

Pan-American: the Northern Stretch

SUBARCTIC NORTH AMERICA

When we imagine the Pan-American Highway, chances are we think of the sections in Central and South America. Those great long stretches of road leading us through lush green mountains all the way down to Argentina's southern coast, which is where James Barkman traveled on his journey. He documented the whole trip, which we've presented here, but it was the very northernmost reaches that had a profound and lasting effect on his journey, and that portion of the route we wanted to focus on here. So let's hone in on the northern reaches, which encompass the mainland United States, Canada, and Alaska, and take us right into the Arctic Circle.

The northern end of the route begins here in the Arctic Circle, near Deadhorse, Alaska. In Deadhorse, there's a shop, a hotel, an airport—not much going on—but it's also home to the northernmost road in the Western Hemisphere: the James W. Dalton Highway. The Dalton Highway is a 414-mile (666-kilometer) supply road that runs from Fairbanks, right in the middle of Alaska, to Prudhoe Bay. The weather isn't exactly the most inviting—nor is the gray, slushy gravel that's known to coat the road's surface.

Riders who spend long days on the Dalton Highway often refer to it by mentioning which of their body parts went numb first. In poor weather, the highway is miserable, and plenty of riders have vowed never to return. In good weather, however, this road can be a complete joy: begin by skirting the Sag River, then pass between the Arctic National Park and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge—from there you'll move through settler towns like Wiseman, Coldfoot, and Prospect Creek. It's easy to spend huge amounts of time on the bike around here, partly due to natural roadblocks caused by elk, bison, and even the odd bear, and also because the days stretch on forever, with sunsets lingering in the sky, frozen as though in a painting, for hours on end.

