

IRAZU, BARROW, the YUKON



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IF ANYONE TELLS YOU that the days of the pioneer are past, suggest that they take a trip to the out-of-the-way places reached by the side roads and trails from the Inter-american Highway in Central America and Mexico, and the Alcan Highway in Canada and Alaska. They will be pioneers whether they plan it that way or not. Eva Jane and I learned this between the latter part of November 1964 and the middle of October 1965 when we made trips from our home in Washington, D. C., to the bottom and top of the North American Continent.

The two trips required seven months and covered over 26,500 miles, of which 21,822 were by our family Chevrolet and the balance by freighter, steamship, ferryboats, motorboats, airplanes, trains, rail scooter, dog sled, and hiking where roads were not available.

In January, while Washingtonians were freezing, we were in Puntarenas, Costa Rica, where the temperature was over 100°F day after day. In August, the hottest month of the year in Washington, we were in Barrow, Alaska, with the temperature below freezing and the Artic Ocean filled with ice packs. To narrate our trip would require a book-length article so I will skip the freighter trip from New Orleans to Puerto Matias de Galvez, Guatemala, and our interesting experiences in Central America, Mexico, and Canada and limit myself to comments on the southern and northern points of our trip and a side trip to Dawson City in the Yukon.

Irazú is a volcano near Cartago, Costa Rica, which, after 20 years of inactivity, resumed erupting in March 1963. It was still active when we visited Costa Rica in January 1965. Recently, Irazú was reported to be inac-

tive again but there is no assurance that it will stay that way.

Irazú is approximately 18 miles northeast of San Jose, Costa Rica, and the fine blue-black ash from the eruptions was constantly settling on the city, and sifting into the houses, stores, and offices. The ash has an acid content which corrodes metals and causes skin irritations and eye infections. Many natives wore masks to protect their respiratory systems, and walks and streets were swept and washed daily to lessen the damage to people and automobiles. There were very few tourists in San Jose as warnings had been broadcast telling of the situation. The ash had inflicted millions of dollars damage to the coffee and tobacco crops and ruined the grazing land over an area of more than 250 square miles.

Occasionally Irazú hurled red-hot rocks which killed several visitors to the crater, and the natives no longer attempted the trip to the summit. An observation platform with a heavy concrete roof offers some protection to the few visitors who make the trip.

Irazú is 11,325 feet high with a narrow winding road to the summit from which both the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans may be seen on a clear day. Much of the road is through verdant landscape as the rocks and heavier ash come down within a few miles of the crater and the lighter ash floats a considerable distance before descending. There were several inches of ash covering the last few miles of the road nearest the summit, and the grass and trees were black and stiff making a gruesome sight. The fields were filled with ashes and rocks. It was difficult to drive, especially since we were in low clouds much of the time with a visibility of

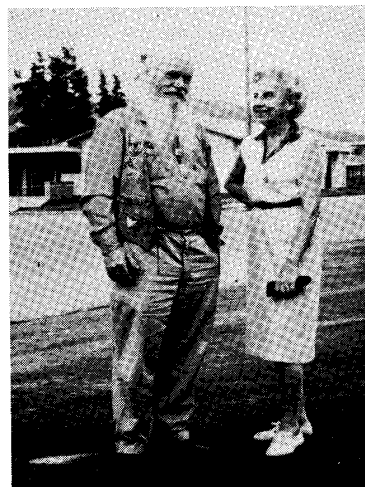
less than 100 feet. During the hour and a half we spent driving the 15.5 miles from the main road to the summit we did not see a single automobile, nor did we see or pass any on the way down.

Our arrival at the crater, which is nearly one-third mile in diameter, was greeted with an eruption of rocks. Since rock eruptions were infrequent, we felt reasonably certain that we had time to explore the place before the next eruption of rocks. We witnessed several eruptions of ash and steam each of which formed a vast cloud quite similar to the mushroom type cloud following an atomic bomb explosion. Fortunately, no lava was running over the rim of the crater. On a train trip to Puerto Limón a few days later (there is no road between San Jose and Puerto Limón) we passed near the base of Irazú and saw the tremendous damage inflicted by the volcano during the rainy season of December 1963. Tons of ash were converted into mud which slid down the sides of the volcano demolishing hundreds of houses in and near Cartago and killing 13 people. Fields in the vicinity of the volcano were filled with huge boulders from Irazú, many four feet and more in diameter.

