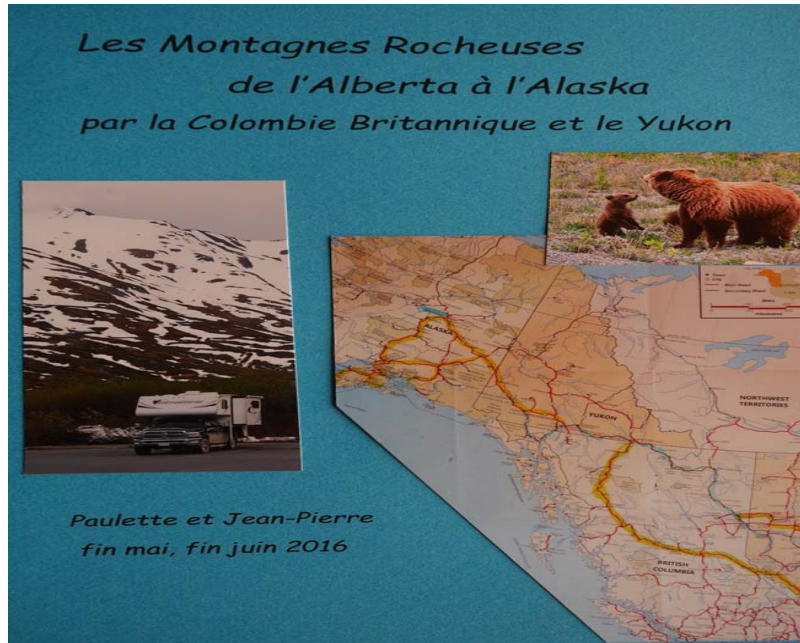


The Rocky Mountains from Alberta to Alaska

Discovering another side of Canada



After 5 years of traveling the Eastern Canadian Provinces, we were tempted to approach Canada from another angle: Discovering the Rocky Mountains from Alberta to Alaska, passing through British Columbia and the Yukon.

As we have done in the past we rented a motorhome through CampingCar-Online/Ramble Camervans, this time departing from Calgary, Alberta (direct flight from Paris). This time we opted for the 4x4 truck camper, instead of the campervan we usually rent. We were worried about the state of the roads in Alaska, however, after the trip we realised that it wasn't completely necessary. We did notice that more than 60% of the other campers we met along the way (rented or owned), were this same type of truck camper!

This time, we also went with a new fleet, "Fraserway", a large local company with a very impressive rental center (more than 300 vehicles came in and out of the lot on our pick-up day!). The service was excellent, the hostess spoke French and there was a minimum amount of technical issues to take care of.

With the formalities quickly wrapped up, we took possession of our large truck camper. With a separate camper in the bed of a 4x4 Dodge Ram, this vehicle was imposing, however we picked up the driving quickly partially due to the fact that we had already driven this type of vehicle in the past (5.7 L engine, diesel, 6 tons, and a height of 3.65 m).

Before hitting the open road, we did our necessary stocking up (groceries and supplies), and hit the Transcanadian Highway north of Calgary to the Rocky Mountains. This long chain of mountains in Western Canada spans the west coast all the way from the Southern United States to Alaska.

Our objective was to discover the large wide-open spaces that characterize this area, and we were not disappointed! In fact: The Alaska Highway (ALCAN) which we took on our return drive was no less than 4,500 km between Dawson Creek in British Columbia and Fairbanks in Alaska.



This route allowed us to discover wild spaces and grandiose landscapes, truly breathtaking. It is here, between the mountains, forest, and glaciers where one can regularly spot black bears!

From here we headed into B.C. following the Fraser River on a route categorized as "difficult". In these areas, one often has the impression of being all alone on the road. From time to time you will cross another tourist, or cargo truck, but you can go for dozens of kilometers without having another vehicle in front or behind you. Once we stopped, we can admit that there was still a flow of traffic, although very fluid and civil, but watch out for the large lumber trucks!



I am often asked, why would you want to travel in this area?

