



DRIVING IN ARCTIC CIRCLES

The Dempster Highway is closed and the team find themselves stranded at the Arctic Circle – there's nothing they can do but wait

MARCH 14

Rolling at five am? Did I hear that right? Do you know how cold it was? That's right; 20 below zero. We wanted to get an early start on the Dempster Highway, particularly after Sho's experience a few short days prior, so the early start seemed prudent. We started out a bit later than planned, but this

by
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Above: The trucks stand proud at the Arctic Circle line.

Below: It can snow any day of the year this far North...

allowed us the opportunity to get something resembling a breakfast and a few other things for the road at the fuel stop at the beginning of the Dempster we stopped at the night before. We had 230 miles to go with no fuel stops anywhere along the way, actually, nothing at all along the way. Not the place for a mechanical problem...

Shortly after crossing the one-lane bridge after that steel gate at the start of the highway, the pavement ended. Not that it mattered, as the dirt was frozen at least as hard as any concrete could ever hope to be, since we were experiencing temperatures as low as minus 34F. Along the way, the white-out conditions seemed almost commonplace at this point—just another 'minor' obstacle for the group to overcome: no visibility. The narrow dirt road did become more and more challenging as the large tandem tractor-trailers flew by at blinding speed as we tried to navigate the frozen dirt road with snow drifts blown in on the shoulder and in some places, clear across the road. This is obviously not a well traveled road, and in fact, the daily average (when not closed) is only 35 vehicles a day.

As the sun came up, several hours after departing Dawson City that morning, the scenery was absolutely spectacular in the early light. The temperatures were low enough and the altitude high enough to thin the tree growth, and the mountain range in the distance was beyond words of description



—barren, bleak, and beautiful.

We arrived at the Eagle Plains stop, just about exactly halfway between the beginning of the Dempster Highway and Inuvik (our planned destination for the day), at about noon. It was just a short drive away to the Circle, and the anticipation of finally achieving our goal made us forget all about lunch and press on.

Upon our arrival at the Circle, we had to get the obligatory photos of everyone as proof of our perseverance and endurance. During the arranging of the vehicles for just the right shot, it happened...

Mike's throttle linkage broke. Quite possibly from the inhumanly cold weather, but more likely from the fact that Mike's truck is well past legal drinking age anywhere in the world. It was snapped clean, and there was no chance of repair on the side of the road, at stupidly low temperatures (although it had warmed up to only minus 20F by now). A few laborious satellite phone calls later to the CAA and AAA (you're where???) and we were exactly where we started, with the exception of now having a huge satellite phone bill on top of it.

After a brief meeting (did I mention it was cold?), Kim and I were sent back to Eagle Plains in the 110 to get a wrecker to drag the stricken 101 to a much warmer location for repairs. When we arrived and spoke with Stan, the facility manager, we learned that he was told that the group decided to tow the 101 in themselves.

