

Truck to Tuk before you're out of luck

The Canadian government announced in the new year the long awaited, 140-kilometre extension of the Dempster to Tuktoyaktuk, Northwest Territories — our country's most northern highway.

Originally completed in 1979 to open up Inuvik to regular traffic, the additional all-weather, gravel pack road will be done in an impressive three years.

Situated in scenic Pingo National Park, the Arctic is a tourist magnet to some of the best Northern Lights, which are patronized by citizens as far as Japan.

However, locals like you and me will shortly be able to drive up to some of the nation's most pristine dark skies with full facilities awaiting.

Tuk (as it's called by the inhabitants) town officials are in the process of ramping up hotels, trailer parks and more to accommodate the anticipated influx.

While the summer midnight skies will likely bring the golfers and trophy fishers over, the real jewels will be in



Neil Roberts

The Sky's the Limit

the 24-hour dark heavens present a few winter months of the year. With the ribbon cutting ceremonies slated for late 2017, you should plan your trip not long after that.

Oil and gas companies with mining enterprises plan to capitalize on this new thruway, and it won't be long before artificial illumination reaches small-city levels.

Interestingly enough, the 3,500-plus populous town of Inuvik generates light pollution equal to or greater than Claresholm and with the North welcoming new investment, more is on the way.

When I drove the Dempster in 1997, it was unquestionably the most unscathed landscape in the nation. Boosting a plethora of unique wildlife and backdrops unable to capture on camera,

the drive alone is a trip to sink your teeth into!

Sky watch

Spica will follow the moon all night on Tuesday, May 21 after sunset. That bright object next to the moon is Spica, and it will not only follow it all night but also set behind it at dawn in the south-west-west.

There will be a planet bonanza from Friday, May 24 to Thursday, May 30. Mercury, Venus and Jupiter will provide a fascinating show low in the west-northwest twilight sky soon after sunset. They will seemingly shuffle around each other, changing their positions noticeably from one evening to the next. On Tuesday, May 26, the trio will be two degrees apart in a rare formation in the northern twilight, visible to the naked eye.

A penumbral lunar eclipse and a new meteor shower will occur on Friday, May 24. The moon will be in a semi-eclipse phase all night, so it's not hard to spot with the naked eye. Also, Comet 209P/Linear might produce up to 400 meteors per hour at its peak

around midnight.

The Eta Aquarids meteor shower, which is caused by comet 1P Halley, will shoot about 10-20 meteors per hour before dawn on May 5, and the waning crescent Moon shouldn't reduce visibility by much. Prime viewing is southeast-east from about 4 a.m. until sun up.

Public events

Mark down Friday, May 9 at 7:30 p.m. on your calendar and join us at the Vulcan Tourism and Trek Station for our monthly star gazing. There will be a short indoor presentation on "summer stars and constellations," and then we'll check them out on our 11-inch telescope outside. Refreshments are provided, and anyone is welcome to attend. There is no cost. Stargazing sessions are held every second Friday of the month at 7:30 p.m. Visit www.vulcantoursim.com or contact the Trek Station at 403-485-2994 for more information.

Neil Roberts welcomes your questions and comments at Neil_Roberts@ptccanada.com and 403-485-2683.