



'The bus.'

Extracts from chapters 2 and 16.

The trail was blazed (*la voie a été ouverte*) in the 1930s by a legendary Alaska miner named Earl Pilgrim. In 1961, a Fairbanks company, Yutan Construction, won a contract from the new state of Alaska (statehood having been granted just two years earlier) to upgrade the trail, building it into a road on which trucks could haul (*circuler*) from the mine year-round to house construction workers while the road was going in. Yutan purchased three junked buses, outfitted (*équiper*) each with bunk beds (*lits superposés*) and a simple barrel stove (*poele*) , and skidded them into the wilderness behind a D-9 Caterpillar.

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A vintage International Harvester from the 1940s, the derelict (*abandonné*) vehicle is located twenty-five miles west of Healy as the raven flies, rusting (*rouiller*) incongruously in the fireweed beside the Stampede Trail, just beyond the boundary of Denali National Park. The engine is gone. Several windows are cracked or missing altogether, and broken whiskey bottles litter the floor. The green-and-white paint is badly oxidized. Weathered lettering indicates that the old machine was once part of the Fairbanks City Transit System: bus 142. These days it isn't unusual for six or seven months to pass without the bus seeing a human visitor, but in early September 1992, six people in three separate parties happened to visit the remote vehicle on the same afternoon.

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He was elated(*very happy*) to be there. Inside the bus, on a sheet of weathered plywood spanning a broken window, McCandless scrawled (*gribouiller*) an exultant declaration of independence:

NIGHTS OF FREIGHT TRAINS AND HITCHHIKING BRING HIM TO THE GREAT WHITE NORTH. NO LONGER TO BE POISONED BY CIVILIZATION HE FLEES, AND WALKS ALONE UPON THE LAND TO BECOME LOST IN THE WILD.

ALEXANDER SUPERTRAMP MAY1992

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Reality, however, was quick to intrude on McCandless's reverie. He had difficulty killing game (*gibier*), and the daily journal entries during his first week in the bush include "Weakness," "Snowed in," and "Disaster." He saw but did not shoot a grizzly on May 2, shot at but missed some ducks on May 4, and finally killed and ate a spruce grouse (*coq de bruyère*) on May 5; but he didn't shoot anything else until May 9, when he bagged a single small squirrel, by which point he'd written "4th day famine" in the journal.

But soon thereafter his fortunes took a sharp turn for the better. By mid-May the sun was circling high, flooding the taiga with light. The sun dipped below the northern horizon for fewer than four hours out of every twenty-four, and at midnight the sky was still bright enough to read by. Everywhere but on the north-facing slopes and in the shadowy ravines, the snowpack had melted down to bare ground, exposing the previous berries, which McCandless gathered and ate in great quantity. He also became much more successful at hunting game and for the next six weeks feasted regularly on squirrel, spruce grouse, duck, goose, and porcupine.

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Let's talk...

- Do you think the description of the bus corresponds to that of the film poster? Why?



- What does Chris mean in this sentence? "NO LONGER TO BE POISONED BY CIVILIZATION ". Give examples of what he means by civilization.
- Was life easy at the beginning? Can you give information on his daily life?