

Lesson Title:	“The International Dog Bus:” Iditarod Geography and the Trail
Background Information	
Created By:	Kate Newmyer, Seabrook, TX, 2024 Teacher on the Trail™
Grade Level/ Subject:	6-12 Social Studies: World Geography
Background Information:	<p>It takes the massive movement of people and animals to make the Iditarod happen. Volunteers and mushers from all over the world and especially the United States travel to remote parts of Alaska in March every year. We can use ideas from geography, specifically human geography, to understand the Iditarod in new ways. We can also apply these concepts to other patterns of human movement and cultural interaction. Blair Braverman writes about how mushers must transport their dogs to and within Alaska to experience the race. “The International Dog Bus” symbolizes trail movement and geography.</p> <p>Human Geography is the study of human population and its cultures, activities, and landscapes. Human geographers study how and why people move, how cultures interact, and the nature of different locations. Human geography concepts are particularly interesting because we humans are performing them all the time whether we know it or not—for example, when we relocate for a job, or visit a major tourist destination, or come into contact with people who have different cultural identities. This lesson will enable students to learn and apply human geography concepts to the Iditarod. Students will then compare and contrast the Iditarod with different types of trails.</p> <p>In addition, this lesson asks students to reflect on the concept of “trail” and invites them to use the Iditarod Trail as a lens to study other important trails and migration routes in U.S. and World History. The Iditarod National Historic Trail Committee maintains not only the part of the trail used by the sled dog race, but also components historically used by mail carriers and Native Alaskans. It also suggests ways we can explore and understand how humans and animals use the trails located close to our own homes to learn more about the movement patterns we use in our own lives.</p>
Learning Objectives/ Essential Questions:	<p>Content Learning Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students understand and describe human geography concepts related to environment, population, culture, place, location, political boundaries, and transportation. • Students apply these concepts to the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race to both learn about the Iditarod and to extend their use of the concepts to global phenomena. • Students research national and international trails as to purpose, location, the

	<p>nature of place, cultural interactions, modes of transportation, and then compare and contrast these trails with the Iditarod National Historic Trail.</p> <p>Language Objective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students utilize speaking, listening, reading, and writing in whole class and group settings. <p>SEL Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students engage in respectful discussion using accountable talk. • Students work together to share information with the class in teams using various roles.
<p>Standards Addressed</p>	<p>Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)</p> <p>World Geography Grade 6</p> <p>6.3.A Identify and explain the geographic factors responsible for patterns of population in places and regions.</p> <p>6.3.B Explain ways in which human migration influences the character of places and regions.</p> <p>6.4.A Explain the geographic factors responsible for the location of economic activities in places and regions.</p> <p>6.4.B Identify geographic factors such as location, physical features, transportation corridors and barriers, and distribution of natural resources that influence a society's political relationships.</p> <p>6.5.B Identify and analyze ways people have adapted to the physical environment in various places and regions.</p> <p>High School World Geography Studies</p> <p>1.A Analyze significant physical features and environmental conditions that have influenced the past and migration patterns and have shaped the distribution of culture groups today.</p> <p>5.A Analyze how the character of a place is related to its political, economic, social, and cultural elements.</p> <p>7.A Analyze population pyramids and use other data, graphics, and maps to describe the population characteristics of different societies and to predict future population trends.</p> <p>7.B Explain how physical geography and push and pull forces, including political, economic, social, and environmental conditions, affect the routes and flows of human migration.</p> <p>7.D Analyze how globalization affects connectivity, standard of living, pandemics, and loss of local culture.</p> <p>18.C Identify examples of cultures that maintain traditional ways, including traditional economies.</p> <p>18.D Evaluate the spread of cultural traits to find examples of cultural convergence and divergence.</p> <p>21.A Analyze and evaluate the validity and utility of multiple sources of geographic information such as primary and secondary sources, aerial photographs, and maps.</p>

