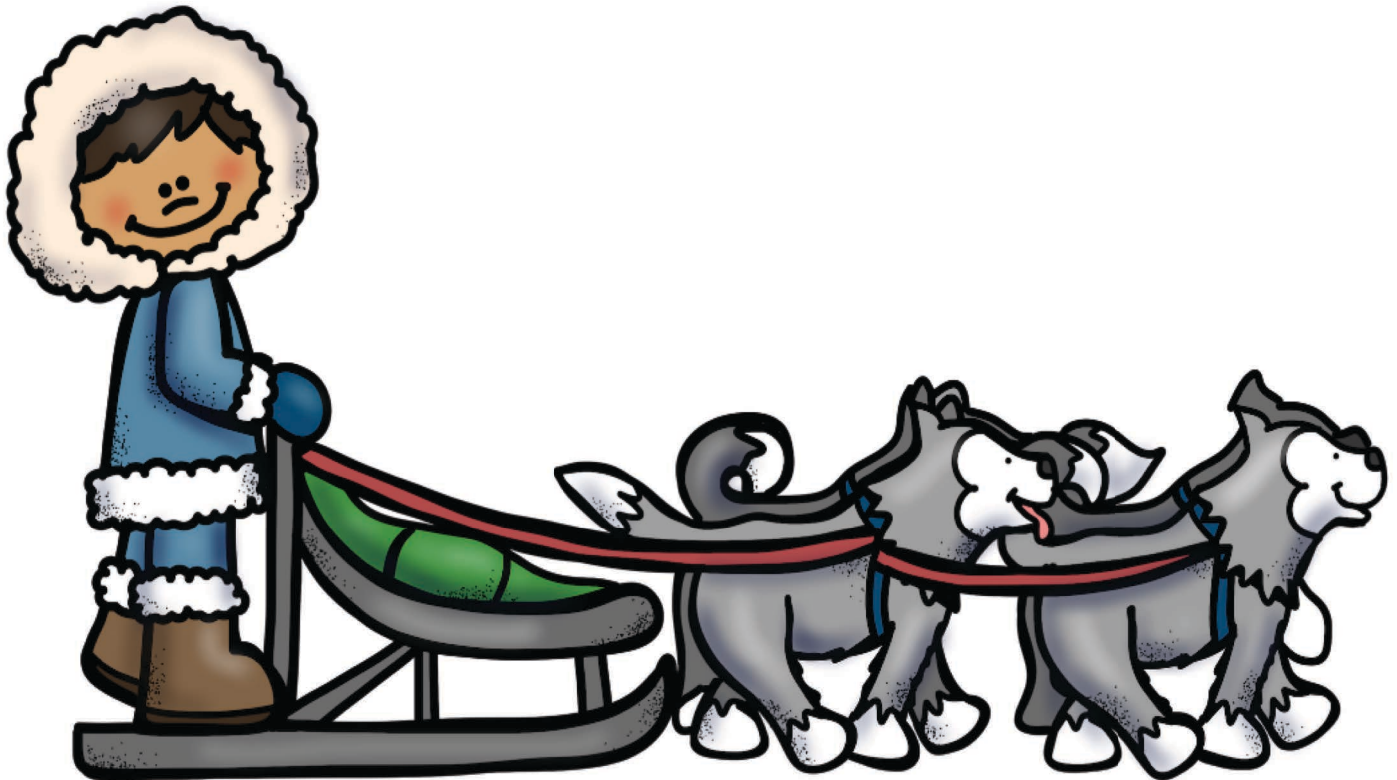


The IDITAROD Alphabet

By Annie Kelley McGuire
2017 Iditarod Teacher on the Trail



A is for



Anchorage

Anchorage is home to the ceremonial start of the Iditarod which takes place on the first Saturday of March every year. Usually 50-80 mushers sign up for the race. The ceremonial start takes place on 4th Street in downtown Anchorage. Thousands of people line the eleven mile stretch that mushers travel down.



