

drive to Juneau at all—drivers have to take a ferry.

So when I ask a group of Alaskans how many people have visited Canada, every person puts up his or her hand. What's more, Alaskans often tell me they feel closer to Canadians than they do to people in the Lower 48. This level of warmth and familiarity with Canada clearly makes my job much easier.

Are you freezing?

Anytime between October and March, a call to Ottawa invariably prompts the question: "Anchorage, wow, how cold is it there?" Usually, we find the temperature that day is colder in Ottawa. Although it is north of 60°, Anchorage is a coastal city, and the winters are surprisingly mild. The bigger difference to Ottawa is the shortage of light. During the worst period in late December, the sun rises at 10:30 a.m. and sets at 3:30 p.m. I won't claim that five hours of daylight is easy, but there are ways to deal with it. At work, we now have a special light to protect against seasonal affective disorder, and I have learned to embrace winter sports. I have taken up ice climbing and mountaineering, and there are great lighted trails in the city for cross-country skiing and running. We just have to watch out for the ornery urban moose (no, this is not a joke, as several thousand moose call this area home). Of course, the midnight sun makes up for the long winter nights. As I write this in June, the sun is rising at 4:20 a.m. and setting at 11:38 p.m.

You must be bored

I think most Canadians assume that Anchorage is the size of Whitehorse or Yellowknife. It is actually a city of nearly 300,000 with all of the amenities. The great thing, from a work perspective, is that almost every important issue in Canada-U.S. relations has an element that affects Alaska. Because of their unique geographic location, the Alaskans are often our allies on such issues. We share more than 2,400 km of border, and the ease or difficulty of crossing that border matters greatly to Alaskans. There are 32 Canadian Forces personnel and their families stationed near Anchorage as part of the Alaskan NORAD region. Canadian companies have invested \$3 billion in mining exploration and development in Alaska since 1981 and are actively exploring for oil and gas. If the proposed Alaska natural gas pipeline goes to Alberta, this estimated \$30-billion project will be the largest private-sector initiative ever undertaken in North America. We have important and complex fisheries agreements, and the connections between Alaskan Natives and Canadian First Nations go back millennia. All told, five distinct Native-First Nations cultures straddle the long border. Finally, as climate change already profoundly affects the Arctic, Canada and Alaska face common challenges. So no, I am not bored.

Isolated posts do have their drawbacks. I feel somewhat disconnected from my colleagues and Ottawa, although our hub mission in Seattle does a great job of keeping me in the loop. Email and phone calls just don't replace lunches and corridor chats. On the other hand, I love the autonomy, challenges and diversity of working in a small post in an important country.

Karen Matthias joined the foreign service in the political stream in 1994. She has been posted to Moscow and seconded to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. She was thrilled to be extended for a fifth year in Anchorage, where she will continue to promote Canada and try to avoid ornery moose.

