

MUSH ON!

Monthly Newsletter of the Iditarod Education Department

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Connections

by Jane Holmes

Ready for a brand new race? Or is it all new? Each time it is run, the Iditarod is different, fresh, and presents distinct challenges and celebrations. But on closer examination, the Iditarod is a vast array of connections that may astound you. Mushing legacies that continue from the 1973 race, return to the Southern Route communities not visited since 2019, dogs with bloodlines reaching back to Leonhard Seppala's dogs, Alaska native mushers from communities that have existed long before the Iditarod began, Iditarod champs back to win again, multiple dog teams from a single kennel running their own races, rookies returning to reach the last 2 checkpoints that eluded them last year, the same number of mushers as the inaugural race to Nome, siblings and father/son teams racing together, and champions from this season's other races ready to win yet another title. The Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race - embracing change, reinforcing connections.



February Teaching Ideas

by Heidi Sloan

Reading and Technology

Jr. Insider Crew

Middle and high school students can write, record, and post as the Iditarod progresses. This lesson plan outlines student jobs and opportunities to update the class on things like daily temperature, leaders, video reports using Insider, etc. Students combine research, reading, and technology, taking ownership of this real time opportunity to follow the race closely. Adaptations of these jobs would work for younger students as well!

Morning Meeting Interactions

Roll It...!

Rolling dice to determine questions testing Iditarod knowledge makes for an engaging morning meeting once your students have learned some of the ins and outs of the race! This is a simple-to-plan activity and will bring enthusiasm to your group.

Science STEM

Investigating the Surface of the Iditarod Trail

The students will plan and conduct an investigation to determine which surface is the easiest for dogs to pull a sled on: snow, rocks, or soil. An engineering challenge of, "Oh no! Your sled has broken and you need to rebuild it with only the materials you have" is also included in this motivating lesson. The plan is written for kindergarten or 1st grades, but could be adapted for older students.

Reading

A is for Iditarod

Younger and older elementary students can benefit from this reading/writing lesson! Using an ABC book that matches letters to musk oxen, students write their own ABC books using Iditarod terms. Older students could then take their books to read to beginning readers, being teachers of the alphabet as well as the Iditarod.



Sanka W. Dog's Zoom Lens Photo

Mushers have shipped these sleds to McGrath. How many sleds do the rules allow the mushers to use? What might be a reason why the musher would want to change sleds?

If you never had an Iditarod addiction, you will after this...even growing up around the sport, the race and people involved, I become giddy with excitement every time I get to tell people about it.

~Lance Mackey
in
"Iditarod: The First Ten Years."



Click on the image to enlarge it.

Photo: Terrie Hanke

Sled Dog of the Month

by Kelly Villar

This month Kristy Berington shares about her special dog Jonah!

Kristy, along with her twin sister Anna, own Seeing Double Sled Dog Racing in Knik, Alaska. The 2023 Iditarod will be Kristy and Anna's 14th Iditarod.

"My special dog is Jonah. Jonah, who is now 14, was my first sled dog that I could call my own. He has had a unique story from the very beginning. I moved up to Alaska in 2007 to run dogs for Dean Osmar with my twin sister Anna. To make a long story short, Dean lost a bet with us about an Iditarod fact. Dean said, "Well, you won, what do you want?"

Anna and I looked at each other and replied simultaneously, "A dog!"

Dean said, "Deal." Dean was very gracious and gave us an amazing opportunity. He had a pregnant female named Sally. He said, "Take this dog, take care of her, raise her puppies, and then pick one out to keep."

Sally had five puppies. It was hard to pick out one, but there was something about the tri-colored male that pulled at my heartstrings.

Jonah and I ended up running our first Iditarod together in 2010 and many more following that, 9 to be exact. We also ran our first Yukon Quest together in 2012. He ran many middle distance races and even won the Northern Lights 300 and Kusko 300.

Honest, strong, smart, stubborn, determined, and sweet. Jonah is quite possibly the perfect sled dog. Jonah has retired from competitive racing. He enjoys racing canicross every fall, going on free runs and going to schools or other functions to teach people about sled dogs and sled dog sports.

