

Winter Road 2008

By Steve Hartle
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Feb. 14 – March 3

This year's trip up the winter road started in Ankeny Iowa . My son, Nathan and I decided to do a small sport show at a Sportsman's Warehouse just north of Des Moines . As it turned out, the weather killed the show. Saturday afternoon it started to snow and the winds picked up to 35 mph. Anyone who has traveled across Iowa in the winter time knows that this kind of weather turns the Iowans into hermits. "We'll go out after the storm dies down." So at 2:00pm Sunday , after talking to about 4 people, we packed up the booth and headed north down through the cornfields on snow covered I 35 (+22f). When we hit the Minnesota border the snow stopped and the roads were clear. We spent the night in Luck, Wisconsin at Nathan's girlfriend's parents house (-14f).

The next morning we stored the sportshow booth in the garage, got on the road and headed for Dryden Ontario . We pulled into Brodhagen's farm just west of Dryden at about 8:30 pm (-35f). On Wednesday I went into Dryden to have a few meetings for the Patricia Regional Tourist Council. I also picked up road food supplies, 30 big cans of coffee, another marine battery, spare gas jugs for the trucks, and a big roll of ducktape. Thursday morning Nathan and I headed over to Kenora to pick up the new solar panels, inverters, batteries, and electrical wiring. The skid of 16 batteries in my truck weighed in at 2032 pounds, not counting the inverters and wiring. Nathan's truck was loaded up with the 180 watt panels and mounting frames. We headed back to Dryden that afternoon.

Early Friday morning we picked up Ed Carson in Vermilion Bay and headed up Hwy 105 to Red Lake . Ed is a retired OPP (Ontario Provincial Police) and pretty good electrician. Ed has severed in about every community in Northwest Ontario from Sandy Lake to Red Lake to Kenora . This guy has as many stories as my old buddy Gord Ehluer, and to say Ed is conservative is an understatement. Ed's bumper stickers read "Buy a gun and piss off a Liberal" and "No to Kyoto ". In Red Lake we picked up the newest member of the truck family, a beautiful, well maintained 1978 Dodge van. Much too nice for Sandy Lake . We went over to the lumber store and filled it up with 1600 lbs. of pressure treated lumber and plywood. Stopped at the gas station and topped off all 3 trucks - \$186.00 later at \$1.18/liter.

The first 60 miles of the road (the Nungesser Road) was icy and slick. The Roads Dept. doesn't salt up here. We moved along at 35-40 mph. The rest of the real winter road was about average. The Barrens River had 30 inches of ice and was smooth. However, the stretch between North Spirit Lake and the Deer Lake split was probably as bad as I have seen it in the 15 years I have been driving the road. 9.5 hrs, and 220 miles later we arrived in Sandy Lake (+15f). The next morning we unloaded everything and reloaded with empty propane bottles and started the 9.5 hr trek back down the road. We met 5 fuel tankers and 1 drilling rig near Favourable Lake . 10:30 Friday night we arrive in Red Lake and stay in the Norseman motel. Saturday morning we had breakfast in The Lakeview and talked to the regulars (Huey, Jack, Martin , and Stan). I think they have their mail delivered here. Around 1:00 pm Saturday we head north again to Sandy (+23f). The tankers are really tearing up stretches of the road, because of the warm weather. 35 miles south of Sandy is Chain Hill and the name does it justice. I made a run at it and made it up all the way. Nathan's turn now. I sat on top of the hill just around a turn and waited. I watched his headlights as they became stationary on the treeline and knew he was stuck. I backed the Ram back around the corner, partway down the hill to the van, hooked up the tow strap, engaged the 4x4 and pulled him up the hill. Sunday was a day to set back, relax and talk to some of the new pilots, and old friends. No endless miles of tree tunnels or listening to the clank of freight or the crunch



of snow under the tires. Monday morning at 4:00 am we start the last trip south (-23f) to Red Lake .

This was an average winter road – conditions and time wise. The snow fall in Sandy Lake is a little below normal. There is a lot of ice and not much slush. 5400 miles later we arrived in the Sunshine State to a desk overflowing with paper work. Next year in February 09 we will do it again.