It's true, why would anyone want to drive for hours on end through a landscape of forests, lakes, and mountains, completely void of any sign of habitation, on an 1800 km road that joins two cities (Prince George and Whitehorse)? There is nothing but very small gatherings of houses here and there, mostly dispersed in the forests. One crosses a few small towns, tourist stations next to lakes, some large intersections which at least allow for refueling.

Because these are the areas where one finds nature in its wildest form, in these hundreds of kilometres without any habitation there is no pollution, and one is never bothered by another person. The only "industry" to speak of in the region is the forestry.



Next we entered into Yukon, the northernmost Canadian Province in North America. It spreads out over an area 3/4 the size of France, with a population of ...35,000! Surprising for us was that this region is bilingual, French and English, a flash-back to the end of the XIX century when millions of adventurers came to the Klondike in search of gold!

In the Yukon we drove along the feet of mountains, in the immense area of Kluane Park, dominated by Mount Logan (5,959 m). Along the lake of the same name (could easily be a small sea), we had the luck to meet several grizzly bears along the way!

After Beaver Creek, we entered into the United States in Alaska, the 49th state. Good surprise: at the border there were no complex formalities with our biometric passports, we just compared our fingerprints to those on our document and in 15 minutes we obtained our visitor visa (\$6 per person). From here make sure to change your speedometer from km/hour to miles per hour and account for the time change.



The landscape here is not terribly different from that of the Yukon. The Yukon and Alaska form the same touristic area: Wrangell, St-Elias, and Kluane National Parks. From Tok, a small village, we left the Alaska Highway and headed north, towards the North Pacific Coast and the fishing village of Valdez. We camped one night under the imposing Worthington glacier and the next day we headed towards the coast but made sure to not miss out on Keystone Canyon.



Next we took the Glen Highway which took us all the way to the largest city in Alaska, Anchorage. Anchorage has not kept its pioneer character and now resembles any other modern US city. After we headed down a coastal highway to reach the Kénai Penninsula, one of the main objectives of our trip.



This area is the pinnacle of Alaskan tourism. This almost island is carved by several large glaciers and juts out into the ocean, constituting Kenai National Park. It is imperative to reserve a campsite here, along the coast or the river. Despite the heavy tourism, this peninsula remains rather wild, with grandiose landscapes mixed with mountains, sea, and glaciers.



This region still keeps the particular aspect where one can find the traces of the historical Russian presence during the XIX century, with numerous well-maintained orthodox churches.

From here we headed back north, up George Parks Highway. Our destination was Denali National Park, a park just as famous as Yellowstone in the United States, and just as visited by tourists. This park contains the highest peak in North America, Mount McKinley (more than 6,000 m), also called Denali by the native population.



We headed out from this area to continue our journey north, crossing some tremendous natural areas to get to the northern city of Fairbanks, an old fur trading post and departure point for gold miners. Along the Tanana river, there are many chances to take a cruise on an old paddle boat! However, the town, the university city of Alaska, has lost much of its charm thanks to the presence of a large US military base.

This is the northern limit of our trip. We head back south on the Alaskan Highway through a landscape less wild, more populated and civilized. We reached Haines which is a typical port town with marvellous ocean views and large tourist cruises. Next we head to Skagway at the tip of another fjord and rejoin our return route and head to the Yukon and Whitehorse.



This route is essentially just a highway, crossing the Yukon and heading to BC, through the landscape that we now know so well, but this time with less snow and shrinking glaciers. It has gotten warmer and the summer is arriving! Following this path we drive down the eastern edge of the rockies, a less spectacular view than before but still very beautiful. We constantly cross lakes and forests and we even came across a herd of buffalo! The Alaskan Highway officially ends at Dawson Creek, about 2,500 kms from Fairbanks.



Once we enter Alberta it is a complete change of scenery, but still rather hilly. Surprisingly we found that this state is covered in fertile farmland, as well as oil pumps like the ones you see in movies. We're far from the natural ambiance we had the rest of the trip! For the first time in a while we come to an actual big city, Edmonton, the capitol of the province and financial hub.

Everything must come to an end! After 29 days of travel and over 10,000km driven through a dream landscape, we returned our vehicle in Calgary where our plane was waiting.

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