I am so very blessed to have had this relationship with him, and now his grandson Hop Dog will carry on his legacy."

Follow Kristy and Anna Berington at Iditarod.com during the 2023 Iditarod. And learn more about Kristy and Anna at [www.seeing double sled dog racing.com](http://www.seeingdouble sled dog racing.com).



Photo: Kristy Berington

Sneak Peek

It is amazing how quickly a year can pass by. I can measure all the wonderful experiences of the past year, mark each holiday and celebration, but it seems like yesterday that I was preparing for my trip to Alaska as a Teacher on the Trail finalist. Now February is here again and I am gearing up for another Alaskan adventure. Before the end of the month I'll be at the Jr. Iditarod, presenting to classes in Alaska, zooming with classes in the lower 48, and collaborating with teachers at the annual IditarodEDU conference! It is about to get real.

Click on the images to enlarge.

Photo:: Julie Westrich



Early in the month, look for a SEL themed post that discusses the benefits of multi-generational learning and the sharing of generational knowledge. Toss out names like Seavey, Redington, and Mackey and you can't help but recall the multi-generational musher dynasties. But there are other family legacies of Iditarod - I am excited to introduce you to names like Miller, Janczak, Guest, and yes, even Westrich. Families volunteer for all aspects of Iditarod - with siblings, spouses, parents, and children creating volunteer dynasties to rival those of the mushers on the trail.

Photo:: Julie Westrich



by Juli Westrich

2023 Iditarod Teacher on the Trail™

On February 10 I will share an SEL lesson about collaboration and the ways Iditarod and our classrooms are a "family". Throughout the school year teachers create a community based on establishing trust, helping students grow to love each other's quirks, and developing a sense of belonging. This dynamic builds positive *Relationship Skills* as students learn to collaborate, working together to create a successful classroom. Similarly, it takes an enormous amount of collaboration to run a successful Iditarod. Working collaboratively creates relationships and builds bonds; I am so excited to get back to Anchorage and see the people who - in a short time last year - became near and dear to my heart. These individuals return to the race year after year, and I feel so privileged to be part of this community, the Iditarod family. Your students, by learning about and following the race, are part of that family, too!



Photo: Julie Westrich

Once the 20th rolls around you might be anticipating a great CRSE post. I'm going to have to disappoint on that score, but I am going to provide something even better. On February 20th I'll be on a plane to Anchorage! This means the start of daily posts about all things Iditarod 2023! Follow along as I learn in real time all the ins & outs, ups & downs of Iditarod before, during and after the race. I'll be packing my gear (how small can I really smoosh that sleeping bag?), meeting the Jr. Iditarod racers, enjoying kennel visits, the IditarodEDU conference, the musher banquet, the ceremonial start, the official start - and that is all before heading on the trail! One thing I can promise is that there will be no shortage of great post material that I am thrilled to share with you!

If You "Mush" Know...

by Lynne Witte

This month's question comes from...
Send your question for our musher to:
jane.holmes@iditarod.com

How do mushers cook food and get water on a race?



Paws to Eat

Every sled dog racing the Iditarod will need about 12,000 calories daily. How does the musher prepare the dogs' meals and get enough water to hydrate them in the checkpoints and while remote camping along the trail?

Every musher is required to carry a cooker and a pot to boil at least 3 gallons of water. Most of the cookers are alcohol cookers using HEET to ignite the fire. HEET is methanol, an alcohol which ignites easily. Mushers carry waterproof matches as well. Once lit, HEET will easily melt snow if no water is already available at a checkpoint. It's easy to boil water to add the meat and kibble for a meal. This cooker is the quick cook prep for Iditarod teams. Like for all human athletes, a good meal and water is important to dogs to be at their best to run.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

Next Race **34** **01** **35** **17**
Days **Hrs** **Mins** **Secs**

February 15 - Conference Registration closes

February 17 - Banquet Centerpieces due in Alaska

February 28 - March 3, 2023 - Iditarod Education Department Educators Conference, Lakefront Hotel, Anchorage, Alaska

