The Alaska Tracks-pedition

I was excited to hear I would be the proud owner of the first set of American Track-Truck wheel tracks ever shipped to Alaska. I was even more excited the first time I put them on and did a few hot laps around my neighborhood. I couldn't wait to get these things out on some trails…and I had a plan…

My '06 Jeep Unlimited Rubicon is a daily driver and weekend wheeler. It has about 2¾" of lift and 33" tires plus a winch and some beefed up body armor. I don't have a tow rig and didn't want to be tied to a trailhead anyway, so I had to come up with a way to drive the Jeep to the trails, swap tracks on, wheel it *(or would you say track it…?)*, and then swap back to tires. I call my home-built trailer the snow bunny. It's built on an early 90's Dodge minivan axle flipped upside down for ground clearance, light truck leaf springs, steel square tube frame, pintle hitch for offroad abuse, plastic composite decking, and best of all, fenders that become skis.

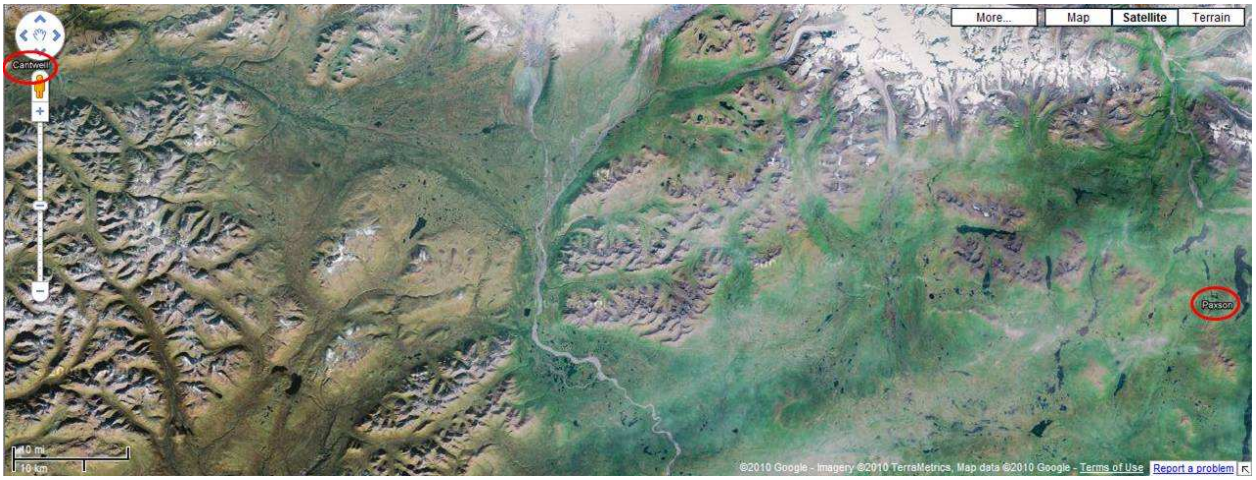
Picture taken along the Richardson Hwy, south of Delta Junction, en-route to Paxson. The Alaska Oil Pipeline is visible in the background.

My brother flew up from Wisconsin for this trip. We're both originally from Minnesota and are in the Army. I'm in the Band and he manages a transportation section but spent many years as a M1 tank mechanic, meaning he can pretty much drive anything with wheels...and many things without. We got to Paxson, the east end of the Denali Hwy without incident and swapped on the tracks. With the two of us working together and very little practice we got them on in about 40 minutes.

