

health might depend on.

There is no public access to the oil fields or Prudhoe Bay beyond Deadhorse. Only the tour buses can take you there, and for this you need to make a prior reservation and provide an ID number from passport or driver's license.

I boarded my bus with about 15 other travelers. Along the way the guide told us some of the amazing facts about oil extraction, water separation and re-injection into the wells, and the enormous pumping stations that send a million barrels per day southward to Valdez. As we neared the water's edge both air and water temperature were in the 30's. I had a chilly apprehension but couldn't back out now from my planned swim. The water was brutally cold but I waded out to chest depth and ducked under. The shock wears off quickly and is replaced by a pleasant numbness. I swam for about five minutes with no problem. One other brave soul jumped quickly in and out.

Back in Deadhorse I considered spending the night since it had been a long hard day. But it was only 6 p.m. and the weather was clear, so I decided to ride back to Coldfoot. I found the sole gas station, which is unmarked and unattended.

You enter an insulated shed, follow the credit card instructions, start the pump, then go back outside to use the fill hose.

The ride back to Coldfoot was lovely and peaceful. I saw a pair of moose, but missed the herd of musk ox that some others had seen. The fog had lifted just enough in the pass so that I could see the snow-clad slopes all around me. I rode slowly and enjoyed the tree-less landscape of tundra, river and vast fields colored brilliant pink by little blossoms in the ground cover.

At midnight I reached Coldfoot, still in bright twilight. I parked the bike, dismounted and promptly fell flat on my back, more tired than I had realized. Pitching the tent was not an option, so again I treated myself to a pricey motel room (\$150). Things looked rosy and dry for my ride south to Fairbanks in the morning.

But it rained all night, and was still coming down hard when I awoke. I relaxed in bed 'til checkout time, determined to wait out the weather.

At this time I began to hear reports that a wolf had attacked a woman and bitten her twice. This occurred at Arctic Circle only half a day after my wolf incident and

about 20 miles from it. She was walking from a campground to the nearby concrete bathroom when the wolf attacked. She ran into the bathroom and hid for several hours, and when she started to come out the wolf was still there waiting for her! Finally other campers came in a car and rescued her. Prior to this many Alaskans had told me that there has never been a recorded case of wolves attacking humans. Here are some further proposed explanations of my own wolf experience. I was greatly comforted by the last one of them.

Wolf was playing (as mentioned).

Wolf had rabies.

Wolf just happened to be jogging north.

Wolf appeared as my protective spirit, my 'totem'.

By noon it was still drizzling with no end in sight. I couldn't wait any longer, so I rode out southwards into the mud. Today's ride was hot, sticky and muddy. The rain did stop after two hours so at least visibility was then good. I was getting better at riding in the mud but still inched my way up steep hills like Beaver Slide. Occasionally some GS riders would pass me, cruising happily



Muddy sections through the tundra keep you alert, and you get used to the nearby pipeline.