

The Iditarod



Alphabet



By: Annie Kelley
2017 Iditarod Teacher on the Trail™

2017



A is for



Anchorage

Anchorage is home to the ceremonial start of the Iditarod which takes place on Saturday, March 4. This year 72 mushers will cross the start line at 4th Avenue and D Street. 55 mushers are veterans and they have finished the Iditarod before. 17 mushers are rookies, and have not yet completed the Last Great Race on Earth. Eight countries will be represented at this year's race: USA, Canada, England, Sweden, France, Norway, Czech Republic, and Hungary.



B is for 

Booties

Thousands of dog booties are used throughout the Iditarod. Each dog is required to wear dog booties, and a musher must keep an additional eight booties in his/her sled for each dog at all times. Booties are used to protect their feet from being scraped up and to keep balls of ice from collecting around the footpad.



C is for Charley



Musher Charley Bejna is from Addison, IL and is hoping to reach Nome for the third time this year. Charley completed the Iditarod in 2014 and 2015. He first visited Alaska in 1991 with his dad and returned in 2007 to be Bruce Linton's Idita-rider. After that Charley set a goal to race the Iditarod, despite having the added challenge of racing with type I diabetes. Charley is a great example of what it means to live out your dreams and not let obstacles get in your way.





D is for 

Dog Care

The dogs of the Iditarod are some of the best cared for dogs in the world. Before the race each dog must be checked by a veterinarian.

The veterinarians check the dogs for many things including heart health, proper hydration, and weight. Then, along the trail there are 55 veterinarians, including head vet Dr. Stu Nelson. Nelson has been with the Iditarod for the last 25 years and is well trained in husky care. The dogs of the Iditarod eat top of the line meat during the race; usually consuming about 10,000 calories per day while racing.





E is for



Establish

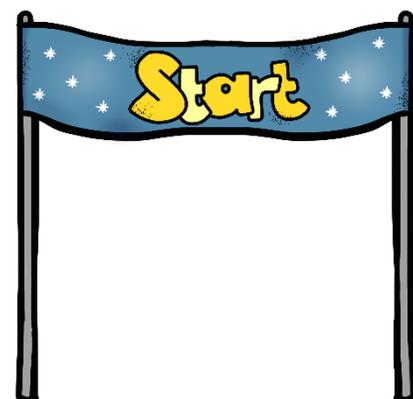
The Iditarod was established, or started, in 1973 by Joe Redington, Sr. Joe is known as the 'Father of the Iditarod' and he established the race for two reasons. The first reason was to save the sled dog culture that was being phased out because of the gaining population of snow machines in Alaska. The second reason Joe established the race was to preserve the historic Iditarod trail between Seward and Nome. This year will be the 45th running of the Iditarod.





F

is for



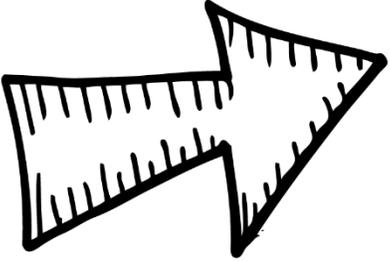
Fairbanks

Fairbanks, AK is the second largest city in the state. Due to low snowfall in some spots along the traditional trail, the Iditarod will start on March 6 in Fairbanks. This is the third time this has occurred (2003 & 2015).

Fairbanks was named by E.T. Barnette, its founder, to honor Senator Charles W.

Fairbanks of Indiana. Charles Fairbanks went on to serve as Teddy Roosevelt's vice president. The current population of Fairbanks is 32,070.



G is for 

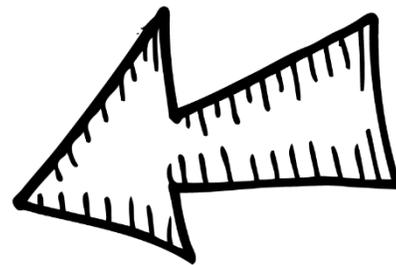
Gee

Command given for
the dogs to turn right.





H is for



Haw

Command given for
the dogs to turn left.





