

ALASKA HIGHWAY RENDEZVOUS '92

IN RETROSPECT

Rendezvous '92, as the Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Construction of the Alaska Highway was called, has drawn world wide attention to the Alaska Highway during 1992. Of equal if not more importance to the regions it brings together, the Alaska Highway resembles a ribbon tying together communities along its path and providing a bonding influence on the multi-ethnic, multi political and economically interreliant jurisdictions it touches throughout the course of its journey. The people of Fairbanks, Delta Junction and Tok have as much or more in common with their neighbours in Burwash Landing, Haines Junction and Whitehorse as they do with their countrymen in the "Southern 48".

The people of northeastern BC share the common bond of the Great Road with their more northern neighbours. The major portion of all traffic destined for Alaska and Yukon must pass through northeastern BC. Approaches to the Alaska Highway find their origins in Prince George and Edmonton which serve as terminus points for all northbound traffic. This traffic then converges at Mile Zero in Dawson Creek for it's onward journey up the Great Road.

The romance that has evolved around the men, women and their deeds who participated in construction of the highway has become legend. Strangely, there are few heros. However, to stand at "Mile Zero" in Dawson Creek is to be drawn north along the Great Road and it's history. Of surprise too, is the manner in which the characters of the north such as Robert Service, Sam McGee and Klondike Kate who historically predate the Great Road are now included in it's imagery. While the Highway was built long after the gold rush of the 1890's became a memory, recent history blends in with the old. Only when one examines the history of the Alaska Highway does it become apparent that, in some unfathomable way, Skagway, Chilkooten Pass, Dawson City all with their beginnings in another century have been brought into sharper focus by the very existence of the Highway.

Daily, hundreds of vehicles pass Mile Zero at Dawson Creek carrying everything from industrial materials to fresh produce. The Alaska Highway provides the economic life line for all of the communities along its course. It is travelled by those vehicles of heavy commerce that deliver the same fresh produce and manufactured goods to the northern consumer as that found in shopping centres elsewhere in North America. Recreational vehicles ply the highway in all seasons and the Great Road like all major arteries never sleeps. Nor does it take a holiday for it remains an open, active and vibrant life line throughout its entire length for 365 days a year. Blizzards, common throughout the winter, the early spring and the fall cause the traffic to pause momentarily while these minor problems are cleared and then the busy hum resumes at its normal pace.