

dropped out of the race for one reason or another. The pace and strategy of the race will change now, once the mushers have this lay over and mentally prepare themselves for the last 1/2 of the Quest.

Alice's brother sent this for those who are interested <http://www.yukonquest.org> (Joyce)



**Journal no 13**

We caught some of the action and Joyce watched 2 mushers leave Dawson midday and together

# Dawson City Journals, Jan/Feb 2005: Part 2

Alice Angus and Joyce Majiski

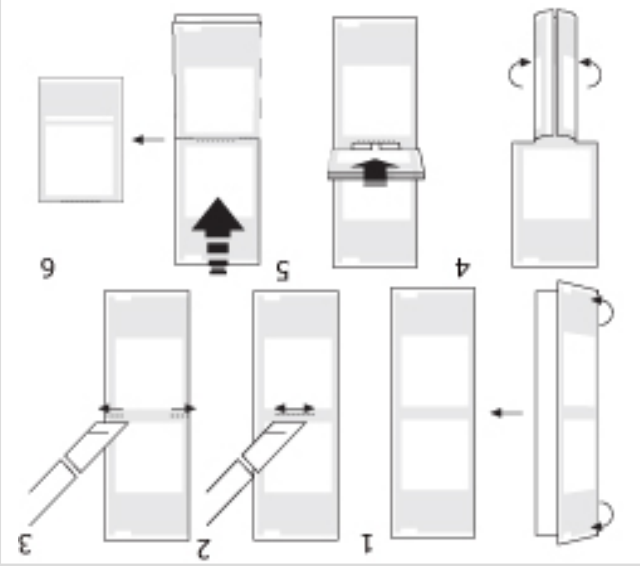
The first 7 mushers have arrived in Dawson. I heard a radio broadcaster saying the first musher was about 20 minutes from town so I got dressed and headed out the door. I saw them from a distance and started to run towards the waterfront but by the time I reached the checkpoint, they were already leaving for the camping area. I did manage to catch a quick pic of the team through the crowd. The media and support crews are now waiting for the rest of the teams to trickle in. A few more mushers have

**Journal No 12**



The Yukon has had near record snowfalls this winter. It has turned the landscape into a romantic wonderland of heavily draped trees and soft looking slopes. When the temperature rose to 30 below zero I walked up the Midnight Dome for the first time. I followed the steep Nature Trail up through the forest into an open section where the communication towers and satellite dishes are located. The sun made the snow sparkle like diamonds and Dawson City seemed small and surreal below. I continued up the trail, fighting through knee deep snow in spots until I could see the open slope of the Dome summit above. The Midnight Dome is so named for the June 21st Solstice celebration where one can watch the sun circle the horizon without touching it. From the summit of the Dome the world unfolds in a panorama that stretch off in all directions. To the west you can see the Top of the World Highway which connects Canada and the USA in the summer months, winding its way across the ridge-tops and beyond. To the far north you can see the southern Ogilvie Mountain Range. Located centrally in this range is Tombstone Mountain, a

**Journal No 5**



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 Alice Angus and Joyce Majiski**

stunning batholith of jagged peaks thrust up like a pyramid through a high alpine meadow.

Walking around to see the southern view, I look down into the Klondike River valley. This is the clearest evidence of mining in the area, even in the winter. Surrounding slopes have been denuded in spots, but worst is the trail of tailings left behind by the big dredge. This machine churned up the entire bed of the Klondike River in the search for gold, leaving a worm trail of stone tailings behind as its legacy. The tailings now form the foundations for several residential homes and businesses and greet everyone who drives to Dawson with the tales of the search for gold and the rubble left behind.

