

Extra Information

Alaskan Highways:

Considering our remoteness, Alaska is blessed with wonderful roads.

Considering our winters, it's a good thing! Roads in Alaska do not go up to high elevations or they would be in permanent snow. If they were steep, they would be too icy to climb all winter.

Many of the pictures you see on our website look like they were taken at high elevations. Bear in mind that this far north, tree line is rarely as high as 2500 feet, and often much lower. That opens



up a world of beautiful Alpine scenery without having to deal with lung-busting thin air! Since virtually none of the land was in private ownership before the highways were built, there was never a necessity to build roads around someone's property lines. Therefore the roads very effectively finesse the terrain, winding as necessary to avoid hills and to keep grades even. Alaska is certainly well known for its mountains. Fortunately, the roads in the North Country pass through the mountains rather than over them. For example, when we cross the Alaska Range at Isabel Pass (the highest point on our tours), the road only climbs to 3200 feet. As a rule, the steepest grades on our larger highways is 6% (same as on Interstate Highways.) And the greatest one-day elevation gain on either tour is only 1800 feet! Most of the Richardson Highway has wide shoulders, such as these spot about 35 miles out of Valdez. This road cross section is typical of the entire highway, except for the section in the next photo. On the northern Richardson Highway between Delta Junction and Paxson, the road is mostly shoulderless. When the Parks highway was completed in 1972, this section of road was bypassed by the vast majority of traffic. Since then vehicle traffic on this stretch of road has been negligible. As a consequence all the lodges and gas stations closed long ago and we eat lunch out of the van.

RAIN: Alaska has an exaggerated reputation for being rainy because most of the people who visit here come up on cruise ships! They cruise the Inside Passage, where the warm waters of the Japan Current fill the air with moisture that falls on the coastal mountains of southeast Alaska. Yes, it rains a lot down there, but away from the coast, most of Alaska and the Yukon Territory is technically semi-arid, getting only 10 – 15 inches of precipitation per year. Below is the monthly average rainfall for summer in Fairbanks and Anchorage as provided by the National Weather Service. Now that's not so scary, is it? Rain is the most unpredictable part of Alaska's unpredictable weather. Statically, June is the driest month with the chance of rain increasing until late August when it tends to get dryer again. That being said, it is very common for a season not to follow this pattern, and the difference from one week to the next is likely to be greater than the difference between the months. A typical 8-day tour will get about 1/2 day of rain. Now, of course, all this doesn't mean it won't rain on you. This far north, anything can happen at any time. The best way to avoid rain is to have all the gear we recommend. Then, perhaps, the irony inherent in nature will send us perfect weather just to spite you.

That's an outcome we can all live with!

Alaskan wildlife You never know what we might see out on the road. We will almost always see moose, we often see caribou, and occasionally bears. We are occasionally asked, "Will I be eaten by a bear?" The answer is, "No, you will not be eaten by a bear." Bears don't like people, so they keep away. While we occasionally glimpse a bear, we rarely get a chance to get a camera out before it disappears into the woods. We often see foxes, rabbits, and porcupines. Very rarely we see lynx.

There are no snakes or reptiles in Alaska. Mosquitoes! Alaska has gotten a reputation for voracious mosquitoes. Like many 'reputations', this one has elements of truth, which are often exaggerated to a ridiculous extent. (See photo...) Alaska has generated this reputation largely because of two of the largest attractions have been hunting and fishing. If I wanted to attract mosquitoes I would go to a wet, wooded area and stand still. Hunters and fishermen do exactly that, and yes, they will get eaten alive. I have been in Alaska for 33 years now, and the worst mosquitoes I have ever seen were in Idaho. In second and third places come Minnesota and Northern California. I'm sure many of you have seen places that can beat any of the ones I mentioned. The fact is, anyplace on the planet with woods and water will have mosquitoes! The typical maximum airspeed of an Alaskan mosquito is about four miles per hour. (You won't find that kind of information in an encyclopedia.) I have been walking away from mosquitoes for years now, and I have observed the speed at which they can no longer keep up. When hiking, you can just walk fast or trot for twenty yards or so and you will lose them for a while. On a bicycle, they can't keep up except when you have a tailwind that is going exactly the same speed as you are. How often does that happen? Most of the other bugs I get asked about either don't exist in Alaska or are here in such small numbers as to not have annoyed me in 33 years. These include the dreaded Black Flies which exist on the east coast of the US.

What's a day like: On a typical high mileage day, we will meet for breakfast at 8:00 AM and be ready to ride about 9:30 AM. We generally divide the riding day into four legs of 12-22 miles each. After the first leg, we have a snack break at the van, where we have bananas, apples, candy bars, drinks, and all kinds of other goodies available. After the second leg, we have lunch, which may be in a lodge, or may be on the side of the road. After the third leg, we have another snack break, and then it's onto our rooms and dinner. We eat our way down the highway! A shorter mileage day proceeds much the same except after lunch we might hop in the van to go to a trailhead for a hiking excursion. Riders ride at their own paces. At all times a guide is employed as 'sweeper' and rides at the back of the group to catch any flat tires or other problems. Some groups string out over quite a distance. Others are much the same speed and stay as a pack. No matter. You get to ride at a pace you find comfortable. Your guide knows the road. He knows the hills. After a few days, they will know you too. We are always glad to answer questions like, "Do I want to ride this next leg?" We know how difficult the ride is, we know how scenic it is, and we can see how fresh you are. We do our best to make sure that you get all you want, but not too much. What if I get tired? After all, you are on vacation; there is no dishonor in taking a break. If you ever don't want to ride your bike or take part in any of the activities, we take care of that too! You will see the van roughly every two hours. You can feel free to get in the van at any time! Bonus Miles! Most days will have the opportunity for you to ride even more mileage than the tour itinerary states. Let us know! We can usually give you all you want!

