

# Northern Exposure

Alaska is America's last border to the far north. But we're not about long, cold winters here! Take a ride with Katja and Jens as they cruise through Alaska to Canada's north on a pair of BMW F800GSs.

Story and photography: Katja and Jens Witt

W e arrived in Anchorage, Alaska with the alarm that a number of us, a great number of people were expecting to fish on the shoreline in their rubber boots and heavy coats. The water in a never-ending routine. In the background, however, the four bikes of the Alaskan motorcycle club.



48 FREE WHEELING

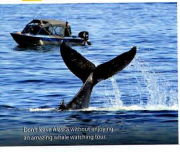


Above: People riding their BMW F800GSs on the dirt roads of Alaska. Below: A view of the Denali Highway in Alaska, showing the rugged terrain and the road's path through the mountains.



FREE WHEELING 43

## FREE WHEELING ALASKA



Below: People riding their BMW F800GSs on the dirt roads of Alaska.

We saved the next day ready for our trip to the Kona Peninsula—a large peninsula jutting from the southern coast of Alaska. However, the majority of untouched wilderness and massive glaciers has to be explored by ship, so no riding. Captain Renee showed us the small bridge with the bunnies as that we didn't miss a single animal sighting. Clinging onto our seats and seats, we reached the massive extension of the landing. It is absolutely breathtaking! On the return trip, it is absolutely breathtaking! On the return trip, it is absolutely breathtaking!



Below: People riding their BMW F800GSs on the dirt roads of Alaska.



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## FREE WHEELING ALASKA

We enjoyed the view and the ride for a further 150 km until a nice panoramic view of Dawson City was provided. Anyone was expected a busy atmosphere for the second largest city in Yukon in Yukon. The city has only around 2,000 inhabitants and it almost seems as if time has stood still on the Yukon River for eternity.

Only Dawson's main street is paved. All other streets, with their historic-looking wooden houses, seem like John Wayne is about to ride to the town with his mates. On the time of the gold rush, up to 40,000 people came to the town in search of their fortune. The arrival over the wood-paved footpaths and allowed ourselves to be inspired for an evening by the historical buildings.

For only a few dollars, you can play a classic gambling game on 34-year-old slot machines. On the time of the gold rush, up to 40,000 people came to the town in search of their fortune. The arrival over the wood-paved footpaths and allowed ourselves to be inspired for an evening by the historical buildings.



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On the way north we ride through Anchorage one more time and, with the Russian Orthodox churches in sight, saw some of the Russian history of Alaska. A herd of roughly 100 reindeer also wanted to go to Deadhorse on their polaroid old timers as they do every year. The stories of other travelers about this adventurous stretch went through our heads and we headed out a little earlier. The surface of the dirt road is as smooth as a baby's bottom. Only the irregularity of what seemed to be construction sites slowed our travel speed.

We were following the Alaskan Pipeline that transports the oil from Prudhoe Bay in Alaska's Vastlyport. The Dalton Highway and the pipeline seem to be inseparable and only part ways occasionally. An obligatory stop is of course the northern Arctic Circle. After an eventful day we reached Oldland in the evening. An elk stood directly in front of the street sign and enjoyed her dinner. It was the something out of Northern Exposure. As our luggage were also something we quickly pitched our tent in the simple camping ground in the north of the town. Even at 10:30 pm the sun wasn't going down. Because of this our sense of time had become somewhat skewed for the past few weeks and the days usually got longer than we thought.



Below: People riding their BMW F800GSs on the dirt roads of Alaska.

## GPS WAY POINTS: ALASKA

Arctic Circle	N65 03.556 W150 48.650
Dead Horse	N70 12.042 W148 27.549
Charley	N63 23.231 W148 37.252
Chitina	N64 26.223 W144 18.024
Dawson City	N64 03.677 W130 25.846
McKinley View Point	N62 50.257 W150 14.309

become restless as the weather got colder and less stable. There were also 300 km through Canada separating us from warmer temperatures. During our walk on the Yukon River we could see the first migratory birds flying in formation toward the south. The water was approaching quickly. Then, at last, everything was OK and our package arrived. The report was done in one afternoon and the next day we were ready to go. It was time to follow the birds off to the south.

ET'S NOTE: Katja and Jens Witt are German travelers that have spent the last 10 years exploring the world on the two BMW F800GS. They are now back in Germany, trying to adjust to a normal life. Good luck...

## Top of the World Highway

A hearty breakfast in the Coldfoot Restaurant the next morning reinforced us for the long day of riding ahead. But there was an unwelcome surprise when we returned to that bike. An oil spill had contaminated the ground under the fork of one of the forks. It seemed that the mud, which had become as hard as concrete, had found its way into the fork seals. The damaged seal was now leaking oil. Unfortunately, the first provisional cleaning also didn't bring much success. After a crisis meeting it was soon clear it made no sense to ride further in the desert without any maintenance. With heavy hearts and we turned around and rode the 100 km back to Fairbanks. For this we had to completely avoid using the front brake as a layer of fork oil made the brakes next to useless.

After the problem was provisionally solved, and we freed the bikes from that blasted mud, it was time to continue south. The forecast was already almost without a sign for the local inhabitants that Summer was nearing its end. The Richardson Highway looks as toward the south again. In the North Pole we stopped briefly to see local resident Santa Claus, because for him the high season was about to start. But, unfortunately, he had a day off and we couldn't get rid of our wish list.



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Welcome to Alaska - the last frontier in the US.

Thankfully the town had a motorcycle dealer, who ended our breakdown with the right battery after only one day. We took a last look at the snow-covered Alaska Range and rolled along the highway towards Tok. We wanted to get to Vanessa. She operates a camp ground in the small town that is exclusively reserved for motorcycle riders. Every tent space is well equipped, with great attention to detail, and there is even a small open kitchen. The special thing however, is that a sauna replaces the missing showers. By now was time to say goodbye to the Alaska Highway and we followed the great road to Chitina (real name) but anyone who follows the road sign to 'Downstream Chitina' is in for a surprise. A city map sent necessary, downtown Chitina is a single building. The three different entrances bring visitors to the so-called shop, saloon and cafe—where you can buy some chicken.



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## FREE WHEELING ALASKA

Chitina is a single building. The three different entrances bring visitors to the so-called shop, saloon and cafe—where you can buy some chicken. The dusty gravel road took us over further into the mountains. It's not without reason that the stretch from the border between US, Alaska and Canada's Yukon River is known as 'Top of the World Highway'. Compared to other panoramic stretches, here you are always riding along the mountain ridge line, and fantastic views are guaranteed. It was then with a little melancholy that we had to say goodbye to Alaska. The border crossing went quickly and we entered Yukon, Canada. Silence, distance, and solitude reward the traveler here. Only 25,000 people live in an area as big as Queensland. It's hard to follow...

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Main photo: Katja and Jens Witt are German travelers that have spent the last 10 years exploring the world on the two BMW F800GS. They are now back in Germany, trying to adjust to a normal life. Good luck...

Left: The historic Alaska Arctic Airline at Fairbanks is made up of 60-year-old propeller and cabin airplanes from the 1950s. Below: Whitehorse has a lot to offer including a historic paddle-wheel steamer.