before pulling in behind Derek on a wide section of cleared space. The excavator passed heading south 500m to rescue Steve from the Big Dipper and 20 mins later he was alongside on the level section. The rest of the convoy would follow. Derek then had a run along the flat to the big left hander before climbing The Hill but failed, having taken too wide a line and losing momentum as he steered left. Derek reversed, pulled into the side and offered Steve the chance. Steve took a long run up with foot flat to the floor and tight to the right, then gently angling to the left aiming directly at a larger long ice covered rock outcrop to cut the corner, the truck being launched and the trailer bouncing even with full load of cement as it rode the granite, myself braced hard but still being flung around, facing the long climb up with full momentum, which gradually disappeared over the next few hundred metres. Steve still foot to the floor and worrying that his speed was faltering, then rapidly running down the gears until we reached the flat and the straight on the ridge of the hill. The ridge road was wide and the Northern



Lights were dancing. Following Steve's line on the corner Henry emerged some ten minutes to catch us up for the final short leg to Tadoule. It was about 10:30pm and we aimed to be in the village within the hour, striking NW and passing to the north of Edmondson Lake and another equally large unnamed lake. O/night Tadoule Lake, Sayisi Dene First Nation Reserve

Friday -29C min overnight max -10C thru Thurs. Great cereal. Slow start for all. Derek said brilliant dancing lights about 12:30. Slow loading/unloading day. Unloaded flt then airport for cement. Probs starting mixer on flatbed. Hauled off with excavator, tractor and trailers loaded also. Heavier trailers, reserve of fuel and drivers. I'm popping outside I may be gone a while.

Broken springs and leaking hydraulics (Yuri), frozen brakes and broken solenoid (Steve), frozen cement mixer engine, broken wheel rims, broken bumpers and snapped toe hitches. Frozen lashings. Frozen everything. No toilets at contractors, airport closed as soon as plane left. Coffees. Heavy snow again. Restocked at shop. Offloaded at shop.

Day Eight

Saturday: Start 5:45am from MIT camp. -13C driving Fri with max +5C, but only -7C at leaving. Explosive crap then off, eating cereal on move - another new skill learned. Passed convoy after one kilometre, but Yuri & Paul absent, assume pushed on. Hit 100 at about 8. Big lakes 70 & 65, huge bounces, less chat as both drivers tired and want off winter road. Nutribars, nuts, banana chips, sharing all germs along the way. Eat and drink en route. Roads up to 40, final 50 with more topo less treated. Nice sunrise and moon with anvil

cloud in v clear sky. Worst bump and all on floor. Classic rewind and classic hour. No more BBC. Chatted business plans. Blue cloudy skies with dark to north. Less banter on CB, H hip & shoulder hurting. Long lake on right. Glad back prepped with physio. H stopped for shit to celebrate dawn. Used cameras Canon EOS D7 with Sigma 10-20mm ideal on trip, backup with Canon EOS 60D with 25-105mm also for vid and Panasonic Lumix DMC-TZ10 also with vid. Cameras stood up to cold outside long enough for good snaps. Most shots from moving and bouncing truck - could not stop - no time and would sink - were ok - best with superwide lens.

Waves uphill bad but have to hit at max speed for momentum. Early start, end of Winter road, gravel road, run along hill crest, easy run, then steam from engine, radiator leak and set of chains lost. RDF jog few kms, non-helpful Indians, Lynn Lake overnight. Steve pushed on, thought convoy passed after one hour, meet The King of Obsolete at garage, then dinner, and late night film crew. St Patricks night Guinness at Lynn Inn at Lynn Lake. Steve already ahead and now at home in Thompson. No chance to say goodbye face to face, but Steve called on phone with a DickvanDyke-esque: "Hello, time for a cuppa".

Day Nine

Early recovery from LL, quick breakfast, fuel low to Thompson. RDF drive, north of Winnipeg at midnight, balmy 18C, 1,000 kms later.

Day Ten

Into depot, trucks stagger in over hours, debrief, breakfast with H