The Klondike River drains into the Yukon River at Dawson City. In addition to the relatively small Klondike, the Yukon has already been fed by many larger and glacially fed rivers, such as the Slims, Kluane and White Rivers. By the time the Yukon passes through Dawson it is a wide and strong river, yet it has another 1000 miles or so to travel before it drains into the Bering Sea. From the Dome I can see sections of open water in the river, both upstream and downstream of

Yesterday I lasted up the Midnight Dome (hill behind Dawson City) for another burst of exercise in the b almy -10 temperature. The snow was criss-crossed with tracks as if all of the animals had come out of their nests for a breath of fresh air and food gathering. I realised that I had been

**Journal No 6**



Dawson, creating slow furls of fog in the cold. I wonder if they will ever freeze, since it has hovered near 50 below for almost a week already. (Joyce)

path and sled the stuff that could freeze up to the cab in. The rest will happen tomorrow, but I am fairly pooped for now. Unfortunately I don't have that nifty digital camera to take a shot to send you all. But if you close your eyes and imagine a classic little log house with a peaked roof, with a blue door and all covered in 2 feet of snow- that would be what it looked like. That is all from the snowy depths of Joyce's abode, about 20 minutes drive from Whitehorse, Yukon. Bye for now. (Joyce).

focused on how human activity is affected by the weather. This was apparent by the lack of vehicles and human movement at 50 below and the ice fog which lends such an eerie uninhabited feeling to the place.

During my walks in the bush, in the extreme cold, I revelled in the quiet, the snow on trees and the peace of the place, forgetting the implications that this cold has on wildlife. Seeing the tiny tracks of lemmings, voles, mice and shrews was a real treat, and reminded me to think beyond the human scope of experience. Seen here is an arctic hare track. (Joyce)



Dawson. The roads were pretty glare with slick hard packed ice/snow until I reached Pelly Crossing, roughly half way. I slowed down for a cow and calf moose at one point. They were on their knees in the middle of the road, licking the salt I imagine. They scrambled to their feet and charged off into the belly deep snow and into the trees. Further along I saw a fairly large dark shape cross the road and head for the trees. If it would have been summer I would have thought it was a small bear and as I slowed I realised it was a lynx - thickly furred and beautiful. It calmly walked into the trees on the snow surface, walking on its huge snowshoe feet. There is never enough time to dig out the camera during these occasions. After last years visit to the UK in Feb /March, I flew back to Calgary and drove home from there. That was a 3 day drive, and on one stretch of the Alaska Highway, about 8 hours from Whitehorse, I counted 13 black bears in less than an hour. Most of them were munching dandelion flowers which had erupted along the roadsides. That was probably the most intensive bear sighting I have encountered on any drive. I found my house and driveway buried in snow when I got home and it took me a while to dig a

A new dusting of snow started last night and lends a softness to the place. While wandering through Dawson I always linger near the oldest structures on the street. These 2 old drunken buildings are situated across from the liquor store and remind me of 2 old men leaning heavily on one another as they lurch down the street, having indulged in a few too many libations. Yesterday I encountered someone leaving the Pit (the local watering hole) who truly was weaving down the middle of the street, glassy eyed but friendly, on the road to somewhere. Locally known as The Pit, the pink and white Westminster Hotel is infamous in the north for the colourful crowd and the great bands it attracts. I must endeavour to drag Alice inside as it is one of those quintessential experiences of visiting Dawson. Even more so than drinking the "Sour toe cocktail".....more on that next time. (Joyce)



**Journal 16**

This is my last morning in Dawson. The weather is warm and there was a dusting of snow yesterday which has covered my newly cleaned car, once again. The sky looks heavy with the portent of more snow. I am armed with several CD's to sing my way home and a bag of snacks for diversion during the 7 hour drive.

Later... I made it home in one piece, the drive was stunningly beautiful with clear blue skies for much of the time. It seems I left the cloud in



buried in the snow but I had been there on a previous visit. (Joyce)



Today's journal features - water fill up and gas for less

'real' place at last. One phase of this took Joyce and I to, Ardnamurchan, the Caringorms, the Spey Valley and the Highlands (all in Scotland) and the film does feature the Loch Ness Monster. Imagine how thrilled we were to find, squished in the bookcase under a huge pile of novels, a copy of a small paper back entitled *The Search for the Loch Ness Monster*. It informed us that there have been many reliable sightings by reliable witnesses such as military men, doctors and lawyers (no women I note). So there it was, a blue and green depiction of the monster rising from the murky waters of Loch Ness, half way around the world and 200 k south of the arctic; our journey seemed to have come full circle. (Alice)

