

Winter Road 2009

By Steve Hartle - 2/21/09



This year winter in the boreal forest of N.W. Ontario was extremely cold to say the least. The winter road from Red Lake to Sandy Lake opened up on January 17th, almost one month early. I usually block out February 20th_ March 10th to run the road. The snowfall levels are below normal, resulting in more ice than normal, which means there could be a later ice-out this year if weather patterns don't change.

On February 2nd, after the Green Bay All Canada Show, I headed north for Vermilion Bay to meet Ed Carson the retired O.P.P. and jack of all trades. Ed will drive one of the other trucks to Sandy Lake. The first job after arriving was to get my big truck up and running. It had been parked in Ed's back yard since early November. The truck needed a new battery. The old one froze and cracked in the extreme cold. After installing a new battery, Ed and I took the two trucks into Dryden to load up with supplies for the camps. Temp -6F.

Our first stop was the lumber yard. Here we picked up sixty 2x6x10 pt boards, ___ x 4_x8_ plywood, 50 lbs of nails, 50 lbs. deck screws, rolled roofing, and etc. Next we took Ed's truck over to the appliance store and picked up four chest freezers for the camps. We also took the time to pickup 30 cans of coffee, 2 cases of pancake mix, and 3 cases of 2 cyl. motor oil and everyday food for the trip.

Wednesday morning (-6F) at 5:00am Ed and I left Vermilion Bay and headed for Red Lake. At 7:15 am we arrived at the Lakeview restaurant, the hangout for most of the Red Lake camp owners and pilots. We had a quick breakfast and then headed up the winter road. The Nungesser road was about the same as 2008, snow covered and icy. We moved up the road at 35-40 mph. Eighteen miles up the road I saw a very large bull moose standing right on the edge of the road. Fortunately he turned around and went back into the bush. Sixty miles later we came to the end of the Nungesser road and turned onto the winter trail. It was obvious that the Province had put money into maintaining the road. It was also obvious that the fuel tankers had not started to run the road yet. The road was smooth (relatively speaking) and the trip up to North Sprit was great. Along this stretch we saw about 30 spruce hens and 2 wolves. After 8 hours and 30 minutes we rolled into the Sandy Lake Seaplane base. Not much snow. Temp -21F.

On Thursday Ed and I spent the day unloading the trucks and putting everything away. We reloaded the trucks with 35 empty propane bottles, filled up the gas tanks on the truck, and made ready for the 4:00 am departure on Friday.

Friday the temperature was -26F and the road was firm and fast. We saw the first of the tankers heading north as we approached North Sprit. Sandy's generators will burn 1.3 million liters of diesel in a year. Eight hours later we unloaded the propane bottles on the dealers dock and headed for the motel and a shower.

Later that night we joined up with Tom Brotherston, Tim Jenkins, and Joe (Tom's partner) for dinner and lot of B.S.

Saturday morning it was +12f and a light snow was falling. We started the convoy up the road at a good steady pace as temperature rose to +25F. We were making excellent time until Tom tried to take a corner too fast and ended up in the snowbank. Fifteen minutes later Ed's 4x4 jerked him out and we continued our trip. At 3:30pm we arrived in Sandy, just in time to get the tanks filled at the Northern store and get the trucks unloaded before dark.

Sunday we left at 9:00am and the temp was +6F. We saw six more tankers working their way north. The road was starting to show signs of tanker wear and tear as we neared the Nungesser road from the north. By 7:30 pm we arrived back in Vermilion Bay at Ed's house. Time for a beer, meal and shower. Overall the road was good and the trip went as planned.

