

Caribana festival ready to swing again in Toronto

CANADIAN PRESS

TORONTO — Caribana, the Toronto street festival that has attracted thousands of people to the city each summer, is set to return this year after an agreement was reached on a debt-restructur-

ing plan.

The festival, which began in 1967, is scheduled for July 18-Aug. 4, including the giant street parade Aug. 2.

The Caribbean Cultural Committee, the non-profit owner and producer of the festival, said in a news release the

debt-restructuring plan was "a significant milestone." It was approved on March 31 by the Ontario Superior Court of Justice in Bankruptcy.

Last year, organizers admitted that confusion kept revellers away from the festival.

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Kevin Vallely looks out over the Alaskan snow.

Environment begins to change around us

Spring breaks on snowy trek to Alaska

Kevin Vallely



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travellers, as shelter is critical to survival. A note on the front door reads that we are free to use the premises provided we respect it, keep it clean, and leave kindling.

Upon entering, our eyes slowly adjust to the darkness and we begin to make out a large room with two old steel cots, a small table and a large wood-burning stove made from a discarded old fuel drum. The evening passes like most others, with us chatting about the day on the trail and plans for the days ahead.

Small cabins such as this are welcome rest stops on the river and are as unique as they are remote. From derelict remains with no doors or windows to tidy log structures with propane lights and stove, they are a window into the bush life of Alaska.

Our route deteriorates during the next few days as warm temperatures make for a punchy trail. What should have been a speedy flight to the next village proves to be a tedious ride-and-push affair.

Nestled between two huge outcrops of rock, the village of Ruby is one of the prettiest in Alaska. The town was built in the early 1900s for gold exploration, and quickly reveals itself as a mining community by its location on the south bank, as traditional Native villages were built exclusively on the north shore for the sun exposure.

While in town a young man named Daryl Hoaney tells us his great-grandfather saw a man riding down the river on a bike when he was a young boy and asks us if we're carrying newspapers to Nome.

Three years earlier, the mayor of Ruby

In the freezing cold of February, 1900, a young man named Ed Jesson began an amazing cycling expedition that started in Yukon Territory and ended on the west coast of Alaska. When he rode his bicycle into Nome on March 29, he carried with him copies of newspapers he had packed at the start of his trip, bringing what was then the latest news to the residents of the community. Kevin Vallely, Andy Sterns and Frank Wolf (left to right in picture) left Dawson City, Yukon, just over five weeks ago and began following the route Jesson blazed. Here they leave Tanana, pass through the village of Ruby, and anticipate the toughest part of their journey, along the Bering Sea to Nome.

A vast band of white sweeps gracefully through rolling hills of black spruce and birch as bare snow-covered mountains peer out from beyond. The Yukon River is different now. Its surface no longer shows signs of torture as the jum-





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bled ice and open leads have all but disappeared. The sheer cliffs of limestone that so closely checked its flow north of Dawson City have given way to a gentler landscape. This is the final river section taking us to the Bering Sea coast.

We leave the community of Tanana in mid-afternoon after running the necessary errands that arriving in a town demands, such as purchasing food and fuel as well as checking our e-mail. The Alaskan government has equipped all schools in the state with the latest computers and satellite internet access so, amazingly, we can stumble off the river in the most remote region of Alaska and still be able to surf the net. This policy keeps all communities connected with the outside world and allows us to make installments that would otherwise be impossible.

The first two days of travel on the river are swift, with a compact trail and perfect weather, and we arrive early to a small one-room log cabin nicknamed the bone yard. An eroding cliff on the opposite bank periodically spits out the remains of a great woolly mammoth and has given name to this spot.

The owner, Gerald (Wolf) Nickolai isn't living here at the moment, and we decide to bed down in his den for the evening. The unwritten code of the North dictates an open-door policy for

Jay DeLima, unwittingly inspired this adventure by telling me the story of Ed Jesson, and we eagerly track down our friends for an evening of food and stories. We are reluctant to leave this tiny village that seems so familiar with the history of our adventure.

The environment is changing we're beginning to sense a shift in the season. Evening temperatures still drop into the -20s, but the afternoons are becoming warmer and we begin to notice running water from streams percolating through the snow. The daylight is becoming longer, increasing at a rate of seven minutes per day, as each evening's sunset races to meet the next day's sunrise. This all brings a certain sense of urgency to our task, even though logic tells us the ice will remain safe for weeks.

We are now in the small native Indian village of Koyukuk and hope to be off the Yukon River in two days. A 160-km trail called the Portage connects the village of Kaltag on the Yukon to the community of Unalakleet on the Bering Sea coast and will transport us to the most hostile place on our journey. Notorious for ground blizzards and hurricane-force winds, the sea ice and tundra of the coast will be the final crux before Nome.

For more information about the journey, visit www.bikesonice.com.

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