

Haul Road

of the night, no people anywhere.

To my amazement I saw two solo riders about this time going in the opposite direction, each on a BMW GS. I wanted to talk, I wanted to warn them about the wolf and the mud. They appeared unstoppable, riding like supermen with perfect confidence in their ability and the machine. I'm sure they made it to Yukon River or Fairbanks without trouble.

The temperature was 42 degrees in a light drizzle. In my waterproof suit and heavy riding armor I was actually dry and toasty warm. I simply parked the bike on the road near the truck and lay down on the gravel between them for a deep and refreshing nap of about three hours. I figured Eggor would let me in if another wild animal emergency occurred.

When I awoke there was still no sign from Eggor. Desperate as I was for gas, there was no point in disturbing him since he wouldn't be carrying any in his diesel truck. I decided to push on as far as I could, with hopes of finding another safe spot to stop just before running out of gas. I didn't want this to occur at some arbitrary spot next to a bear. As expected, the reserve light came on when I had 70 miles still to go.

The next terrifying hill was aptly named Beaver Slide. The steep downhill north side was not only unpaved, but churned into thick oily mud. I made it down in first gear, engine off.

When I had maybe five miles left in the tank I reached another good hilltop, called Gobbler's Hill, also with a concrete bathroom. This would be the best place to wait for rescue. The weather had cleared and the great view showed me some buildings in the distance below. My Mileposts book confirmed this was the Jim River Maintenance compound, exactly 6.5 miles ahead.

I went for it, coasting the first two miles down Gobbler's Hill and entering the maintenance yard on fumes. These places are strictly off-limits to the public, but I was determined and desperate. The foreman gave the OK and a young man named Corey gave me 1.5 gallons of gas, no charge. Then 35 miles later I limped on one cylinder into the muddy truck-stop called Coldfoot.

Oddly, this important refuge, the sole

station along the 360-mile stretch from the Yukon River to Deadhorse, first appears only as an intersection of two dirt roads, unmarked except for a curious billboard announcing "Sourdough." So the weary rider has to explore the muddy crossroad to discover the compound. In a quarter-mile you round a bend and ride into the two-acre parking lot of mud and puddles. On one side is the 24-hour café/restaurant. On the other is a soggy campground and the Slate Creek Motel. I think these stations are somewhat removed from the main road in attempt to be out of range of the huge dust clouds that trucks stir up on the Haul Road.

I eagerly filled my tank and sipped hot coffee. I told the story of the wolf chase to staff and travelers, both to warn them and to get local opinions about the behavior

strapped on its side to a palette. Another casualty of the Haul Road, I thought.

But the owner/rider, Steve Sady from Utah, emerged out of his water-soaked tent and explained that the rear wheel bearing had failed prematurely, leaving him stranded 80 miles north of Coldfoot. Steve had spent a few days getting a local pickup to fetch the bike and was now negotiating with truckers to find space on a flatbed to haul the skid down to Trail's End BMW in Fairbanks. What luck for me to meet an experienced GS rider here, who turned out to be a mechanical engineer with time on his hands! "C'mon, let's fix your bike!" he said enthusiastically.

Without much hope I agreed, and started the engine to begin diagnosis. The right exhaust stayed cold, so we



Coldfoot is the last refuge before Deadhorse on the Haul Road.

of the wolf. To my surprise, many Alaskans laughed outright and said the wolf was just having fun. But others took it more seriously, as I did.

Now discouragement and a feeling of failure set in, as I sensed that I must turn back. The bike was barely running on one cylinder but might quit at any time. I was beginning to crumple with exhaustion. Though the rain had tapered off, the remaining 240 miles to Deadhorse were still probably slick with mud, and I knew the road climbed over a mountain pass in the Brooks Range. Coldfoot had been named after an exhausted group of gold miners who gave up and turned back here in 1900, and I knew how they felt.

What first caught my attention near the gas pump at Coldfoot was an R1150GS

removed the right fairing. The throttle body looked completely normal, but we soon discovered that its return spring had been broken at one end, apparently during the fall in the mud. This left the butterfly valve in a random position at idle and explained why the engine ran better at full throttle. The spring was captive inside the throttle pulley and it looked impossible to replace it or to bend a new hook on its end. I made a phone call to Tom Cutter back home who confirmed that I needed a new throttle body assembly containing pulley spring and all. I came out of the café glumly, only to find Steve with a big grin on his face. He had produced a piece of shock cord from his kit and threaded it through a hole in the throttle pulley. We tied the other end