

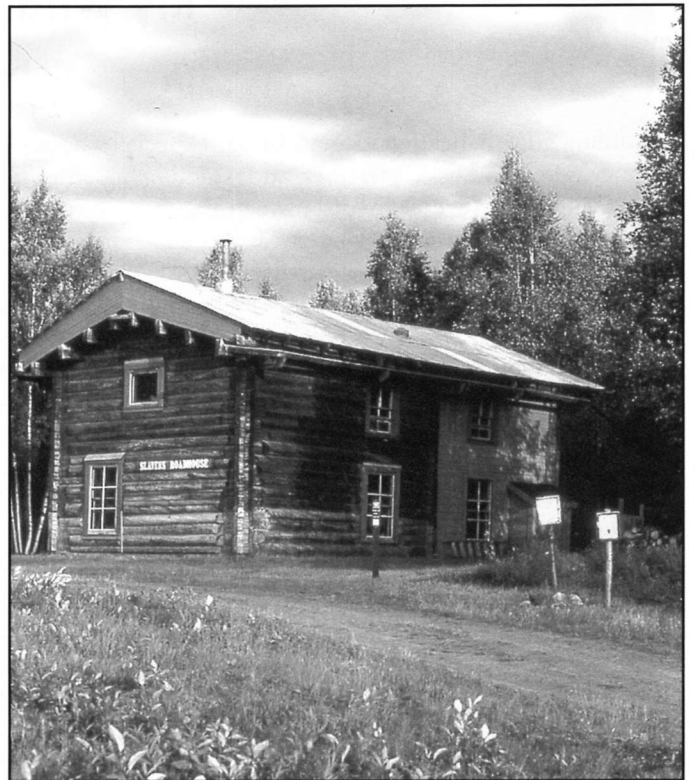
Our goal for the day was Slaven's roadhouse at the outlet of Coal Creek. It had looked like a short day on the map. There was supposed to be time to take in some of the history evident along Coal Creek. The wind and the river had other ideas. We arrived at Slaven's at 5:30 p.m. and trudged up to the big two-story house. The river had dropped 11.6 metres from our previous camp, but it seemed like we had fought for every bit of that descent.

The roadhouse was built in 1932 by Frank Slaven. This Ohio lad had come north in the Klondike Rush of >98 and had moved on into Alaska, staking his first claims on Coal Creek in 1905. With the onset of the Depression, Slaven branched out from mining into the hospitality industry. The National Park Service began a careful restoration of the house in 1993.

We were moving the canoe well back from the blustery river when we met Keith, a maintenance ranger who was working at the site. He offered us several sleeping options and the use of his kitchen. I choose a bunk space on the second floor, which old-timers like Ed Biederman or his son, Charlie, may well have used. Both men had delivered the mail between Eagle and Circle by dogsled.



*Breakfast at Slaven's Roadhouse*



*Slaven's Roadhouse*

The old days are relived at Slaven's for two weeks every February during the Yukon Quest International Sled Dog Race. The roadhouse is an official "dog drop" where mushers can leave injured and tired dogs for airlift to the outside. Park staff are on hand to keep the wood stove red hot, and to provide round-the-clock meals for the men and women who are driving their teams between Whitehorse and Fairbanks. In 2002, 27 teams stopped here for a break from the -40° weather. To get water for their visitors, the park staff had to cut through over one metre of river ice.

I got a sense of the Quest experience by reading Sue Henry's *Murder on the Yukon Quest*, starring musher/detective Jessie Arnold. I realized we had a dog's eye view of part of the Quest route, from Dawson City to Circle.

The wind was still blowing hard at 10:30 p.m. when we turned in. It picked up again the next morning as we bent to our labours, fuelled by oatmeal porridge that was cooked on a propane kitchen range. The sun was shining and the big blow seemed to be slacking by lunchtime. We stopped as the river was about to turn from north to west. On the far bank we looked back to Takoma Bluff, rising 180 m from the water's edge. The top of the bluff pulls back gradually from the river and tapers north into a massive wetland. This is the first harbinger of the vast Yukon Flats which lie ahead. When we pulled out at Circle, the wonderful mix of scenery we had enjoyed would give way to 300 km of flat marshland.

By late afternoon we were saying goodbye to Yukon-Charlie. I would love to visit with him again!