### Journal 15

Close to the city of Dawson are a number of old cemeteries from the gold rush. One has a prominent marker signifying the Yukon Order of Pioneers, further along there is an NWMP North West Mounted Police (now called Royal Canadian MP) grave site. The markers are wood slab s, greying with age, telling of sickness and too often an early demise. Up on the Dome road there is another cemetery which has a Jewish section. It is

### Journal No 9

Affectionately known as the Pit...the pink palace is the place for general drunkenness and local colour in Dawson- It is the place to go if you want to experience a frontier watering hole. Unfortunately it looks pretty respectable from this angle. With the buzz of the Quest (see journal 8), I am certain it would be the place to be over the next few nights. (Joyce)



Now that we are getting ready to leave, the time has flown and I am sorry not to have had more time to sit in the residence and rifle through some of its collection of books. I could have learned much from the *Snow Campers Guide*, which is gaily illustrated with timeless black and white grainy photographs depicting types of footwear, techniques and other essential technical equipment for on the trail. Much could have been learned on the subject of thrilling snow bound adventures from the *Snow Campers Guide*. I was also surprised to see a hardback edition of a book about the women characters in the UK's, longest running soap, *Coronation Street*, which is also a popular show on CBC north. Though I was not as taken with it as I was by the *Snow Campers*. Joyce and I are here to make a film for our project *Topographies and Tales* - which is the culmination of a long collaboration between Joyce myself and Probus involving many exchanges of e-mail, discussions on what each of our homes was like, laughter at the myths and misapprehensions we both had and finally a handful of journeys, between London, Scotland, the Yukon and North Western Canada - to see the

### Journal no 14: Reading Material

It has been quite interesting to watch Dawson slowly emerge into the light. People are shaking off the winter blues and residents who escaped on southern holidays during the darkest months are returning home to shovel off their walks. There is a feeling of emerging and busy preparation for the sudden and steady influx of visitors to town. This morning there was light on the horizon by 7:30 and somehow it feels as if we have broken the back of winter. Dawson is bustling with activity and the speculation is that by tomorrow the first of the Yukon Quest dog racers will be coming through. Just watching the numerous trucks with dog boxes drive through town, sleds and straw bales on the roof, is exciting. Today Alice and I walked across the Yukon River to see where the handlers are setting up camp for their respective teams. White canvas wall tents with stovepipes peeking through the roof, house the humans whose tasks include shovelling away mountains of snow to prepare a feeding and bedding area for the dogs. When staked out, fourteen dogs, each with a comfortable straw bed take a fair amount of space. (Joyce)



Alice, baby Clara and Joyce watched the last ones leave at nightfall. They swished off up the river under a bright moon and into the night. It will be several more days on the trail before the reach their final destination and it was exciting to watch them ride away into distance. They grew smaller and smaller against the big broad wilderness. The teams Joyce saw at midday the characters of the dogs were quite different. The first team were quite calm, while the second team were yowling and barking, ready to go, jumping in the traces and eager to go. The first shot is of Frank Turner coming down to the checkpoint to wait for the signal that he could leave, which is why he has one of his handlers in the sled. (Alice and Joyce)

Quest, which departed from Whitehorse today. Everything goes much more smoothly when the weather is colder: the dogs don't overheat, there is less overflow on the ice and cold usually means clear and no snow. The first teams should reach Dawson in the next 24 hours. The competitors have a mandatory lay over of 36 hours here in Dawson, where the dogs are checked by vets and the mushers get a chance to have a real rest while the handlers look after the dogs. The start and finish locations alternate each year between Fairbanks, Alaska and Whitehorse, Yukon, which are about 1000 miles apart. It is one of the longest and most challenging races in the dog sledding world and there is great excitement as the teams leave town in a staggered start amid huge fanfare and celebration. It feels as if Dawson is slowly emerging out of a long winter sleep. Businesses are reopening after a winter break and everyone is preparing for the Quest coming through. (Joyce)



**Journal No 11**

There is an arrow fashioned of green duct tape on the kitchen floor of the residency. Alice thought it was either a remnant of an artwork or garb age and ignored it. In fact the arrow points northward and I tend to orient myself each time I enter the kitchen. With the stove on the north wall it seems I am oriented north quite often.

We had another drop in temperature overnight. This morning the thermometer read -30C. This bodes well for the dog teams racing in the Yukon