

Day 4 ~ Thursday 24 July, Paddle Wheel Cruise & Huskies.

Locals tell us this has been the coldest summer they can remember. The weather channel confirms it is 10°F below normal, but at least today is sunny.

On board the Tanana Chief, a paddle wheeler, we pass \$300k log cabin palaces, on one acre lots, along the Chena River.

Many traditional homes lack siding. Classified as "unfinished", they enjoy lower property taxes. There is no sales tax in Alaska.

Winter temperatures in Fairbanks (at 470ft) may drop to -45°F, but just 4-5 miles away at 600ft be only -20°F.



Tanana Chief.



At these extremes, one removes a battery from the car overnight to store in a warm place, and of course, transmission warmers are mandatory for older vehicles.

Permafrost is technically classified as any body of earth which remains frozen for two years or more, but is quite unpredictable. It is necessary to drill down 40ft to determine its stability before building. Homes are often built on short pilings allowing cold air to circulate underneath, thus protecting the permafrost.

Raised-bed gardens provide extra warmth for plants.

Several float planes are moored at docks. No air traffic control here, just eyeballs.

I have never seen a fish wheel before. Two nets rotate driven by the river current and, hopefully, scoop up salmon.

We cruise to the conjunction of the Chena and Tanana. These rivers used to flood in the sixties, but flood control has reduced the flow and sandbars block navigation between the two.

Along the banks the dominant tree is the White Spruce. Many home owners use rip-rap to stabilize their banks, some have traditional boulders, a few ugly car tires.

Where there are ripples, food accumulates and fish abound.

Susan Butcher, of Iditarod fame, owned a home here.



Chena River.



Domesticated reindeer were introduced to provide alternative food sources for subsistence farmers, but they cross breed with wild Caribou. It became too complicated to raise and keep the species separate, so the herds have declined from 300,000 to 60,000.

We turn and head back up stream to the Pump House for lunch and bid goodbye to the Tanana Chief.



Pump House.

The George Parks Highway connects the two largest population centers, Fairbanks and Anchorage. The road, cut into the side of a mountain, climbs to 1,400ft and follows a mountain ridge. Across Minto Flats (*Many lakes*) for a rest at Teklanika River (*Little water, much rock*), where the gift shop has a nice piece of Scrimshaw on Caribou horn and a huge stuffed bear. The black scar on the side of Mt. Healey is a coal seam. Descending we cross the Nenana River. On our right Hines Creek Falls.

At Goose Lake Kennel, the Husky Homestead, everyone is given a puppy to hold. One little pup pokes his nose under a ladies jacket, goes to sleep and snores.



Fish Wheel.



Teklanika.



Goose Lake Kennel, the daughters.



Huskie home.

Stan, an Iditarod participant, describes a typical day and winning strategy in the ten day race from Anchorage to Nome. It sounds brutal. The dogs run six hours then rest for six, and must be cared for. They would run non stop until exhausted if allowed. The musher gets only 90 min sleep in 24hr.

At the Denali Princess, the largest hotel in Alaska, our keys don't work, but a passing staffer takes pity on us.

"No, you can't take him home. We count them." Besides being fun for us, this is part of their social training. The sled husky is not a pure strain and is bred for stamina not looks. The AKA therefore does not recognize them. Indeed some kennels may deliberately introduce other breeds.

This kennel is run by Jeff King, four time Iditarod winner, aided by his two daughters who provide narration.

Every dog has its own kennel to which it is chained. This allows physical contact but not unwanted breeding. Breeding is selective and timed to produce pups in early summer so the females winter training is not interrupted.



Take me!



Later.



The sled.