I is for



Iditarod Historic Trail

Iditarod is the name of an old gold mining town which existed during the last gold rush in the early 1900s. Joe Redington, Sr., founder of the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, lived along the Historic Iditarod Trail, and was friends with the last mail carrier between Rainy Pass and Knik, Lee Ellexson. Ellexson showed Joe the trail back in the 1950s, and Joe's dream of preserving the trail began. Joe loved history and was determined to get the Historic Iditarod Trail on the map. In 1978 the Iditarod Historic Trail became a recognized trail by Congress, and is one of only 16 trails that hold the prestigious distinction.





J is for



Jon Van Zyle

Jon Van Zyle is a two time Iditarod finisher (1976 & 1979). Jon has also been the official artist of the Iditarod since 1979, and has created dozens and dozens of paintings for the Iditarod since then. Jon is a self-taught artist and has paintings in museums all across the country. Jon has also illustrated many children's books including *Arctic Lights*, *Arctic Lights* and *Big Alaska*, both by Debbie Miller. Jon was inducted into the Iditarod Hall of Fame in 2004.





K is for



Kennel

An Iditarod kennel is a place where all the dogs call home. There are kennels all over the state of Alaska and the lower 48. Nature's Kennel is located in McMillan, MI, and is run by Iditarod veteran Ed Stielstra. The kennel is named after one of Ed's favorite dogs, Nature. This year there are three Iditarod teams racing out of Nature's Kennel. Sisters Anna and Kristy Berington own Seeing Double Sled Dog Racing, a kennel in Knik, AK. Anna has finished the Iditarod five times and Kristy has finished seven times.



L is for



Laura Neese

Laura Neese is an Iditarod rookie musher and she is racing out of Nature's Kennel. Laura first learned about the Iditarod when she was ten years old, and since then she has dreamed of completing the "Last Great Race on Earth". When Laura was fourteen she started her own little kennel in her hometown in Ohio. Once Laura was 18 she moved up to Michigan and her dream of the Iditarod were on their way. Laura will be starting with bib #7 in the 2017 Iditarod.



M is for Musher



A musher is the driver of a dog sled team. All 72 mushers picked their starting position on Thursday, March 2 at the Musher Banquet. There are seventeen women and fifty-five men racing this year. Ryan Redington will be leading out the group wearing bib #2, and Kristy Berington will be the last one to leave Fairbanks with bib #73. Bib #1 is reserved for the honorary musher, which this year is Leo Rasmussen of Nome. Leo has been the checker in Nome since the first Iditarod in 1973. Leo will be at the finish line again this year welcoming all the mushers and teams to the finish line.





N is for



Nome

Nome is home to the finish line of the Iditarod. The town is located on the Seward Peninsula. Nome was once a booming gold mining town of over 30,000 gold seekers, but the current population is down to only about 3,600 people. Now, each March between 50-70 mushers reach the "Burled Arch" on Front Street and complete the "Last Great Race on Earth". The last musher to reach Nome receives the Red Lantern Award.





O is for



Optimism

Optimism is defined as the hopefulness and confidence about the future or the successful outcome of something. As the race began today, there was lots of optimism at the start line. The optimism of rookie musher, Roger Lee, was quite evident as his team neared the start in Fairbanks this morning. Lee's team was roaring to go, and he certainly had a pep in his step! The optimism is certain to continue down the trail until all the mushers reach the Burled Arch.





p is for



parka

A parka is a large windproof jacket with a hood, which is designed to be worn in the cold weather. Each musher has a parka that is worn on the trail to protect them from the extremely cold temperatures. Very often a parka will have a fur ruff on the hood to help the musher keep warm.





Q

is for



Quiet

Quiet is a great word to discuss the Alaskan wilderness. As mushers and teams make their way to Nome, there is a lot of quiet along the trail.

They pass through parts of the state that is home only to the animals that live there. When the dogs run, they are quiet as can be. However, the second the teams stop, they are often barking and jumping because all they want to do is RUN! Quiet is not the word used to describe the checkpoints. There is something always happening no matter the time of day at a checkpoint.



R is for



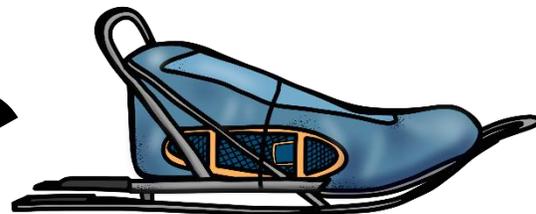
Red Lantern

The Red Lantern Award is given to the last musher to reach Nome. This award is given to honor the perseverance of the musher and their team. First Red Lantern Award winner was John Schultz with a finishing time of 32 days, 5 hours, 9 minutes, and 1 second. In 2016 Mary Helwig received the award when her team made it to Nome in 13 days, 8 hours, 51 minutes, and 30 seconds.





