

Bikes, beasts and buggies

Our intrepid travellers recall their most exhilarating experiences, from a tundra trundle to a scenic cycle

THE WHEEL THING: You don't need to be a triathlete to cycle around the seawall that frames Vancouver's Stanley Park — simply hire a funky, one-speed cruiser and off you go. This greenbelt juts into the waters surrounding downtown Vancouver: English Bay, Burrard Inlet and Coal Harbour. The 11km jaunt will take you past Lost Lagoon (once a tidal mud marsh, now a freshwater bio-filtration wetland), the totem poles that pay homage to British Columbia's coastal First Nations, clipped gardens, forests of Douglas fir and western red cedar and Lions Gate Bridge, which connects the city with North Vancouver. Grab some coffee at Prospect Point, then complete the circuit via the western side of the park, with its sandy beaches and

seaside pools. Be sure to observe local etiquette: the lane nearest the water is for walkers and joggers and the other is for cyclists and inline skaters. More: spokesbicyclerentals.com.

CATHERINE MARSHALL

COLD SNAP: My Air Canada flight from Halifax, Nova Scotia, lands at St John's, Newfoundland. I collect my rental car for a 340km run up the east coast to document the pristine wilderness, quaint little villages and dramatic scenery of the Kittiwake Coast. Through a relentless pea-soup fog, I creep up the Trans-Canada Highway, beset by loose moose and speeding semi-trailers, with visibility of 20m for the entire journey. Where the Road to the Isles meets the east coast, I crawl into Twillingate. The fog suddenly clears, revealing a gorgeous fishing village and a harbour filled with ice floes, icebergs and three black-backed gulls squabbling over the remains of a seal, a to-die-for photo op. Aargh! My camera battery has seized in the minus 12C spring chill. I hold it close to the car heater, ratchet up the fan, open the window, stick it through and score the first of many dramatic photos. More: twillingate.com.

DAVID MAY



ALAMY

CANADIAN GOTHIC: Hip-roofed barns and old rocket-headed silos, blueberry pie and mum-and-dad cafes. A drive across the Manitoba prairie can seem like a journey back in time — until a grain truck blows by like a 30-tonne tumbleweed and rattles me back into the 21st century. Only minutes later, time warps again, this time seriously. We pass a somberly clad man and woman clipping along the highway in a horse and buggy, as though it were the only way to travel.

But around here, for some people, it is. The couple are members of a low-tech, Christian farming sect, most probably Amish. With his Abe Lincoln beard and her granny bonnet and shawl, they are a tableau portrait — American Gothic Hits the Road. We roll on, past small towns spaced 16km apart. When the prairies were settled in the 19th century, that was the distance for a daytrip by horse and buggy. More: travelmanitoba.com.

JOHN BORTHWICK

BLOOMING MARVELLOUS: When is a garden more than just landscaped trees and flowers? When it also curates an annual festival of art. Reford Gardens (also known as Les Jardins de Metis) in northeast Quebec does just that. More than 3000 plant species and varieties are on display, including 400 rare Himalayan blue poppies that thrive in a microclimate of hot, humid days and cool nights in a plot overlooking the St Lawrence River. The gardens are historic, established in the

That's snow biz on the frozen highways

INCIDENTAL TOURIST

The antics of TV's Ice Road Truckers are not a patch on the real deal

SUZANNE MORPHET

I WANT to tell you about ice roads, but first I have a confession to make. Even though I'm from the Great White North (aka Canada) and once lived in the Northwest Territories, where the

condition of ice roads is discussed as routinely as the weather, I have never watched the television series *Ice Road Truckers*.

I don't need to. I've driven on ice roads and that's a lot more exciting. Of course, I'm familiar with the wildly popular show and its real-life truckers, especially Alex Debogorski, who is now a living legend in Yellowknife.

But when I ask my husband — who grew up there and knows Debogorski — what he thinks of the show, he shrugs. "They make it out to be more dangerous than it really is."

When I read the promos for the seventh season, I see what he means — exploding batteries, failing brakes, a fire in a truck cab and the fabricated "battle for winter road supremacy".

Then I learn that not one trucker has died or even been seriously injured while driving the NWT's longest ice road — the one where the first season

of *Ice Road Truckers* was shot. According to Bill Braden, a long-time northerner and the author of *On Good Ice*, the biggest hazard for truckers is not falling through the ice or freezing to death at minus 40C if their truck breaks down. It's boredom. Excruciating boredom. Imagine driving for hours on end at 10-35km/h — the maximum allowed for loaded trucks so they don't create a dangerous wave under the ice.

But if driving an 18-wheeler on ice is less thrilling than you've been led to believe, I can assure you that driving a car on ice roads — at your own risk — is anything but boring.

My first experience was crossing Yellowknife Bay to the indigenous community of Dettah. I cautiously inched my red Honda Accord on to the ice and then I heard a series of sharp, cracking noises. Terrified, I jumped out, expecting my car to plunge

through any second. I later learned that cracking ice was a good sign — it meant it was solid.

A few years later I was a passenger in a car on the winter road from Fort Smith to Fort Chipewyan. After negotiating the twists and turns through a beautiful, snow-covered forest we emerged on to a frozen lake. Picking up speed, we were soon flying across the ice with no other cars in sight. It was exhilarating — until we began careering across the road, out of control.

Brakes are useless on ice and the driver did her best to steer us away from the snow bank towards which we were hurtling.

A road marker looked as if it would come straight through the windscreen when we hit the snow bank, flipped and started rolling. We weren't hurt, but the car ended up on its side. In those days, there were no mobile phones. Thankfully, a couple of snow-

mobilers stopped and gave us a ride.

That experience hasn't put me off ice roads. In fact, I have one more on my to-do list: the ice road from Inuvik to Aklavik in the Mackenzie River delta, way above the Arctic Circle. One summer I attempted boating with friends to Aklavik, but we got hopelessly lost in the maze of channels. And every time we went ashore for a comfort stop we got eaten alive by mosquitoes. We decided to turn back.

Ice roads may have other hazards, but at least you can't get lost on them. And best of all, there are no mosquitoes in winter. If driving your own car on ice is too scary, operators such as Arctic Adventure Tours will drive you from Inuvik to Aklavik or Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk.

• whitehuskies.com/iceroad.php

Season seven of *Ice Road Truckers* starts at 9.30pm, July 30 on A&E Channel.



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