March 2 - Musher Meet and Greet and Banquet, Anchorage, AK

March 4 - Ceremonial Start of Iditarod 2023, Anchorage, AK

March 5- Restart of Iditarod 2023, Willow, AK

**Iditarod: One Thousand Miles
Across Alaska by Dog Team**

To commemorate the 40th anniversary of her 1983 Iditarod, Pam Flowers will release her newest book, Iditarod: One Thousand Miles Across Alaska by Dog Team. Expect the book to be available through Amazon prior to the start of Iditarod 2023. I'm howling, wagging my tail, jumping and turning in circles with excitement! Her writing is so lifelike, I feel as if I'm a part of her eleven dog team. As you read, you'll feel like you are on the sled with Pam mushing along the Iditarod trail!

Pam once told me that if an author is going to write a book on a subject already written about, the author should have something new and unique to tell. Certainly there are many books about Iditarod but no two Iditarod experiences are ever alike. This is Pam's unique story. Pam was consumed by love and respect for dogs. That passion called her to Alaska to learn "mushing."

At 35, Pam left her job as a respiratory therapist in the lower 48 and took a job as a handler for Siberian breeders Earl and Natalie Norris. She'd always loved dogs and now at Howling Dog Farm she'd have the opportunity to work with dogs 24/7. The experience was life changing.

If you've ever wondered if dogs really like pulling a sled, Flowers puts your mind at ease saying, "Like their wolf ancestors, dogs naturally prefer living in packs. To a sled dog, mushing is the perfect sport because they get to pull a sled with a few of their best friends in the company of their favorite human. What more could a dog ask for?"

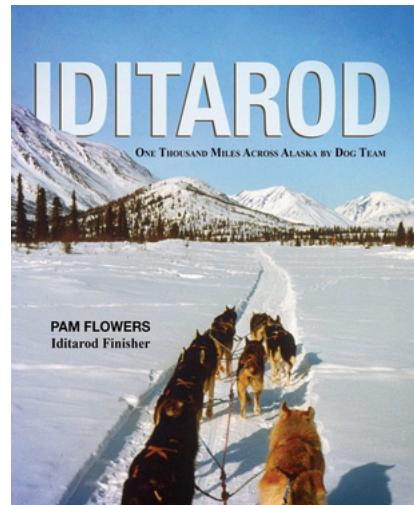
Every Iditarod fan has questions about the infamous portions of the trail - the Steps, Dalzell Gorge, Farewell Burn, Little McKinley, Topkok and the blow hole. Pam describes the hairpins and switchbacks of the Happy River Steps as well as the heart stopping turns and ice bridges of the Dalzell gorge along with all those other sections of the trail mushers find tricky.

About the Farewell Burn Flowers says, "It looks as though someone took a black marker and drew a wavy line through the jumbled devastation that stretches all the way to the horizon and vanishes among the distant hills. The line is the trail." Then she gives a rundown of her nighttime journey through the Burn with gusting winds and temperatures plummeting to minus thirty degrees. Be prepared to shiver!

Following her 1983 Iditarod run, Flowers embarked upon many astonishing adventures - all with dogs. Pam is a veteran of nine arctic expeditions including three to the Magnetic North Pole and has sledded 2,500 miles alone across the Arctic of North America. She has through-hiked the Appalachian Trail with her dog, Ellie. This amazing woman of small stature, has followed her dreams and encourages others to do the same!

This book is written at a 5th to 6th grade reading level but is considered a crossover as it's a good read for adults too. The 147 page book contains a wealth of mushing information, captivating trail stories and a collection of pictures from the 1983 Iditarod and Pam's other expeditions. There you have it! I'm glad I could tell you about author Pam Flowers and her new book.

Running and pulling a sled is what I like best, but reading is a wonderful way to relax on a day off! Handler helped me order my very own copy!



Zuma's Scavenger Hunt - Northern Breed Adaptations

Hello Friends! It's Zuma here! We sled dogs are really amazing! We are loyal, loving, strong, athletic and we love to run and pull! But that's obvious. There are several not so obvious or well-known traits that allow us to thrive in frigid conditions. That's why we are referred to as Northern Breed Dogs.



