

Winter Road

by Steve Hartle

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No two years on the winter road are the same, and this year was no exception. On 2/18/07 I left my Dad's house in Plymouth, WI and headed for North West Ontario. After a quick stop in Appleton to pick up 1700 lb. of 12 ft. metal roofing, that will cover the roof on the big cabin at Central, I was on my way again. Northern Wisconsin and Minnesota temps were running in the 20's f and there was less than normal snowfall.

The border was fast and uneventful. The first half of Hwy 502 was dry and I moved along at a good pace. The temp also began dropping at a good pace. When I arrived in Dryden it was 5°f. Sunday night was spent at the Holiday Inn Express.

On Monday I picked up my old friend Gord Euler in Vermilion Bay, and the two of us headed for Red Lake. Gord's family settled in the Vermilion Bay area in the early 1900's, and I heard story after story during this trip. Gord, also has 50+ years of guiding on Eagle Lake, and is in the Fishing Hall of Fame in Hayward, WI. MORE stories. I enjoyed all of them. Gord also spotted a wolf on a small lake near Cedar Lake.

When we arrived in Red Lake, we dropped the metal roofing off at the trucking company that specializes in winter road shipping. I had heard that the road was very rough, and figured I would let them handle the 12 ft metal. We then loaded the truck with 8 ft. lumber (1650 lb.), and a few deep cycle batteries. I decided to spend the night in Red and get an early start the next morning. It is much easier to see the bumps at night.

At 5:15 a.m. we started up the road. The first 60 miles of the all-weather road (sometimes call the Nungesser road) were smooth and icy. We sped along at the blistering rate of 40 mph. Then we hit the real winter road, and settled down to the average speed of 20 mph for the next 5 hrs. Ice on the Barrens River was 24in. thick, and we saw 2 fuel tankers hauling diesel to North Sprit. When we got to the Deer Lake Split & we managed 10 mph for the next 4 hours. At 3:15 p.m. we rolled into Sandy Lake.

We spent the next day unloading the truck and reloading with empty propane bottles. Filled up the truck 90 liters @ \$1.90/L. Saw old friends and visited with the Sandy Lake Seaplane pilots. We left Sandy at 4:30 a.m. (-25f) the next morning and headed for Red Lake. During our brief stay in Sandy, some work was done on the road. The bulldozers had widened the road from Sandy down to the Deer Lake Split. This made it possible for two trucks to pass with having to get the shovels out and widen a spot in the roads snow banks. But, this meant that the logs and rocks from the snow banks were now in the road. Fun and games dodging them. We made it back to Red in 9.5 hrs.

Over the years I have run the road in as little as 6.75 hrs and as long as 16.5 hrs. This was a normal, average year. Next year we will do it again.