<p>Materials Needed:</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Human Geography Vocabulary Terms—including. 2. Frayer Model vocabulary study sheet—including. 3. Answer Key of possible connections of human geography concepts to the Iditarod, included. 3. Iditarod Trail primary sources—including. 4. Iditarod National Historic Trail information: iditarodnhtvisitorguide.pdf and Iditarod National Historic Trail Bureau of Land Management (blm.gov) 5. Iditarod About Us page from www.iditarod.com About Us – Iditarod and Map of the Routes Race Map – Iditarod 6. Lists of National, International, and Historic Trails. Here are three lists to get you started: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. 24 Best Hikes in the USA to Add to Your Bucket List The Planet D b. Historical Walks of the World: 25 Famous Trails Wanderlust c. National Historic Trails - National Trails System (U.S. National Park Service) (nps.gov)
<p>Procedure</p>	
<p>Engagement:</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have students read the description of the Iditarod Trail from Safety to Nome, written in 2022. Virtual Trail Journey – Safety – Iditarod Students can notice how the author describes the characteristics of the trail in terms of distance, weather, speed, and other factors, and what words the author uses. Students should also retell the stories associated with this portion of the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race from 2014 as told by the author. Finally, students can examine the photos included in the article and describe what they see. 2. Generate a discussion with these questions and others that you deem appropriate: What kind of place is this, based on the photos and information? Where are Safety and Nome located on a map, in relation to other places, and within what political entities? Determine the coordinates. In what ways do people move across this portion of the trail? Make a list of reasons of why, how, and when people come to this place. What features make this place unique? 3. Create an anchor chart or list of the things that students notice. You could organize the chart or list by the five elements of Human Geography if desired: location, human-environment interactions, region, place, and movement. 4. Tell students that they can apply various human geography concepts to the Iditarod, on a micro-level, so as to understand and apply these concepts on a larger scale. Explain that Human Geography is a branch of Geography that studies humans and their relationship to the land in terms of population, culture, and activities. Remind students that we humans are actively living these concepts in our own lives every day, and that it is important to name these concepts so as to communicate effectively with others about them. 5. For Part 2, examining the idea of “trail,” have students brainstorm famous trails, either local, national, or international. Examples could include North Atlantic Oceanic Route, Lewis & Clark Expedition, Trail of Tears Oregon Trail (U.S. History), human migration to North America, the Silk Road, pilgrimage routes such as to

	<p>Mecca (world history). Then have a discussion with the question, what makes a trail? (Possible answers: a predetermined or established path, used by multiple people over time, to accomplish a specific purpose, etc.)</p>
<p>Lesson Procedure:</p>	<p>Part I: Human Geography Concepts and the Iditarod</p> <p>Step 1 Using the list of Human Geography vocabulary terms and concepts, engage the students in any or all of the vocabulary learning activities suggested below, or find your favorite at www.vocabularyluau.com. Have students work in partners or groups to understand and describe the definitions of the terms.</p> <p>*Note: Determine what is best for your class: reduce the number of terms to the most important or give students the opportunity to learn the terms at their own pace, adding terms when they are ready.</p> <p>Possible vocabulary learning activities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Frayer Model. In a square, students write the word in the middle. In one corner, they write the definition, in another, the characteristics, and in the last two, examples and non-examples. Give students words in pairs and have them evaluate if the words are the same, opposite, go together, or are unrelated. Concept cubes: on a cube template, students write a word, definition, explanation or significance, example, category, and why it's important. Then students cut and tape the cube together. They can practice rolling with their own cube until they know it, then trade with another student. Word sort. Students are given all the vocabulary words (and definitions if desired) and in groups, sort the words into categories. A "closed sort" is where students sort the words into pre-determined categories; an "open sort" is where students determine the categories. This is one I do a lot in my class. <p>Step 2 Have students read the description of the Iditarod from the About Us page listed in item 5 of Materials. Students can partner read the overview of what the Iditarod is, if they are unfamiliar, or to establish common background knowledge. Discuss what students learned from the article.</p> <p>Step 3 Assign each group a different list of vocabulary terms. Give access to the primary sources to each group, either digitally or on paper. Structure the groups and their interactions/roles as best fits your class's age group or other needs.</p> <p>Step 4 Students use the primary sources and the Iditarod web site (www.iditarod.com) to determine how the concept connects to the Iditarod. Confer with each group, suggesting possible connections from the list included if students need help. Have students take notes on the word lists.</p> <p>Step 4 Students share with the rest of the class. Possible ways to do this are to have each</p>