Humans aren't naturally fit for Arctic weather, so they adapt by wearing a coat suitable for it.

Photos: Terrie Hanke

Click on each image to enlarge.

The American Kennel Club has a list of [Seven Reasons Northern Breed Dogs Thrive in Cold Weather](#). Before you go to the article, brainstorm with other students as to why you think sled dogs prefer Arctic conditions then go to the article to learn about and understand those traits. Kelly Villar, 2019 Teacher on the Trail, wrote several articles that explain northern breed adaptations. Read her stories to gain even more knowledge about the amazing Northern Breed Dog. Thanks Kelly, for sharing this great information!



[Super Circulatory System!](#)

[These Feet Were Made for Walking!](#)

[Fluffy Tails!](#)

[Gotta Love all that Fur!](#)

[Keeping it Cool!](#)



clockwise:
feet,
tail,
tongue,
and
coat
adaptations



Now that you know more about the Northern Breed Dog, AKA sled Dog, you can really appreciate the special traits of sled dogs and what makes them so perfect for running races such as the Iditarod and the Yukon Quest.

Speaking of the Yukon Quest, here's some info about the 2023 Quests. Yes, Quests. It used to be that the race was 1,000 miles just like the Iditarod. On alternate years it started in Fairbanks and went to Whitehorse, YT or started in Whitehorse and finished in Fairbanks. In 2023, there will be TWO Quest races. The [Quest Alaska](#) will start on February 4th in Fairbanks and run to Tok, a distance of 550 miles. The [Yukon Quest](#) will start on February 11th in Whitehorse and end in Dawson City, a distance of 450 miles.

Your scavenger hunt for the month of February – What mushers are participating in the Iditarod and also in either the Yukon Quest Alaska or the Yukon Quest? While you are into the Quests, track the temperature along the trail. Keep the chart handy and use it as a comparison to temperatures during Iditarod. What measures will you need to take to make sure your comparisons are meaningful?

Do you have questions about the Iditarod that you'd like to ask Zuma? Email the question to geehawzuma@gmail.com. Zuma will respond to at least one of the questions in the next EDU Newsletter. Zuma would love to hear what you are wondering about.

My team will be going out on a run soon so I best close and get out into the dog yard!

Mandatory Gear

by Jane Holmes



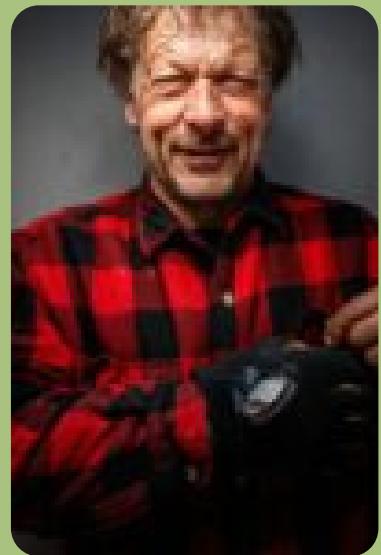
Click each image to catch up on the newest episodes of Husky Talk.

Episode 6: Michael Williams, Jr.

7 time Iditarod musher and 2nd generation Alaska native musher from the Bethel area.

Episode 6: Martin Buser

An Iditarod legend who completed his 39th race last year. Catch up with this 4-time champion.

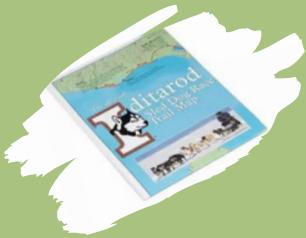


RECOMMENDED READING LIST

Looking for a good book about mushing?
Check out these great reads.



Explore our carefully vetted list for **books** about Iditarod, the sport of mushing, and sled dogs in general. Find books by approximate reading level, and where applicable, the Lexile and/or Fountas & Pinnell levels. Many reach across grade levels, so please explore all of the lists.
Click on the image to access the lists.



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