

# When seniors travel . . .

A monthly report covering travel news and views of special interest to older Alaskans and their families

## A suggestion for late vacation travel in 2009

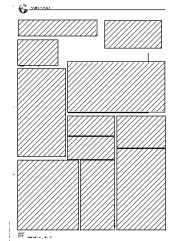
If you haven't already done so, you perhaps should be pondering where you might go for this year's vacation. Trouble is, although the pool of travel opportunities is deep and near-endless (San Francisco, Vegas, the Grand Canyon, the Panama Canal, Hawaii, Europe, Hong Kong), your pool of finances this year may be uncharacteristically shallow.

Well, here's a suggestion that's close to home, therefore less expensive, yet "foreign." The locals all speak English fluently. (Handy, eh?) The American dollar is gratefully accepted everywhere. And you'll find that hospitality is as abundant and as genuine as it is in Alaska.

We're talking about Canada. Neighboring Western Canada to be precise, where three-fourths of the Alaska Highway resides. And we're including the western and eastern approaches to the fabled roadway that was constructed during World War II by and for the use of the U.S. and Canadian military.

Now comes a product endorsement, of a sort I make only infrequently. If you think you may be interested in a western Canada road trip, I heartily recommend you pick up the current 2009 issue of The Milepost® and view the myriad opportunities for a short trip or long one. I know...I know... there are many good Alaska guidebooks out there, and I've contributed to a number of them. But none have the depth of coverage, especially for motorists, the Milepost® provides.

Earl Brown, field editor for the publication and a resident of Fort Nelson, British Columbia, is always ready to tout Canada's attractions. Among them:



- beautiful Muncho Lake in the Canadian Rockies;
- Liard Hot Springs Provincial Park, where travelers can soak in hot springs anytime of the year;
- the Watson Lake Signpost Forest, which dates back to 1942;
- Whitehorse, capital of Yukon Territory and home to the SS Klondike National Historic Site; and
- beautiful Kluane Lake, at 154 square miles the largest lake in the Yukon Territory. It is reachable through the two major access routes to the Alaska Highway that are logged in The MILEPOST® – the West Access Route through British Columbia and the East Access Route through Alberta.

Major tourist stops in Alberta range from the Royal Tyrrell Museum, with its 40 complete dinosaur skeletons, to West Edmonton Mall, which has more than 800 stores, 100 eating places and a waterpark. Then there's the less well-known but just as interesting stops, like the Okotoks Erratic, largest known glacial erratic rock in the world, and the South Peace Centennial Museum, which features vintage farm equipment and demonstrations of pioneer skills.

Along the West Access Route through British Columbia, there's the rugged Fraser River Canyon and the Hell's Gate Airtram; Barkerville Historic Town; the world's largest jade boulder in Cache Creek; an impressive display of chainsaw sculptures at Chetwynd; and W.A.C. Bennett Dam, one of the world's largest earthen dams. There are also quiet fishing lakes, campsites beside mountain lakes, and museums celebrating the province's history.

Other British Columbia routes detailed in The MILEPOST® include the Cassiar Highway through

the wilds of northwest British Columbia; the Inside Passage route via BC Ferries and Vancouver Island; the Chilcotin Highway; and the Sea to Sky Highway. The province has so many natural attractions that The MILEPOST® will add a third Alaska Highway access route to the book in 2010.

You'll find the 2009 Milepost in virtually every bookstore in the state. Cover price is \$29.95 but you can pick one up at Costco for \$16.99.

### **You'll never guess what awaits on the Caribbean's Grand Turk Island**

I've reported on some pretty weird travel attractions over my years and decades of travel writing, but none more offbeat than a unique new offering at the Grand Turk Cruise Center owned by Carnival Corporation. The world's biggest cruise organization has partnered with Cockburn Village & Farm Ltd. to develop Conch World on Grand Turk Island in the Caribbean.

The attraction (are you ready for this?) is a pair of world-famous trained conchs! That's right, trained conchs. Good grief...what's next? Juggling king crabs in Kodiak?

The Caribbean conchs are named Sally and Jerry and, say the Cruise Center's promoters: "The pair love to venture out of their shells and have their pictures taken."

They will perform regularly when the center opens this fall.

It should be noted that the Grand Turk center is a new eco-friendly attraction that was four years in the making. The unique million-dollar-plus tourism attraction consists of several brightly colored pink buildings that showcase the Queen conch, which is native to Grand Turk and plays a vital role in the

health of coral reefs. The species serves as a food source for lobsters, turtles, sharks, octopus and other marine animals.

Cruise Center guests can also visit the Bare Naked Conch Café. I'm not even going to guess from whence comes that name, but the aim of the eatery is for visitors to savor delicious farmed conch prepared in a variety of ways.

There's also the Pink Pearl Gift Shop, which sells a variety of conch-related merchandise. It should be noted, say the center's promoters, that one in every 10,000 animals produces an exquisite pink pearl valuable enough to be part of the Crown Jewels of England. No mention is made about the availability of such gems at the gift shop. For more information, visit [www.Grandturkcc.com](http://www.Grandturkcc.com).