	<p>group present to the rest of the class. Students could create a presentation and then have students conduct a gallery walk looking at the presentations on different laptops. You could create an editable shared document for students to contribute to. They could trade and discuss their vocabulary study sheets in jigsaw table groups (one person from each group travels to another group to present/learn).</p> <p>Part 2: Comparing/contrasting other trails with the Iditarod Trail</p> <p>Step 1 Compile a list of your local, national or international trails they would like to experience. Include urban trails, suburban trails, and rural trails. Then brainstorm a list of historic trails or use the list linked above. For example, my list would include the 13 miles of Seabrook Trails near my home, which includes local landmarks such as a school, a library, and various parks including one that overlooks the Houston Ship Channel. On my “trail bucket list” is the international portion of the Appalachian Trail into Newfoundland, Canada. My favorite historical trail is the Lewis & Clark route. Consider expanding your definition of trails to include subway networks, bus routes, urban hikes, or city tours.</p> <p>Step 2 Examine the Iditarod Trail maps on the web site. Students can read the trail descriptions also if they choose, which provides another opportunity to examine human geography concepts about how humans interact with the environment.</p> <p>Step 3 Students work in groups to compare and contrast a trail, or a set of different trails, to the Iditarod Trail. Be sure to include how the trails are used, how often, by whom, for what purpose, and how they are marked and maintained, and any other pertinent information.</p> <p>Step 4 Apply human geography concepts to students’ chosen trails. Discuss what makes the trails unique, and if there are any common factors among all the trails, including the Iditarod Trail.</p>
<p>Conclusion & Reflection:</p>	<p>Students should reflect on how applying human geography concepts to the Iditarod Trail has helped them learn about the Iditarod. They can also reflect on the vocabulary terms that they feel have most helped them to better describe the world around them and how they interact with it. Students can do this through discussion, writing, or creating a video or podcast.</p>
<p>Assessment:</p>	<p>Assess the students’ learning in the way that best fits your classroom. If your focus is on geography, create a straightforward test using the geography definitions and students fill in the terms. If you are using this lesson as an extension, create a game or set up a gallery walk for students to reflect. One of my favorite informal final assessments is called Pick Five and Write, where you give students 7-10 strategically chosen words to choose from. Students choose five words and write a paragraph or story that is cohesive and makes sense. Students could also “Pick Five and Talk” with a video or audio assessment.</p>

Notes

Enrichment/ Reinforcement Suggestions:

1. Students can be inspired to check out all or part of their local trails on a day of their choosing! Make connections to the Iditarod Trail, noting specific characteristics of checkpoints or stopping places, details of how the trails are being used (hike, bike, or other forms of transportation, dog walking, ages of users, etc.), and then report back to the class or other students. Students could make a map or write a description similar to those found on the Iditarod web site and share with family, friends, or other students.
2. Students could create a poster or presentation that encourages others to experience local trails.
3. Students can write a letter to their local newspaper encouraging people in their communities to make use of the local trails.

Human Geography: One of the major divisions of geography that studies the spatial analysis of human population, its cultures, activities, and landscapes.

The five themes of human geography

1. location	the geographical situation of people and things
2. human-environment	reciprocal relationship between humans and environment
3. region	an area on the Earth's surface marked by a degree of formal, functional, or perceptual homogeneity of some phenomenon—in other words, what factors does the area have in common that lead to its status as a region
4. place	uniqueness of a location
5. movement	the mobility of people, goods, and ideas across the surface of the planet

TERMS

accessibility	The degree of ease with which it is possible to reach a certain location from other locations. Accessibility varies from place to place and can be measured.
connectivity	the degree of direct lineage between one particular location and other locations in a transport network
absolute location	The position or place of a certain item on the surface of the Earth as expressed in degrees, minutes and seconds of latitude and longitude
relative location	The regional position or situation of a place relative to the position of other places. Distance, accessibility, and connectivity affect relative location.
thematic maps	Maps that tell stories, typically showing the degree of some attribute or the movement of a geographic phenomenon
cultural ecology	The multiple interactions and relationships between a culture and the natural environment
mental maps	Image or picture of the way space is organized as determined by an individual's perception, impression, or knowledge of that space
population density	A measurement of the number of people per given unit of land
functional region	A region defined by the particular set of activities or interactions that occur within it
state	A politically organized territory with a permanent population, a defined territory, and a government
perceptual region	A region that only exists as a conceptualization or an idea and not as a physically demarcated entity
cultural landscape	the visible imprint of human activity and culture on the landscape. The layers of buildings, forms, and artifacts sequentially imprinted on the landscape by the activities of various human occupants.
landscape	the overall appearance of an area. Most landscapes are comprised of a combination of natural and human-induced influences.
perception of place	belief or "understanding" about a place developed through books, movies, stories, or pictures