S is for



Sled

The first sleds were traditionally made of wood, but today they are much more high-tech. Many mushers today make their sleds from a variety of materials, including hockey sticks. The sled hold all the mushers' gear including extra dog booties, dog food, cooker, snow shoes, and many other things. Mushers can also send out additional sleds on the trail, in case a sled breaks or if they want a lighter one towards the end of the race.



T is for Tanana



Tanana is a checkpoint on the 2017 Iditarod. This is the third time the race has gone through the village. Currently there are 248 people who call Tanana home, and there are 42 students in the school. This year the village will host the "First to the Yukon" award in which the musher gets a nice dinner provided by Iditarod sponsor, The Lakefront Hotel. This year the first musher to the Yukon River was Nic Petit.





U is for



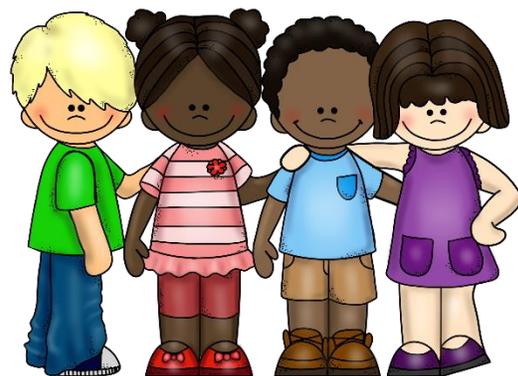
Unalakleet

Unalakeet is one of sixteen checkpoints the 2017 Iditarod will travel through. It is the largest village on the trail between Anchorage and Nome with a population of about 900 people. The first musher to reach Unalakleet receives the "Wells Fargo Gold Coast Award" which includes \$3,500 and a trophy. This year Mitch Seavey received this award. Unalakleet is also home to Piece on Earth, a popular pizza place that mushers and volunteers love to visit.





V is for



Volunteers

A volunteer is a person who freely offers to do something. The Iditarod is an event that could not go on without the volunteers that come out from around the world. At every checkpoint there are volunteer veterinarians, trail crew, and communications people who keep the race going. In Anchorage and Nome there are many volunteers who staff the communications rooms and make sure the website is up to date. And each village has been wonderful and volunteering their time as well.



W is for



Wade Marrs

Wade Marrs is a musher from Knik, AK, but today resides in Willow, AK. His kennel is Stump Jumpin' Kennel and is home to over 50 dogs. Wade began mushing at a young age, and ran his first Iditarod in 2009. He has two top ten finishes under his belt. Wade had three other teams train with his kennel this year. Andrew Nolan, 17 years old, won the Jr. Iditarod and Hannah Mahoney, also 17, received the Jr. Iditarod Red Lantern Award. Jimmy Lebling is a rookie in the Iditarod this year and is excited to be part of the Stump Jumpin' team.



X

is for



X-Back Harness



The x-back harness is a type of harness that most mushers use with their dogs. The harness is designed for speed and comfort. The x-back keeps the harness in place, and doesn't disrupt the dog's gait.



Y is for



Young Mushers

There are many young mushers out on the trail this year. A musher must be 18 before the Iditarod starts in order to race. This year's youngest musher is Laura Neese, 20 years old, who finished in 42nd place. There are eleven mushers that are 30 years old or younger this year. Dallas Seavey is the youngest person to ever complete the Iditarod in 2005—he turned 18 just days before the start. Melissa Stewart is the youngest woman to ever finish the Iditarod—she finished in 2008 at the age of 18.



Z is for Zirkle



Aliy Zirkle is a veteran Iditarod musher. Aliy finished her 17th Iditarod this year in 8th place. Aliy first started mushing after moving to Alaska in 1990. Aliy and her husband, Allen Moore, run SP Kennel which is named after Aliy's first Alaskan husky, Skunk. Aliy has finished in the top 10 of the Iditarod 6 times, and has won the other 1,000 miles, the Yukon Quest. Aliy has received the Leonhard Seppala Humanitarian Award for outstanding dog care three times (2005, 2011, 2016).



Credits:

