



▶ an alarming sight: the road closure warning sign was flashing its red lights of doom.

We constructed something resembling a lunch from the local Co-op market, some phone calls were made, and the decision was to press on to the gate, another 40 miles down the road. If it was a minor delay due to wind, it could be re-opened at any time, and perhaps not for long. The hope was that we would be ready to go when (or if) the opportunity presented itself.

Well, that opportunity never came. We spoke with a highway worker we encountered on the road (as we learned later, he was heading home for the night) who said the road would not be clear tonight. We pressed on to the gate anyway. What did we find there? Nothing, no one, everyone was gone, apparently for the night.

Since it was Saturday afternoon, things were not looking good. More phone calls and a chance encounter with yet another highway worker (which may explain why the road was still not open – they were all talking to Mike, and not clearing the road) who indicated that the road was covered with eight foot snow drifts and could be closed for

Above: Conference with the road crew – it's not looking good for us.

Above inset: When this sign flashes, they mean it!

Inset: Mike on the Sat phone again...

Below: Another gorgeous sunset to end the day.



several days. This is not good news, since the typical closure under these conditions is five days or more.

We reluctantly made our way back over the same 40 miles to Fort McPherson to reassess the situation. The sign was still flashing 'closed', and another phone call was met with sympathy, but not a solution for us. We decided to make our way all the way back to Inuvik where we left that morning as we would have better access to accommodations and other creature comforts (like food). Seems easy enough, but it never is. Meanwhile, the cold and vibration was taking its toll on the 101 again. This time, the side mirrors had both fallen off the truck – a combination of the cold and the vibration of the Dempster Highway I suspect. Eric and Neal would be Mike's eyes for the remainder of this trip.

About two miles outside of Inuvik, the 101 started making a rather unholy noise, sounding a lot like an alternator bearing about to seize. The problem is, when it made its lovely 'fingernails on a chalkboard' screech, the entire truck would shake violently, and the heat would stop. Could it be something worse;

the water pump perhaps? That would be a bigger problem, as finding a Rover V8 water pump 250 miles above the Arctic Circle may be a bit tricky.

We limped the 101 the last few miles to the hotel so we could get the engine cover off and have a look at it. Thank the Rover Gods: it was simply the fan clutch which had seized and worn the shaft out of round. Since it is well below zero (on the warmest days) up here this time of year, we could simply remove the fan to get us back below the Circle where an aftermarket clutch fan or an electric fan could be sourced. We were all quite glad to have such an easy fix (for a change).

And so, the final score for the day was: 327 miles, nine hours, one fan and a half-tank of fuel (for me, with the 300 Tdi, more for the others), to travel backwards about five miles to a different hotel across town. 161 miles forward, 166 miles back. I had a feeling we should have just stayed in bed.

■ Next month: The team finally head away back along the Dempster Highway but not without incident as Jim falls foul of 'tourist tax'. 