We returned to Washington by way of Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and Mexico the middle of March 1965 and left for Western Canada and Alaska the latter part of June 1965. On our way north we visited many points of interest including Banff, Lake Louise, and Jasper National Park. We drove the full length of the Alcan Highway which stretches 1523 miles from Dawson Creek, British Columbia, Canada, to Fairbanks, Alaska. In spite of the dust and mos-

LEFT . . C. V. Maudlin pur17 at the summit of Mt. Healy in Mt. McKinley National Park. Nenana River is in background. He is a past national secretary of Triangle.

BELOW . . Cloud of ash and steam leaving crater of Irazu. Occasional red-hot rocks had killed visitors.



ABOVE . . Eva Jane Maudlin visits with Yukon Bud Fisher, a Klondike prospector now living in Whitehorse, Yukon Territory. Since their tour of the American continents, the Maudlins have spent four months hunting, fishing, touring Africa. Full game quota included two elephants.

RIGHT . . Eskimos gather snow for melting to obtain water.

quitoes we found the trip much more pleasant than we had anticipated.

Barrow, Alaska, the largest Eskimo village in the world, is located on the northern-most tip of solid land on the North American Continent facing the Arctic Ocean. It is less than 1200 miles from the north pole and there are no roads to it. The only airline with service to Barrow has its terminal at Fairbanks, Alaska. Before going to Barrow we spent a day in Nome, and two days in Kotzebue, Alaska, which also is above the Arctic Circle and largely inhabited by Eskimos.

The population of Barrow is approximately 1300. Contrary to the general impression, the Alaskan Eskimos do not presently live in ice igloos or sod houses. They have small shacks or houses, and in Barrow many of the dwellings are heated with natural gas from a nearby US Navy well.

The ground is frozen solid the year around. There are no conventional streets or sidewalks, only trails which go in and out between the houses and are used by dog sleds and snowmobiles. There are no passenger automobiles in Barrow.

Barrow does not have a water or sewer system. There are no wells and the natives obtain water for drinking and cooking by melting snow. Refuse is disposed of by hauling it on sleds far out on the ice on the Arctic Ocean. Other than a small trading post there are no stores or shops. From May 11 to August 2 the sun does not set and when we were at Barrow in early August it was light enough to take pictures 24 hours a day.

Many Eskimo families have a dog team consisting of five, seven, or nine Alaskan huskies. They are working dogs, not pets, many of which are crossed with wolves. They are kept on chains or ropes and are outdoors around the clock. Visitors are warned to stay away from them.

Hunting and fishing is excellent and an Eskimo family has no difficulty in getting sufficient caribou, fish, seal, and walrus to supply its needs and those of the dogs. Each dog is fed one dried fish a day. Occasionally several families combine their efforts

and hunt whales. Some meat is dried and some is stored in "deep freezers" made by cutting a hole in the permanently frozen ground. Other food items are very expensive as it is impossible to grow vegetables or crops due to the perpetually frozen ground. There are no trees and lumber must be brought in by air or on the annual trip of the supply ship.

The Arctic Ocean is full of ice the year around. Occasionally, in the middle of summer the wind will create a narrow channel between the ice packs making it possible for the natives to paddle their walrus hide covered comiaks to the supply ship which is anchored out.

The natives wear heavy fur and hide clothing and mukluks. The women usually wear a loose fitting calico over-parka with wolverine ruff over their fur clothing. Babies and younger children are carried in an ingenious cloth or hide sling on the backs of the mothers and older children.