Paxson Lodge – East end of Denali Hwy

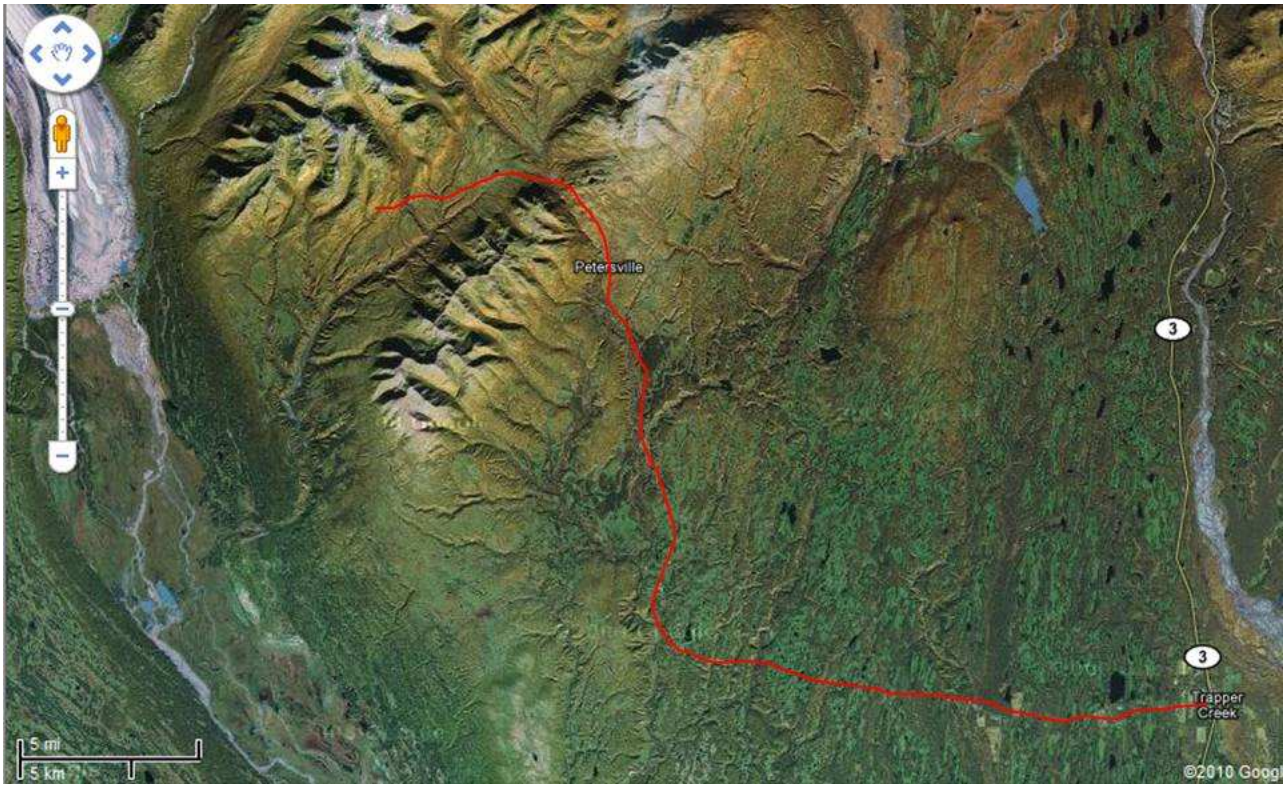
From Paxson we headed up the Denali Hwy which is closed to wheeled traffic in the winter. 42 miles up the road is the Maclaren Lodge where we stayed the night. They were surprised to see anything other than snowmobile traffic and asked me all about the tarcks and how well the whole setup worked out.

The next morning we went the rest of the way to Cantwell, 136 miles total in two days. We drove through fresh deep snow, around and across overflow ice, falling snow, blowing snow, encountered a caribou herd, moose, and dozens of ptarmigan. All in all, an amazing trip.



RUBICON

On day 3 we headed up Petersville Road, an extremely popular snow mobiling area about two hours north of Anchorage off the Park's Hwy at Trapper Creek. We tracked up in a crowded parking lot, again getting many positive comments, curious questions about the tracks, and a couple pictures taken. For this one we left the trailer in the parking lot.



Petersville Rd – at the end of the "maintained" road.

The Forks Roadhouse is a popular winter hangout for Trapper Cr locals since you can only get there by snow mobile. When we told the bartender we drove up in a Jeep she flipped out thinking we tore up the groomed snowmobile trails. “Get that friggin thing outa here,” she said, and then looked out the window to see a tracked vehicle. “Oh, you guys were messin’ with me. You can go wherever you want.”

We were a little disappointed about the lacklustre overcast weather at first, but as we headed up the trail the clouds lifted off and we had some gorgeous views of Mt. McKinley, the Alaska Range, and the surrounding countryside. It’s no wonder the area is so popular. Seeing Mt. McKinley in the distance is a little deceptive to the eye. All we really see from this area is the top 1/3 or so of the mountain since there are other hills and ridges in between. The pictures really don’t do it justice.

Finding Petersville on a map is also a bit misleading. It's really just a scattering of mining claims and a couple cabins up by the "road". Peter's Creek is at the end of the regularly traveled route. There are plenty of trails past the bridge, but from there you start getting into the "back-country". We took the Jeep as far back as we could to see if we could find the limits of the tracks. It took some doing, but I was finally able to bury it to the frame in a chest deep drift consisting of 8" of windswept drift pack covering 4 foot deep sugar snow on a steep hillside. Compared to some mud holes I've been in, though, this was all too easy. The tracks didn't actually stop grabbing and we only had to dig the hardpacked snow out of the undercarriage to get moving again. That's where we turned around and headed back. We did end up having to winch out of the little gulley we found ourselves stuck in simply because it was too steep to get back out after we dropped in.

All I can really sum it up with is: **What an amazing trip!**