



Left: Entering Amos, the cathedral dominating the skyline.

Below: Improvisation...Land Rover style! A full selection of Army MRE meals (courtesy of Jim Leach). You had to be there!

Below left: Yes, we did eat "yellow snow" Hot maple syrup is poured into the snow and then wrapped around sticks.



vehicles; this was certainly an express lube. Everyone had arrived and the expedition was taking shape. Our leaders Ted Matthews and Mary Kaye were in Mary's Discovery, Peter Wood was sporting his Discovery II and John Cockell had his recently acquired Defender 110 Station Wagon, fitted with a 300Tdi engine. Jim Leach and Mike Ladden had arrived in Jim's expedition prepared 110 hardtop, but their trip to Canada was not as straightforward as mine. Jim and Mike made a slight detour to Roversnorth: a propshaft bearing needed replacing.

The final member of the Baie James team was Kim Groenendyk. Kim is a long time friend of Ted and Mary's and had agreed to chaperone me around Canada. Kim was vehicle-less and had made the early morning trip from Toronto to Montreal via various buses.

In between sips of coffee and munching on a toasted omelet

sandwich, the expedition participants started applying the various sponsorship logos.

By 11am we were ready for a photo session and official wave off from Patrick. With a quick radio check and directions from Patrick we headed out.

Having traveled three quarters of a mile, our convoy of freshly oiled Land Rovers came to rest at the first Tim Hortons. We had started as we meant to carry on.

After topping off our fuel tanks the convoy rejoined the road. Chirps from the CB began to sing out.

"Are we going the right way"?

"This is the way Patrick said to go".

After another 10-15kms and starting to see signs for Montreal Centre Ville (City Center), Mike Ladden pipes up.

"Amanda says that we should be going the opposite way!"

"Who the hell is Amanda"?

Came the unison reply.

Had Mike slipped another

passenger into their vehicle or had he picked up a hitch hiker?

It turned out that 'Amanda' was Mike's trusted virtual GPS aid. For the rest of the expedition, 'Amanda' became the eighth member of the team.

Driving north, the traffic density started to dwindle and we started to see tell tale signs of touring snow mobiles, their tracks visible in the snow beside the road.

Our first night's destination was the Forestal Hotel in Val d'Or, the best place in town.

Temperatures were below zero but still temperate compared with what we were expecting. Even so, everyone plugged in their engine block heaters just to ensure easy starting the following morning.

DAY THREE:

Early the next morning we prepared for our trek further north but, as we were still in civilization, we made a quick detour to the local Canadian Tire store, where John upgraded his CB unit and we collectively purchased all of the lock de-icer in the store. One advantage that the Discovery has over the Defender is central locking. Discovery owners could open their doors with a flick of a switch, Defender owners had to manually coax the door locks.

The frozen lock situation raised its head moments later as we were doing the first gas stop of the day. The locking fuel cap on Jim's 110 was frozen solid. Jim's manual coaxing caused the key to break off in the lock: Jim obviously had too many Wheaties for

breakfast. Luckily the Defender has separate ignition and fuel cap keys, plus Jim carries spares, so the reluctant cap was given a early morning wake up call with a pair of vice grips and we were on our way again.

The trek today was to be a reasonable 200 plus kilometer jaunt to Matagami. We were in no hurry so we made an extended lunch stop in Amos. Pulling into the main street there seemed to be a little more activity than normal: there was a winter festival. Serenaded by street music we joined the masses around the Amos cathedral, (St-Therese d'Avila).

The cathedral was built in 1922 and is a remarkable structure. Built in the center of Amos the main feature of the cathedral is an enormous dome, 100ft diameter and has a height of 104ft. Constructed using 22,000 bags of cement, you would have thought that the cathedral would be cold and damp but far from it, we were quite toasty inside.

With hunger pains dictating the itinerary we headed for a café for bison burgers.

Arriving in Matagmi just after sunset the desolate road was a sign of what to expect over the coming days. We sensed that the best part of the trip was still ahead as Matagmi is situated at kilometer zero on the James Bay road, close to the fiftieth parallel and officially within Baie James Municipality, which at 131,136 square miles, is the largest municipality in the world. ▶