The Eskimos are very friendly and the happiest and most contented of all the races we have observed in our travels around the world. They appear to thoroughly enjoy life. Life at the "Top of the World" will soon be different as the Government is beginning to move into Barrow to "improve conditions" and change their way of life. We are glad to have visited Barrow before the change.

On our return trip, after visiting Anchorage, Valdez, Mt. McKinley, and other points of interest in Alaska, we left the Alcan Highway at Tetlin Junction, Alaska, on a narrow dirt road for a 523-mile detour to visit Dawson City, Yukon Territory, Canada. Yukon Territory covers 207,076 square miles and has a total population of 14,628 of which approximately 2300 are Indians and 23 are Eskimos.

The road between Tetlin Junction and Dawson City is used principally by hunters. There are no service stations and the last 70 miles is open only in the summer. The road is through breath taking mountainous country and instead of going around the mountains the road goes over the tops. Although the trip was made in late August, we encountered much snow. We saw many caribou but only



one automobile, a hunting party, during the trip to Dawson City.

Dawson City, at the junction of the Yukon and Klondike Rivers, was a little village of less than 100 people prior to August 17, 1896, when gold was discovered in nearby Bonanza Creek. During the historic Klondike Gold Rush of 1897-98, prospectors flocked to the place and the population increased to over 30,000 housed in hastily constructed hotels, shacks, and tents with stores, bars, saloons, etc. Today Dawson City has a population of less than 900. Many of the original buildings are still standing, or leaning, and some contain the original tables, chairs, tools, etc. An old blacksmith shop, other than for dust and trash, looks as if the smithy had just gone to lunch.

The Palace Grand Theatre is one of the very few buildings that has been restored. It is used by a stock company during the summer months when tourists fly to Dawson City from Anchorage and Fairbanks, on one- and two-day tours. Robert Service's cabin is standing and furnished as it was when he occupied it. Strange as it may seem, visitors do not appear to remove articles from these old places for souvenirs.

Park and plug in

Dawson City has a very short summer and temperatures of 40°F below zero are not uncommon in winter. Due to the extreme cold weather the streets are not paved and the sidewalks are made of wood. Since the growing season is very short, the natives raise their vegetables in small greenhouses on their premises. As in northern Alaska, the automobiles are equipped with electric engine heaters and parking places have electric outlets so that motorists can plug in the car heater cords.

While in Dawson City, we panned for gold and got a little "color." However, we decided that there were easier ways to make a living. Evidently others found the same to be true and many dredges and other gold mining equipment have been abandoned and are rusting away on the banks and in the creeks. Only a very limited amount of hydraulic mining equipment is operating.

August 17 is Discovery Day and each year residents and visitors celebrate the discovery of gold on Bonanza Creek with a parade, games, and celebrations. This is the official end of the tourist season, the theatre and gambling ship closes, and the natives return to their normal life. We were fortunate to be in Dawson City for several days when life was normal.

On leaving Dawson City, we drove over a narrow gravel and dirt road which follows the Yukon River much of the 350 miles to Whitehorse, Y.T. After visiting in Whitehorse for several days, we put our Chevrolet and

ourselves on the narrow gauge White Pass and Yukon Railroad which follows the Gold Rush Trail of '98 to Skagway, Alaska. The railroad, the only one in the Yukon, was constructed in the late '90's through the rugged St. Elias Mountain Range which separates Yukon from the Pacific Ocean. It is 110.7 miles long and is an engineering masterpiece.

Skagway, known as the "Gateway to the Yukon" is a port town with two short narrow roads which dead-end a few miles from town. It was a city of 15,000 during the Klondike Gold Rush and now has a population of 750.

After spending several days in Skagway, visiting the many historical and interesting places, we took the "Inside Passage" water route to Seattle, Washington, using various ferryliners, ferry boats and steamships. We disembarked with our Chevrolet at Juneau, Sitka, and Ketchikan, Alaska, at Prince Rupert, Vancouver, and Victoria, Canada, and at Port Angeles, Washington, and toured the surrounding country. Feeling that we had done enough sightseeing for one year we took a direct route to Washington, D. C., from Seattle and are now planning our next adventure.