

Pinguicula vulgaris along the early Alaska pipeline

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Those who have been fortunate enough to travel along the Alaska highway know that both Alaska and Canada's Yukon Territory hold adventures and surprises around every corner. Over the past few summers I had the opportunity to explore and botanize many of these remarkable areas while working in the north as a Biologist.

Located off the Alaska highway at kilometer 1743, behind the community of Destruction Bay, Yukon, are several marvels I found side by side. There, hidden amongst the Spruce trees along the base of the Kluane mountains are the famous Alaska highway, the historical US Military pipeline and colonies of insectivorous *Pinguicula vulgaris*. During the 1942 war effort to connect Alaska to the rest of the country by road, the 2340 km [1520 mile] long Alaska highway was built in under nine months to become heralded as one of the world's great engineering accomplishments. Later in the 1950's the early "Alaska pipeline" was built along side the highway to transport different petroleum products from Haines on the coast, through the Yukon Territory, to Fairbanks, Alaska inland. This same 8" pipeline can still be seen today from many sections of the Alaska highway.

Unintentionally, when the Army built the pipeline they also built an ideal habitat for *P. vulgaris*. The exposed ground on each side of the pipeline, known as the "right-of-way", was kept clear of trees and brush during the pipeline's use until the 1970's. These open areas let in sunlight to the ground below which is kept continually moist by the snow-melt seeping down from the mountains immediately above. As the water percolates down through the Spruce forests and scree, small amounts of nutrients and minerals are picked up to be later deposited on the exposed ground. The butterworts soon colonized the newly created habitat and multiplied. Sometimes the butterworts can even be found growing out from under the pipeline as shown in the photograph. Despite the frequent and strong winds, such as those which destroyed an Army camp in the early years to give Destruction Bay its name, the butterworts are sheltered by the trees growing along both sides of the pipeline's right-of-way.



Today, *P. vulgaris* can be found growing densely beside sections of the pipeline along with *Cypripedium* and *Coralrhiza* species of orchids. The time of year to catch the butterworts and orchids in bloom is usually mid to late June. Along the pipeline, which has been unused for many years now, regrowth should continue to thrive in these areas for many more years to come to be enjoyed by both the appreciative and the curious.

Butterwort growing out from under the pipeline.