

ELEVEN HOURS on Horseback

— LARRY'S SHORT STORIES #154 —

It doesn't make any difference what you're made of, you're going to be a "whipped puppy" when you finish an 11-hour horseback ride in the Yukon mountains. The good news is that we were on horseback; our guides were walking.

The morning started way up in the mountains, where we had spent a mostly sleepless night on the ground – by our moose kill of the evening before. With the meat loaded, we mounted up at 9:00 a.m. and rode back to the cache we had stashed the previous afternoon – after spotting the moose. It was a short mostly downhill ride through the willows.

In quick order, Logan and Levi (our guides) packed the gear on their two saddle horses and off we went – Matt and I riding and the guides walking – picking up game trails when available,

but always pushing up the Rae Creek drainage toward the Worm Lake camp, a long, long way away.

Packing a horse is a pretty straightforward process, if the

load isn't too heavy and you have all the right equipment – pack saddle, pannier boxes, canvas and ropes. Base camp normally has such equipment, but conditions and needs often change in spike camp, and invariably the guides have to improvise, to make things work. Using a standard saddle as a pack saddle – well, I've never seen that before.

Our guides did their very best, but during the all-day ride/walk to camp, we stopped countless times to re-position



There weren't any fresh supplies at the Worm Lake cabin, but we had plenty of moose meat and mashed potatoes – from a box.

the packs as they slipped left or right. The ground was very soft in places and one time the two main pack horses went "down" in the marshy ground. Oh no, I thought; they'll have to completely unpack to get them up. But, after a minute or so of rest, the guides pulled and pushed both horses to a standing position and got them to struggle out of the mire.

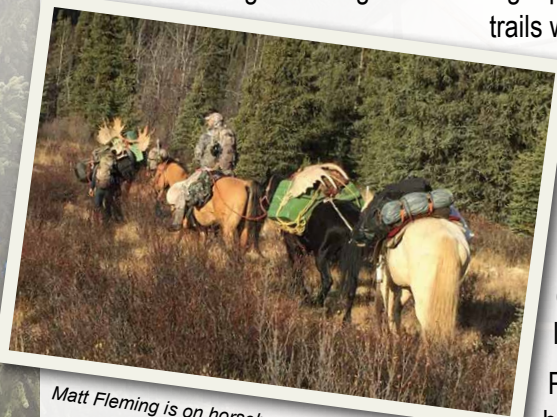
This was an almost impossible trail for the horses and guides and I felt very sorry for them. We crossed

"Now we know a little more about what we're made of."

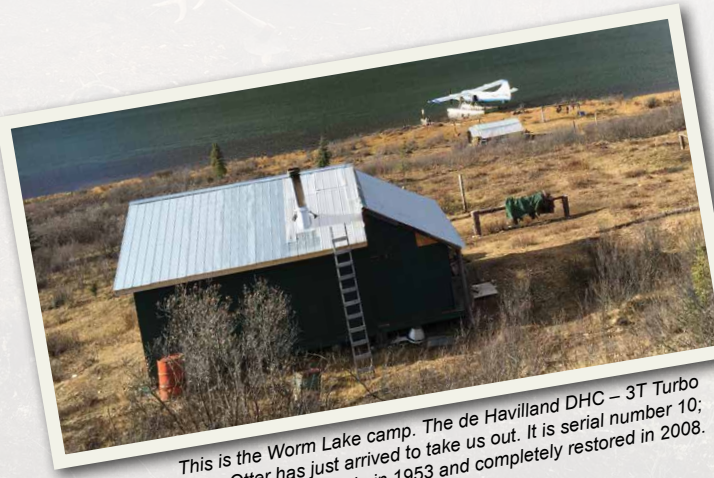
the river numerous times and each time the guides would jump on the back of one of the pack horses and hold on to the packs to cross the river. For eleven hours, we endured this journey, jumping ditches, slogged through mire and fighting off brush and trees – but we made it. Now we know a little more about what we're made of.



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Midnight Sun Outfitting
Rae Creek Valley
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Matt Fleming is on horseback, his guide Levi Letkeman is on foot and Logan Young is out of sight up front. My horse was never in a hurry, and I brought up the rear.



This is the Worm Lake camp. The de Havilland DHC – 3T Turbo Otter has just arrived to take us out. It is serial number 10; made in 1953 and completely restored in 2008.