

MUSH ON!

Monthly Newsletter of the Iditarod Education Department

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Now Is the Time . . .

By Linda Fenton

Have you ever dreamed of going to Alaska to see the start of the Iditarod? Now is the time! The 2025 Iditarod Teacher's Conference will be happening from February 25-28. Along with some amazing speakers with loads of lesson plans, you will experience a field trip that includes seeing the Vet Checks at Iditarod Headquarters and a visit to Matthew Failor's Alaska Husky Adventures Kennel. A ticket to the Musher's Banquet with a chance to meet the mushers is also included.

Teachers who attend the conference get passes that will allow them to enter the street where mushers are setting up for the Ceremonial Start in downtown Anchorage. PLUS you will be with lots of like-minded teachers who are as excited as you to use the Iditarod in the classroom. Join us!

[Register here!](#)





Many advancements in dog care have been achieved since the first Iditarod. Proper preparation of the mushers, veterinarians, and canine athletes has been a major objective . . . By making dog care a priority, the Last Great Race on Earth will continue to grow and thrive.

*Stuart Nelson Jr., D.V.M
Iditarod: The First Ten Years*

Boots on the Ground

by Jane Holmes

Race Qualifiers

The Sled dog racing season is well upon us here in Alaska, and despite low snowfall, races are a go! Following the Knik 100 in December, the Knik 200 is finishing as I write this. The race was modified to 175 miles due to low snow trail conditions, but it's a race nonetheless. As I was attaching GPS trackers to musher's sleds at the start of the Knik 200 yesterday, I caught up with a couple of the mushers also running the Iditarod.

Ryan Redington's kennel sent 4 teams on the trail, including him. When I asked him how this race fits in to his Iditarod training schedule, he was firm in his answer that he was running for competition, not just practice. He said his races are always for competition. Both Beringtons ran the Knik 200, but Anna told me that they were using it as a practice run, not competition. Their 2 teams of 10 dogs include Anna's Iditarod hopefuls.

Riley Dyche, Hunter Keefe, and Travis Beals also raced the Knik 200. Be on the lookout for Iditarod mushers in these upcoming local races/Iditarod qualifiers: Copper Basin 300 and the Su Dog 300.



Night and day the dedicated veterinarians brave all kinds to weather to check our Iditarod canine athletes.

L to R: Travis Beals, Ryan Redington, Hunter Keefe, Riley Dyche

Meet A Sled Dog

by Kelly Villar

We visit Justin Olnes at ReRun Kennel this month in Fairbanks, Alaska. Justin started his mushing career in 2013 after mushing with his college advisor. Justin and his wife Kailyn, who finished the Iditarod in 35th place in 2022, own ReRun Kennel. According to their website, "ReRun Kennel was started in 2022 to provide a home for rescue sled dogs in need and provide them with a means to do what they love best - run!" When asked about a dog that has touched their hearts, this is what Justin had to say:

"We adopted Fly and Tippet from the Fairbanks North Star Borough Animal Shelter in the fall of 2021. Even as puppies, these two had a burning desire to be sled dogs. We discovered this when we hooked them to the Christmas tree we had just cut and they took off with it, beating us down the trail back to the cabin. They didn't need anyone to show them the way. They were yearlings for the 2022-23 season, the first winter we raced with a team built from our kennel (my wife Kailyn had run Iditarod the year before with dogs from Wade Marrs). When Kevlar, my main leader, suffered a shoulder injury before the 2023 Copper Basin 300, I was in desperate need of an additional leader. Given the small size of our race pool, I asked Fly, "Will you help lead the team?", and she went on to lead the entire race and cement her place out front. Tippet was shy but has since also turned into a great leader. The other day, while on a training run, I mistakenly commanded "gee" where I thought a right-hand turn was located, but it was too early, and nothing was there. No matter, Tippet dutifully pulled the team right and started breaking trail through a clearing I had mistaken as the turn. I look forward to these two siblings leading us onward to Nome in 2025!"

To learn more about Justin and his wonderful dogs, check out rerunkennel.com We look forward to cheering for Justin Fly and Tippet on their rookie run of the Iditarod in March!



Tippet

Photo by Kailyn Olnes



Fly (left) leading her first Copper Basin as a yearling.

Photo by Whitney McLaren



Paws and Get Ready!

Check out some of the exciting plans for the month of January from Maggie Hamilton, 2025 Teacher on the Trail™. This month is all about the drop bags.



A Classroom Without Walls: The lesson this month is math based with a focus on multiplication and division. Using basic and multi-digit multiplication and division, students will discover what it's like to be a musher preparing their drop bags for the race.