sense of place	state of mind derived through the infusion of a place with meaning and emotion by remembering important events that occurred in that place or by labeling a place with a certain character.
distance	Measurement of the physical space between two places
culture	The sum total of the knowledge, attitudes, and habitual behavior patterns shared and transmitted by the members of a society
environmental determinism	The view that the natural environment has a controlling influence over various aspects of human life, including cultural development
local culture	Group of people in a particular place who see themselves as a collective or a community, who share experiences, customs, and traits, and who work to preserve those traits and customs in order to claim uniqueness and to distinguish themselves from others
material culture	The art, housing, clothing, sports, dances, foods, and other similar items constructed or created by a group of people
nonmaterial culture	The beliefs, practices, aesthetics, and values of a group of people
sacred sites	A place or space which people infuse with religious meaning
centripetal forces	Forces that tend to unify a country, such as widespread commitment to a national culture, shared ideological objectives, or a common faith
urban	The buildup of the central city and the suburban realm—the city and the surrounding environs connected to the city; typically urban areas have large settlements with high population density
rural	a geographic area that is located outside towns and cities; typical rural areas have a low population density and small settlements
friction of distance	The increase in time and cost that usually comes with increasing distance
cyclic movement	Movement—for example, nomadic migration—that has a closed route and is repeated annually or seasonally
periodic movements	Movement—for example, college attendance or military service—that involves temporary, recurrent relocation
migration	A change in residence intended to be permanent
voluntary migration	movement in which people relocate in response to perceived opportunity
kinship links	types of push factors or pull factors that influence a migrant's decision to go where family or friends have already found success
pull factors	positive conditions and perceptions that effectively attract people to new locales from other areas
push factors	negative conditions and perceptions that induce people to leave their abode and migrate to a new locale
intermodal connections	places where two or more modes of transportation meet
local exchange trading system (LETS)	a barter system whereby a local currency is created through which members trade services or goods in a local network separated from the formal economy

Answer key: possible connections to the Iditarod Trail, there are many more your students could make.

accessibility	Some checkpoints are only accessible in the winter by dog sled, airplane, or snowmobile. Other checkpoints can accommodate larger aircraft, while the urban start of the trail, the city Anchorage, is accessible by car and bus for a variety of visitors.
connectivity	The Iditarod Trail is unique in that connectivity is very limited. Many checkpoints are only accessible by plane, dog sled, and snowmachine.
absolute location	Mushers along the Iditarod Trail during the race carry a GPS, which allows their absolute location to be recorded. Checkpoints along the trail have an absolute location, allowing the race to be segmented into manageable pieces.
relative location	People who travel and visit the Iditarod Trail become familiar with the relative locations of checkpoints and associate them with distances between each, how accessible each one is, and if the landscape allows easy or difficult connectivity between them.
thematic maps	At any given point of time in the Iditarod, a map can show where each musher is located relative to the others and how far along the trail they are. “Hidden” or insider knowledge can be present in the maps, such as why during the 2023 Iditarod, bib numbers 6 and 8 traveled closely together for the length of the race (sisters Anna and Kristy Berington).
cultural ecology	The natural environment of Alaska dictates in many respects how people move, what they eat, and where most people choose to live. If road access is not feasible in the winter, for example, people must find alternative methods of transportation, including dog sled.
mental maps	Anyone closely affiliated with the Iditarod has a mental map of all or part of the trail. Checkpoint workers must have mental maps of the layout of the checkpoint, and knowledge of where temporary trail markers, chutes, and structures are located.
population density	The population density of any Iditarod checkpoint swells and recedes as the race enters and leaves.
functional region	The Iditarod Trail is a functional region, where along the trail various race activities take place. While it goes through many different areas of Alaska, it can have the sense of a functional region with its own culture, symbols, and values.
state	Alaska, the U.S.’s 49 th state, has a state government, representatives in U.S. government, a permanent population, and defined borders.
perceptual region	Many places, especially those in between checkpoints or comprising a few checkpoints in a row, have names denoting their status as a perceptual region, such as the Farewell Burn, or the Bering Sea Coast.
cultural landscape	Each remote community on the Iditarod Trail has its own unique cultural imprint in the form of structures, paths or roads, and other features.

