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Alaska – from Anchorage to the Canadian Border

Mudbath and Fun with Bears

Alaska is huge. Very huge. The biggest state in the US is five times bigger than Germany, but with only 0.6 million inhabitants – that is the number of people living in our hometown Frankfurt. Therefore more space for unspoiled nature and enormous landscapes. The highest mountain in North America, Mt McKinley, is here. Alaskan wilderness is breathtaking, moving, and a few times it is even a little bit scary – dense green forest, broad rivers, and sometimes lakes with ice still on them in June. The endless highway often consisted only of gravel, and cars passed us only every two hours.



When we descended into Anchorage we noticed that after New Zealand's and Hawaii's islands something different here awaited us - we flew over snowy mountain ranges, one after the other, everywhere we looked there was solitude and harsh mountains. That was scary, because we were more specialized in cycling around relatively small Pacific islands. We got a little bit nervous, but we did not mention it to anybody! And indeed, temperatures below ten degrees Celsius, snow along the road, massive headwind and strong rain gave us a hard start. Our much welcomed coffee-stops every 20 to 30km are not possible because of a terrible shortage of cafes. Here in Alaska you do one thing – miles. At the end of the day you get to a lonely campground with an outhouse, you hand pump your cold water and you are surrounded by thousands of mosquitoes. For all Kiwis: Your sandflies are still worse, mosquitoes are bigger and slower and because of that easier to kill!

Nevertheless, we were rewarded for our struggle on the road, never before had we had that much silence, our thoughts flowing freely. The view of clear lakes between majestic mountains while getting out of the tent in the morning was inspiring. The euphoric impact of the Northern Light, which even at night never disappears completely. Wildflowers line the highways. Massive cumulus clouds, so powerful you fear they will flood the whole country. And of course, the wildlife: Cheeky squirrels, crossing the road right in front of our wheel. Majestic eagles, high above us. Silver fox, red fox, porcupine, hares and deer. What about the bears? They are here, too. That is for sure. Julia's first nights in the tent were not what you would call very relaxed, but despite the grizzlies in the Denali National Park and a black bear on a very remote road, we did not see them on the highways or campgrounds. And that's all right. But we kept running into moose, which crossed the highways or stepped into parking lots. Because they look kind of stupid (sorry) and very cute at the same time many folks underestimate them. Especially a moose cow with its calves is dangerous. The moose mom is a little bit overprotective and attacks humans who come too close for the perfect picture. That's why we step back as soon as we see moose mama!



One thing was definitely confirmed up here in the far north: It is good to have old friends and it is good to make new friends. The visit of our two Frankfurt buddies Sven and Daniel in the first three weeks in Alaska has been a real pleasure. To experience and "survive" the Denali Highway was one of the highlights of our whole trip so far and the memory of it will connect us for the years to come. The calls and emails from back home, for which we always eagerly look as soon as our Laptop is connected. Thanks to satellite connection even the most remote roadhouses have wireless internet these days.



Talking about new friends: Mark, the owner of a roadhouse, gave us his truck for a day and made Stefan the barman late at night. Dan and Eva live close (by Alaskan standards) - 18 miles from Delta Junction and rented us one of their wonderful cabins and cooked great salmon, halibut and buffalo meals for us. They gave us their advice, and together with Eva, we made a road trip to Dawson City, the legendary gold rush town on the Yukon River.

Cycling the Last Frontier

After 36 hours (thanks to changing flights twice and long stays in between) we flew into Anchorage, where our visiting German friends, Sven and Daniel, gave us a warm welcome. A few beers, a few burgers and it was midnight. The next day we spent assembling the bicycles, buying new gear like bear spray - and food, of course!



We hit the road in busy Anchorage and after the city disappeared in the rear vision mirror we were alone in the howling wind. We cycled through glaciers on the Kenai Peninsula to Whittier and took the ferry to Valdez. The first pass is named Thompson. A hundred years ago the gold miners rushed with sled dog teams over this route which today is the Richardson Highway. The campground we had planned to stay at was still closed and so we pushed on another 20 kilometers to the next one. Because we were not eager to lift our food up into the trees (and had no idea how), we preferred campgrounds with bear-proof storage places.



Sometimes we just camped next to a roadhouse, - you get a shower for 5 bucks and a beer for less - that's a good life. We followed the Richardson Highway to Paxson, where we turned onto a lousy gravel road named the Denali Highway. 134 miles of pure wilderness and only 24 miles paved. Because we are so strong (hmm, another reason might be that Sven and Daniel are so strong, because they each gulped down two burgers daily at least) we turned adventurous at 5 p.m. with no regard to the fact that we had to cover another 36 kilometers of a very hilly road to the roadhouse we planed to camp at. We arrived at half past eight dead tired but very happy. We liked the roadhouse that much that we ate and drank till midnight and then cycled in semicircles another 2 kilometers down the road to pitch our tent. For some strange reason the beautiful pictures of the sunset (it never really is dark here) are not clear.

The next day began with a late start, perfect weather (25 C° and sunshine) and a lot of dust on the very hilly gravel road. On the third night the weather changed dramatically, it was raining cats and dogs. In the morning we heard the rain hammering on the tent and nobody wanted to leave the safe shelter. It cleared up a little a few hours later and we hit the road. Or what used to be the road – it turned out to be a big mudslide. Our progress was – to put it nicely – very slow. Our heavily loaded tandem got stuck in the mud and as well as that the mud between our mudguards and the wheels blocked everything and we needed to scratch the mud out with a knife. After 5 hours of strenuous cycling we reached a wilderness campground without showers but a great supply of mosquitoes. They seem to be oblivious to the rain. We reached the end of the Denali Highway and went on to the nearby Denali National Park, one of the most beautiful national parks in the USA. We were lucky enough to watch grizzly bears, but the view of the highest mountain of North America was not meant to be. Unfortunately Mt McKinley is only visible three to four days a month. At this great spot we had to say farewell to our cycling comrades, who had to take the train and a flight back to civilization. We are on our own again, moving on to Fairbanks.



Here we enjoy the pleasures of big city life. Then we turn the handlebars south and hit the 2400km long Alaskan Highway, which will lead us into Canada. No matter when you read this newsletter, we will probably be still on that road....

Canada calling

After resisting the temptation to cycle to Prudhoe Bay (800km gravel road to the Far North of Alaska) we head on further south. Shortly before Beaver Creek we will cross the Canadian Border and follow the Alaskan Highway through Canada. In the middle of August to match with our birthdays we will get some very special visitors: Stefan's parents, who will fly to Vancouver and will join us for three weeks in a campervan. So we will get a sag wagon plus entertainment in the evening! This and the wild landscape of Canada, that's going to be a wonderful August!

**Have a good one,
Julia und Stefan**



"Nothing is more damaging to the adventurous spirit within a man than a secure future." (Chris Mc Candless)

Sponsor of the Month:



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