More to Discover: Find out more about drop bags, the volunteers who help prep and deliver the drop bags, and how mushers are training in January. Plus you can learn more about how I am using the race in my school and classroom!

CLICK [HERE](#) TO FIND ALL OF MAGGIE'S LESSONS!



Serum Run Series – Who Was Leonhard Seppala?

by [Terrie Hanke](#)

As they waited for news that diphtheria antitoxin had been located, Nome's emergency Board of Health was creating a plan to get the much needed serum from the railroad terminus in Nenana to the desperate people of Nome.

While aviation enthusiasts were evaluating the available "airships" and looking for a pilot, the "better to be safe than sorry" camp was brainstorming a speedier than normal ground delivery.

Board of Health member, Mark Summers, suggested a relay. He proposed sending the best dog driver from Nome to the village of Nulato, the approximate halfway point from Nenana to Nome, to meet a driver carrying the serum from Nenana. Summers, superintendent of a Nome based mining company, had an employee who fit the bill. Who was this man that Summers and the people of Nome – especially the parents, would place their faith in?

Use this link to read more about Leonhard Seppala in the Eye on the Trail Serum Run stories.

[Who was Leonhard Seppala?](#)

K9 Journalist Corner by Sanka W. Dog



With this being 2025, it's the 100th anniversary of the Serum Run which is sometimes called the Great Race of Mercy. In January of 1925, the children of Nome were experiencing severe sore throats. Dogs don't get sore throats but humans do so I suppose you've had a sore throat at one time or another.

At first the doctor of Nome thought the kids had tonsillitis but it turned out to be much worse. The children had diphtheria. There was medicine available to cure and prevent diphtheria. The children needed that medicine but there was very little in Nome. As a matter of fact, Dr. Welch had ordered more serum but the last ship came, unloaded and departed and there was no new serum delivered. Then the Bering Sea froze over.

With all the sick children and more getting sick every day, a plea went out to locate serum. While the search was on, people began thinking about how the serum would get to Nome. The closest rail head was 674 miles away in Nenana. There were no roads connecting Nome to Nenana. The Bering Sea was frozen. Options were very limited.

Mail and supplies were delivered to the villages between Nenana and Nome by mail carriers and their dog teams during the winter. It took almost a full month for mail to travel by dog team all the way to Nome. Was it possible to cut that time down, perhaps by a relay or was there a faster way?

Airplanes were new to Alaska. Altogether there were three airplanes and two pilots in Alaska. The planes were used extensively to deliver supplies and people to remote Alaska during the summer but by the time winter came, the planes were badly in need of repair. The decrepit airships were sitting in Fairbanks awaiting overhaul and reconditioning for the coming summer.

Those airplanes had open cockpits and water cooled engines. Anti-freeze and de-icing techniques hadn't been invented. None of the planes had radios or navigation equipment. Mother nature dished up some of the worst weather in twenty years with blizzards and brutally cold temperatures. The weather in January of 1925 was fit for neither airplane, man or beast.

The decision between airplane and dog team would be made by the territory governor, Scott Bone. People who thought the plane was the way forward for Alaska pushed Bone to send the serum by air – it would take only a few hours. People who thought the airplane was not sufficiently proven encouraged Bone to send the serum by ground. It would take longer but the dogs and drivers were likely to succeed whereas if the airplane crashed the pilot and the serum would be lost. We know that Bone went with the tried, true and reliable dogs.

Leonhard Seppala was one of twenty mushers who were called upon to transport the life-saving diphtheria serum. Togo was one of 150 sled dogs that powered the serum 674 miles from Nenana to Nome. If you'd like to learn more about Leonhard Seppala and Togo, please read Togo and Leonhard by my friend, Pam Flowers.

Consider this list of serum run mushers. What math functions have your students practiced using Iditarod race data? How about using serum run data to practice percentage, average, addition, subtraction, ranking shortest to farthest, less/more and average speed. Students can also practice alphabetizing the musher's by first and last name. Take time to compare the average speed the serum traveled in 1925 with the average speeds of the 2024 Iditarod mushers. You'll find the average speed of the 2024 teams under Race Center – Standings – Race Log #613. Have fun while learning who the brave dog drivers were who saved the children of Nome.