landscape	A scene on the Iditarod Trail might include landforms, vegetation, and human-built structures.
perception of place	When people consider traveling to Alaska to see the Iditarod, they may have images in their mind from reading articles, seeing videos or photographs, or hearing stories from friends. Even if they have never been, they have a limited understanding of what it's like.
sense of place	Anyone who visits a part of the Iditarod Trail creates a sense of place where their interactions and experiences are cemented and associated with the location they visited. It is the reason why many people return year after year—their emotions are cemented by the sense of place they acquire.
distance	All along the Iditarod Trail, distance is measured between checkpoints in order to track participants' progress and estimate the need for supplies and food.
culture	Alaska's has many examples of local culture, Native Alaskan culture, the mushing community, and many others.
environmental determinism	The specific rural, wintry, remote environment of much of the Iditarod trail has necessitated the development of most aspects of human life, including transportation, clothing, food, and communication, along with the aesthetic of winter wear, the values of independence and self-sufficiency and many other cultural aspects.
local culture	The Iditarod is a local culture in and of itself as a unique Alaskan and U.S. phenomenon. The Iditarod intersects with various towns and communities along the way, all of which have specific aspects of local culture, such as freshly baked pies in Takotna and the returned dog transport hub at Unalakleet.
material culture	The material culture of the mushing community is distinct and persistent, with items such as dog harnesses, sleds, booties, drop bags, parkas, hats, mittens, boots, and/or signature items of apparel.
nonmaterial culture	The mushing community and the visitors who appreciate and admire the race exhibit a shared excitement over the race, the dogs, and peripheral events. Visitors often assimilate with an aesthetic or participation in traditional events, and they share these values with others.
sacred sites	Whether traditionally sacred or made sacred over the years by people's admiration for stories, celebrated local people, and canine athletes, the Iditarod contains many sacred sites.
centripetal forces	<p>Alaskans share a widespread commitment to a state culture unique among U.S. states, for example, as evidenced by land acknowledgements at public gatherings, the singing of Alaska's state song, reverence for Native Alaskan values, and respect for a wilderness way of life. Residents of Alaska proudly share these values with outsiders and tourists.</p> <p>The Iditarod and its mushing community also reinforce a shared commitment to the values and ideals of the race, such as rewarding excellence in dog care, generosity from local communities, and respect and enjoyment of the race by visitors.</p>

urban	The Iditarod intersects with the urban area of Anchorage most notably on the day of the Ceremonial Start, when snow is brought in and laid on city streets, and tourists line sidewalks and buildings to watch the dog teams, especially at 4 th St. and Cordova.
rural	The Iditarod takes place in mostly rural areas. Students could examine the differences between what most lower-48 residents would consider rural, and what rural areas are like in Alaska.
friction of distance	Remote Alaska is a classic case of friction of distance, where certain products and services are increasingly expensive as you get farther away from urban hubs.
cyclic movement	Annually, the Iditarod Trail is used for a series of races including the Iron Dog and Iditarod Trail Invitational for hikers, skiers, and bikers. People relocate to Alaska temporarily to experience these events as participants, families, and tourists.
periodic movements	Many people return to Alaska year after year to volunteer along the Iditarod Trail. They return at the same time every year.
migration	One major example of migration that incorporates Alaska's Iditarod trail system was the Alaska Gold Rush in 1896-1899.
voluntary migration	Many people choose to move to Alaska to pursue the way of life that they desire, or for a specific job in a certain type of community, such as teaching in a remote Native Alaskan community.
kinship links	The mushing community is closely linked. If people desire to take on this way of life, they may move to Alaska and work for a musher to gain experience.
pull factors	Alaska is a positive pull factor in many people's decisions to leave home and pursue a mushing life or at the least, one that includes dog handling, living off the land, and other desired life choices.
push factors	While I think most mushers and tourists are operating from pull factors, one could argue that people throughout history have fled to Alaska to escape from a life they no longer want.
intermodal connections	Anchorage is Alaska's largest transportation hub with ships, cargo aircraft, and road transport. Iditarod Trail towns may bring supplies in by aircraft, to be taken up by dog teams as they pass through during the race.
local exchange trading system (LETS)	On the trail during the race, mushers often help one another by loaning or gifting items of gear, such as sled runner plastic or even a whole sled! Local communities help mushers by providing food and rest shelters in exchange for the tourism benefits that the Iditarod brings.