### **First in a new series, "Know Your Travel Rights"**

This month we embark on a new travel series of sorts, a series of short one-paragraph suggestions to make your next trip (and many others to follow) hassle-free and worry-free in the area of legal obligations on the part of

travel agents, travel wholesalers, cruiselines, airlines, hotels and other elements of the travel trade. The series comes to us from a recent release that quotes Jeff Isaac, principal attorney at The Lawyer in Blue Jeans Group ([www.lawyerinbluejeans.com](http://www.lawyerinbluejeans.com)). Isaac boils down a few key considerations to help road warriors and vacationers avoid – or appropriately deal with – travel troubles.

Here is Isaac's first suggestion in our series: Ensure your travel agent is legit.

Before booking, ensure your travel agent or agency is compliant with state requirements. While 'seller of travel' regulations vary from state to state, many require registration, fees and compliance with some financial security regulation or statute. Some states even have specific laws for the regulation, registration, or bonding of sellers of travel, so it's important to know if you agency is adhering to such requirements.

Next month: Leveraging available support resources.

### **Some whopping good fares from Southwest Airlines this fall**

If you're flying south this fall to a destination not covered by any of the airlines with bases in Alaska, and if your connecting carrier choices includes Southwest Airlines, you should be aware that SWA has announced one of the biggest fare sales in the company's history.

Customers can purchase one-way tickets for \$30, \$60 or \$90 based on length of travel. For travel up to 400 miles, fares are \$30 one-way. For travel between 400 and 750 miles, fares are \$60 one-way. For travel more than 750 miles, fares are \$90 one-way.

These fares are available beginning Sept. 9, 2009, through Nov. 18, 2009. Of course, your originating carrier might have a "joint fare" with another airline that makes getting to your ultimate destination even more economical. But do check. You could save a tidy sum.

*Alaskan senior Mike Miller lives in Juneau*

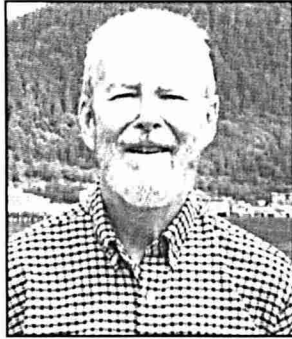
where he writes about things Alaskan from his home office overlooking Gastineau Channel and the Juneau cruiseship docks. He also publishes a cruising Web site at [www.AlaskaCruisingReport.com](http://www.AlaskaCruisingReport.com).

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Right, Grand Turk Cruise Center founder Chuck Hesse shows trained conch "Jerry" to visitors at the Grand Turk Cruise Center exhibit on Grand Turk Island in the Caribbean.

*Photo courtesy Carnival Cruises*



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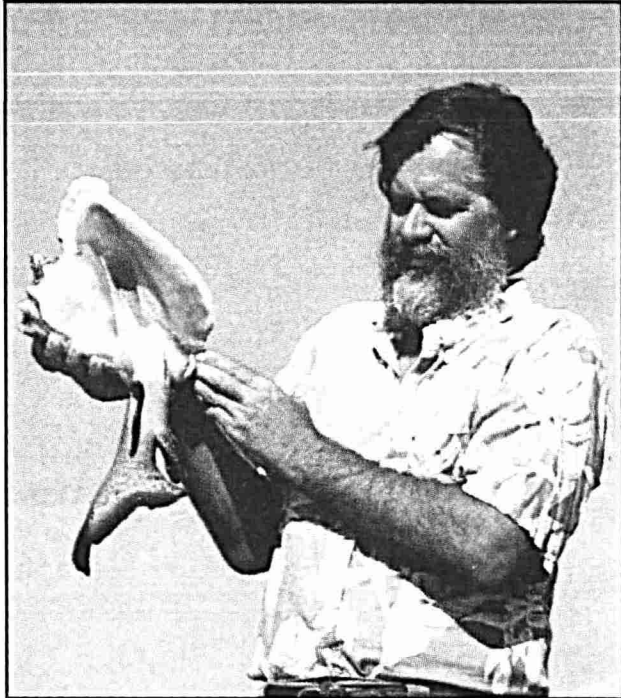
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British Columbia fisherfolk, like their counterparts in Alaska, have contributed hugely to the life and lore of Northwestern Canada. This oceanside park and statue – a frequent photo setting for visitors to Prince Rupert, B.C. – honors such Canadian men and women.  
*Mike Miller photo*



*Photo courtesy The Milepost®*

Everybody, but everybody, stops at Watson Lake (777 miles south of Delta Junction, where the Alaska Highway begins if you're heading south) to ogle and photograph the Watson Lake Signpost Forest. The collection dates back to 1942 when a homesick American soldier named Karl K. Lindley – working on construction of the now-historic roadway – made up a signpost noting the distance to his hometown, Danville, IL. Huge numbers of visitors have been doing the same ever since. Visitors, in fact, are encouraged to add their own hometown signs to the collection which now numbers more than 61,000.