Born to Run,
Sanka W. Dog

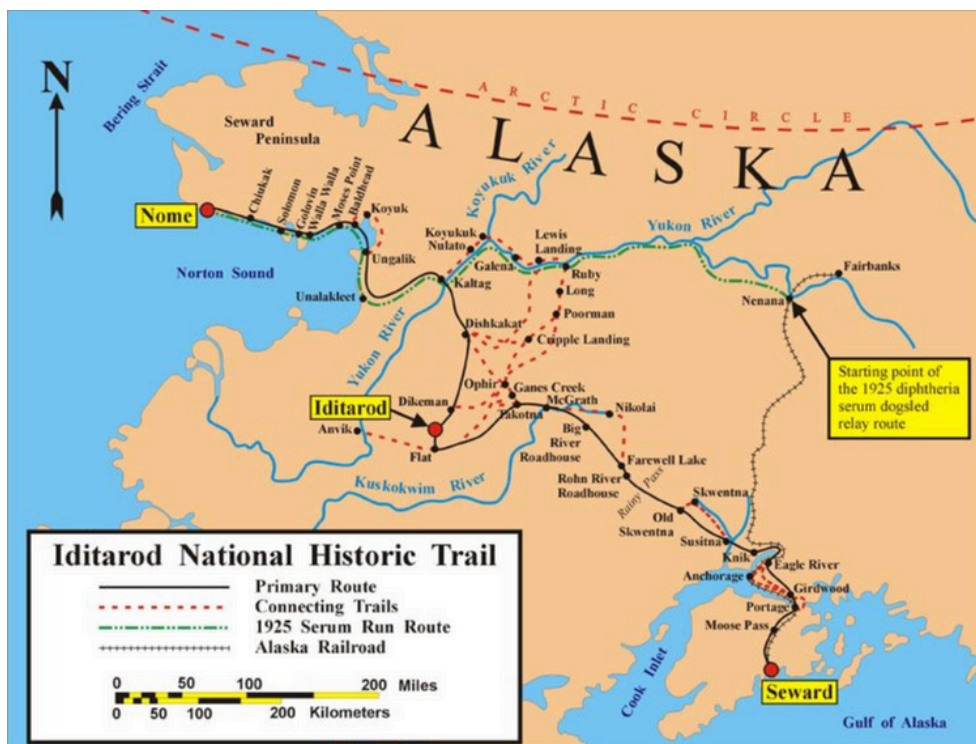
The Serum Run Mushers of 1925

Musher	Leg of Serum Run	Miles
"Wild Bill" Shannon	Nenana to Tolovana	52
Edgar Kalland	Tolovana to Manley Hot Springs	31
Dan Green	Manley Hot Springs to Fish Lake	28
Johnny Folger	Fish Lake to Tanana	26
Sam Joseph	Tanana to Kallands	34
Titus Nickoli	Kallands to Nine Mile Cabin	24
Dave Corning	Nine Mile Cabin to Kokrines	30
Harry Pitka	Kokrines to Ruby	30
Billy McCarty	Ruby to Whiskey Creek	28
Edgar Nollner	Whiskey Creek to Galena	24
George Nollner	Galena to Bishop Mountain	18
Charlie Evans	Bishop Mountain to Nulato	30
Tommy Patson	Nulato to Kaltag	36
Jack Screw	Kaltag to Old Woman	40
Victor Anagick	Old Woman to Unalakleet	34
Myles Gonangnan	Unalakleet to Shaktoolik	40
Henry Ivanoff	Shaktoolik to Seppala handoff outside Shaktoolik	1
Leonhard Seppala*	outside Shaktoolik to Golovin	91
Charlie Olson	Golovin to Bluff	25
Gunnar Kaasen	Bluff to Safety to Nome	53

Total Miles: 674

Total Time: 127 hours, 30 minutes (5 1/2 days)

****Seppala set out from Nome expecting to receive the serum in Nulato but more drivers were added to the relay. After covering 170 miles, he received the serum from Henry Ivanoff just outside of Shaktoolik then turned around and went 91 miles back to Golovin before handing the serum to Charlie Olson. With Togo he traveled a total of 261 miles, a far greater distance than any of the other relay drives. He carried the serum 91 miles which was more than any other relay driver.***



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- Jan. 11, 2025: Dog Blankets in Wasilla
- Feb 18, 2025: Centerpieces Due in Anchorage - **You can still participate!**
- Feb. 25-28, 2025: Iditarod™ EDU Winter Conference
- March 1, 2025: Ceremonial Start
- March 2, 2025: Start of 2025 Iditarod™
- June 24-26, 2025: Iditarod™ EDU Summer Conference in McCall, ID

Congratulations Teagan!

Teagan R., age 12
2025 Education Trail Mail
Design Contest Winner



Iditarod® **EDU**

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