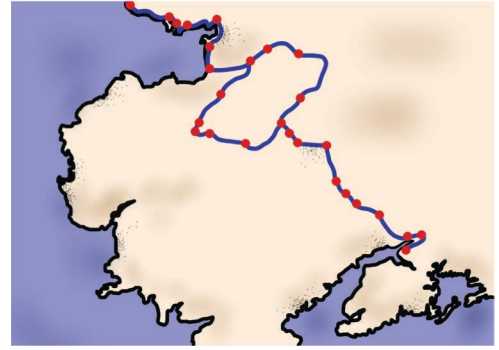
B is for Booties



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



Checkpoint

During the Iditarod there are 16 to 23 checkpoints during the race, depending on the year/route the mushers are taking. At the checkpoints mushers are able to rest and feed their dogs. They also take naps and check in with volunteers and fellow mushers. Mushers are required to take three breaks at different checkpoints along the way. They must take two 8-hour rests and one 24 hour rest.



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 over 50 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 46th running of the Iditarod.



F is for Fairbanks

The Iditarod has started three times in Fairbanks, AK. The race begins in Fairbanks when there is not enough snow along the traditional northern or southern route. The route that starts in Fairbanks only has 16 checkpoints. The ceremonial start remains in Anchorage on the first Saturday of March, but the restart in Fairbanks takes place on the following Monday. The race begins on the frozen Chena River behind Pike's Waterfront Lodge.



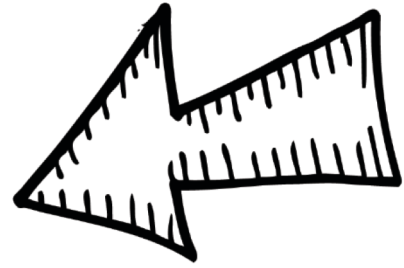
G is for 

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

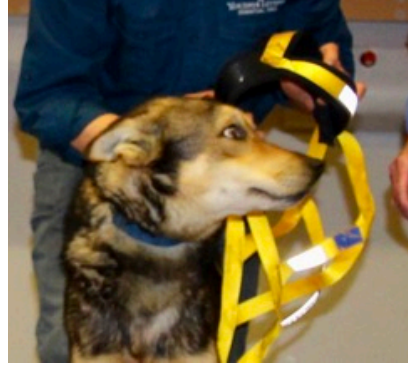


kennel

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. Most dogs live outside and have their own dog house. The dogs spend their days running with their team and enjoying the delicious food their musher has prepared for them.



L is for



Lolly Medley Memorial Golden Harness Award

Every year in Nome, one dog is awarded the Lolly Medley Memorial Golden Harness Award. The lead dog who receives this award is selected by mushers because of their outstanding performance on the trail. Lolly Medley was a harness maker and musher from Willow, AK. She was one of two women who ran the second Iditarod in 1974.



M is for Musher



A musher is the driver of a dog sled team. Every year mushers pick their starting position on the Thursday before the race at the Musher Banquet. There are typically 50-80 mushers that compete in the Iditarod each year, with their ages ranging from late teens all the way to their seventies.



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 begins, there is lots of optimism at the start line. 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 2017 Cindy Abbott received the award when her team made it to Nome in 12 days, 2 hours, 57 minutes, and 31 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 Teacher on the Trail™



Every year the Iditarod selects a teacher to travel down the trail and report back to teachers and classroom about the race. The program began in 1998 with the first Teacher on the Trail, Andrea "Finney" Aufder Heyde. The selected teacher usually spends 5 weeks in Alaska visiting classrooms across the state and traveling down the Iditarod trail by bush plane.



U is for Unalakleet

Unalakeet is one of the checkpoints the Iditarod always travels through. It is the largest village on the trail between Anchorage and Nome with a population of about 692 people. The first musher to reach Unalakleet receives the "Gold Coast Award" which includes \$3,500 and a trophy. 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



Willow Lake

The restart of the Iditarod takes place on Willow Lake on the first Sunday of March each year. Willow Lake is located about 70 miles away from the ceremonial start in downtown Anchorage. The lake is frozen in the winter months and musher get their teams ready to go behind the Willow Community Center. The restart begins at 2PM.



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. 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 

Zig-Zag

Mushers zig-zag their way across Alaska during the Iditarod. They travel 1,000 miles over mountains and frozen rivers, and through some of the most remote parts of the United States. Mushers visit 16-23 checkpoints along the way, and ultimately end up under the "Burled Arch" in Nome.



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