

## Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

# The Long Journey Home: Traveling with Beau

**Author's Note:** This is the eleventh in a series of stories<sup>1</sup> reflecting on a 2007 trip to Alaska with my dog, Beau. During that trip I began a personal journey to an expanded understanding of One Health, the implications of which would unfold over several years.

By Dr. Donald F. Smith  
November 12, 2014

Doris flew out of Anchorage on September 3rd, on the last direct Chicago flight of the season. The following day, American Airlines would be rerouting that plane to San Juan, yet another indication that the north is ephemeral and quite isolated, especially in the winter months.

Beau and I toured the outskirts of Anchorage for two hours until we were sure Doris's plane had departed, then we headed north, retracing our path through Palmer and the Wrangell Mountains. We had barely reached Tok, 325 miles from Anchorage when my daughter called with the news that my 89-year-old mother had fallen at a bus stop in Toronto and broken her hip. My plans for a circuitous trip back through the northern Yukon and then south through British Columbia changed, and we headed home by a more direct route.

Much of the scenery was familiar from my trip west, though higher elevations in both Alaska and the Yukon were now snow-covered. Some things hadn't changed, however, such as the pair of swans cohabiting the same marsh and lake where they had been 10 days earlier.

Ready for breakfast in Beaver Creek on our second day, we were enticed by the sign for Buckshot Betty's Restaurant and Cabins. We pulled onto the spacious gravel apron and parked between two large RV's, each with miniature dogs barking at Beau through the closed windows.

I entered a cozy breakfast nook already inhabited by a dozen or more people sitting around a large table overflowing with plates piled high with pancakes, eggs and sausage. Not wanting to sit down until invited to do so, I patiently waited by the door for several minutes until a larger than life person who could only be Betty herself, burst into the eating area from the kitchen. Balancing half a dozen plates in one hand and two coffee pots in the other, she ordered me to sit down in her unique blend of colorful language, and reinforced her admonition by blurting something about her not being my mother. When I told her I wanted takeout because my dog was waiting in the car, she barked at me to "bring the mutt inside."



*Buckshot Betty and an impatient Beau, Beaver Creek, Yukon*  
(Photo by the author, 2007)

Beau and I had a delightful time with Betty, especially after the RV's left and it was just she and her assistant with the two of us. She is a legend in these parts and, as we left, she tucked a copy of the CD, "The Ballad of Buckshot Betty," under my arm.

People in the Yukon come in two kinds. Old timers, like Buckshot Betty and newcomers, like the young woman we met late that night on the outskirts of Teslin. Having seen a kaleidoscope of northern lights in central Alaska a week earlier, I inquired if she had seen them in this area in the late fall. Looking at me as if she didn't understand the question, I repeated it and said we had seen them in Denali Park. "No," she answered authoritatively, *"they must be in Alaska. I've never seen them and I've been here for six months."*

Walking back to the jeep, an enormous expanse of the northwestern sky was filled with the Aurora and, before reaching the jeep, they were dancing right above me. The show was visible for the next two hours, so brilliant and beautiful that we stopped several times to marvel at the wonder of it.

I met another long-timer at the 95-person hamlet of Burwash Landing at milepost 1093 on the Alaskan Highway. Beau and I were the sole patrons of the quaint Kluane Museum of Natural History with its interesting taxidermy collection complete with a standing polar bear that stretched to an imposing ten-feet in height. The proprietor, a caustic young man with long hair and beard told me he was originally from Toronto. "How did you get up here?" I asked. "By Greyhound!" was his curt answer, and the conversation deteriorated. Though after Beau softened the ice between us, we had a most interesting conversation.



*Beau still reluctant to pose for a picture, Burwash Landing, Yukon*  
(Photo by the author, 2007)



*One of triplet black bear cubs along the Alaska Highway, Yukon*  
(Photo by the author, 2007)

When encountering animals on the Alaska Highway, a cardinal rule is to never leave your vehicle to approach, and if you do stop to admire or take photographs, be particularly mindful of traffic. As I was pulling over the right shoulder to admire a Black bear sow and her three cubs, a family of tourists piled out of a large van just ahead of me. Two men and a woman spilled out onto the road, within ten yards of the sow, and I watched incredulously as two more fumbled around in the back of the van pulling out tripods and over-stuffed camera bags.

Just as the pair with the cameras started across the road towards the bears, an enormous blast from an 18-wheeler exploded from behind our jeep and an accelerating driver swept his rig past us, barreling down the middle of the road and barely missing the tourists. The sow kept on munching grass and inching her brood further down the ditch beside the road as the undeterred visitors set up their tripod and snapped pictures.



*A red fox along the Alaska Highway, Yukon*  
(Photo by the author, 2007)

The remainder of the trip was relatively uneventful and I was visiting my mother -- she had returned to her assisted-care facility several days earlier -- ten days after leaving Anchorage. Beau and I stayed in Toronto two more days and then returned to Ithaca.

Beau's behavior was no different from the many other times he had returned home from a long trip. As we neared home, he sat up, started to whine and jiggle all over. His tail flapped loudly against the jeep's seat and he dashed from the driver's side as soon as I opened the door. Around and around the lawn he ran, then bounded in the house as Doris opened the front door to greet him. After his hugs from her, he was back outside, sniffing for new trails left by deer and squirrels throughout the property. Then, as is his ritual, he raced around the house again, this time stopping at his water dish for a few noisy laps.

Within half an hour, he was stretched out on his favorite chair, sound asleep and snoring softly.

---

<sup>1</sup> Smith, Donald F. Traveling with Beau: My 34-day Trip to a Deeper Understanding of One Health. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, September 9, 2014.

Smith, Donald F. Returning to my Canadian Roots: Traveling with Beau. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, September 11, 2014.

Smith, Donald F. From Ontario to Wisconsin: Traveling with Beau. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, October 16, 2014.

Smith, Donald F. A Lesson in Humility: Traveling with Beau. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, October 17, 2014.

Smith, Donald F. The Canadian Prairie: Traveling with Beau. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, October 21, 2014.

Smith, Donald F. The Texas of Canada: Traveling with Beau. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, October 29, 2014.

---

Smith, Donald F. The Alaska Highway: Traveling with Beau. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, October 31, 2014.  
Smith, Donald F. Lake Kluane: Traveling with Beau. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, November 3, 2014.  
Smith, Donald F. Arriving at Anchorage: Traveling with Beau. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, November 5, 2014.  
Smith, Donald F. Lakes, Mountains and Brown Bears: Traveling with Beau. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, November 10, 2014.

#### KEYWORDS:

Human-animal bond  
One Health  
Traveling with a dog  
Alaska Highway  
Yukon  
Beaver Creek, Alaska  
Burwash Landing, Alaska  
Kluane Museum of Natural History  
Black bear  
Red fox

#### LEADING QUESTION:

What types of people are there in the Yukon?

#### META-SUMMARY:

The author returns home on the Alaska Highway, Yukon, through Toronto with his dog.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dr. Donald F. Smith, Dean Emeritus of the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, had a passion for the value of the history of veterinary medicine as a gateway for understanding the present and the future of the profession.

Throughout his many professional roles from professor of surgery, to Department Chair of Clinical Sciences, Associate Dean of Education and of Academic Programs and Dean, he spearheaded changes in curriculum, clinical services, diagnostic services and more. He was a diplomat of the American College of Veterinary Surgeons and a member of the National Academy of Practices. Most recently he played a major role in increasing the role of women in veterinary leadership.

*Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine* is one of his projects where he was able to share his vast knowledge of the profession.