<p>Definition</p> <p>types of pull factors that influence a migrant's decision to go where family or friends have already found success</p>	<p>Characteristics</p> <p>--connections between people --influences on where people choose to live --family, friends, loved ones, members of a special community</p>
<p>Concept or Vocabulary Term</p> <p>Kinship Links</p>	
<p>Examples</p> <p>A person moving to Alaska to become closer to the Iditarod mushing community, to learn and to live with friends and experts</p>	<p>Non-Examples</p> <p>Someone moving to Alaska who has no established connections in the state such as a job or acquaintances</p>

Example

<p>Definition</p> <p>The buildup of the central city and the suburban realm—the city and the surrounding environs connected to the city</p>	<p>Characteristics</p> <p>large settlements high population density</p>
<p>Urban</p>	
<p>Examples</p> <p>Houston, TX Fairbanks, AK Anchorage, AK</p>	<p>Non-Examples</p> <p>McGrath, AK Bandera, TX</p>

Definition	Characteristics
Examples	Non-Examples

A conceptual diagram with a central white box. The box is positioned between the 'Examples' and 'Non-Examples' labels, and is also centered between the 'Definition' and 'Characteristics' labels. The labels are placed in the corners of a larger frame: 'Definition' at top-left, 'Characteristics' at top-right, 'Examples' at bottom-left, and 'Non-Examples' at bottom-right.

Definition	Characteristics
Examples	Non-Examples

A conceptual diagram identical to the one above. It features a central white box and four labels: 'Definition' (top-left), 'Characteristics' (top-right), 'Examples' (bottom-left), and 'Non-Examples' (bottom-right), all enclosed in a rectangular border.

Primary Sources

Use these primary sources to help your students visualize and apply human geography concepts.

I. Pat Pourchot, Interview.

[Project Jukebox | Digital Branch of the University of Alaska Fairbanks Oral History Program \(uaf.edu\)](#)

University of Alaska Fairbanks Project Jukebox: Oral History of the Iditarod Trail, accessed November 7, 2023.

After clicking the link, you can navigate to different parts of the interview using the boxes at the left.

While listening, jot down the concepts that can be applied, questions, and things you notice.

Explore the other interviews while you are visiting this amazing site!

2. Photographs

What visual representations of Human Geography concepts are present in this photograph? What do you think this part of the trail is like?

A. Skwentna: River Crew erects banner and flags en route. Photo: Terrie Hanke, 2008.



B. Straw, drop bags, and Heet delivered to Skwentna by the Iditarod Air Force. Photo: Terrie Hanke, 2007.

How have land formations influenced human interaction with the landscape? Consider the types of buildings and other aspects of culture that developed as a result of the climate, vegetation, and land.



C. Landing on Lake Spenard, Anchorage. Photo: K. Newmyer, 2023

How do the factors of distance, location, and transportation intersect in this photograph?



D. Iditarod Trail, Mile 0 Photo: Greg Olson

If your goal was to travel the entire Iditarod Trail, what feelings, thoughts, and ideas might you have at Trail Marker 0? Describe the symbols and aesthetic that are used to capture the spirit of the Iditarod National Historic Trail.



3. Excerpt

Pitcher, Don. Anchorage, Denali, & the Kenai Peninsula. Moon Handbooks, Avalon Travel: Berkeley, CA, 2013.

How does the author describe the Mat-Su Valley? Describe the various factors that help define this area as a region. Using the map and the description, what human geography concepts come into conflict with one another here?

90 ANCHORAGE AND VICINITY

ANCHORAGE

888/420-7788, www.sewardbuslines.net, daily, \$30 one-way) provides bus service between Anchorage and Whittier.

FERRY
The Alaska Marine Highway (907/465-3941 or 800/642-0066, www.dot.state.ak.us/amhs) has daily ferry service connecting Whittier with

Matanuska-Susitna Valley

The Parks Highway heads north from Anchorage to Denali and Fairbanks, but before you're even close to either of these, the road takes you through the heart of the Matanuska-Susitna Valley, named for the two rivers that drain this part of Alaska. Originally established as an agricultural center, the Mat-Su is now primarily a bedroom community for Anchorage, with reasonably priced homes and fast-spreading semi-urban sprawl. Two towns dominate the valley: The old farming settlement of Palmer is along the Glenn Highway 42 miles from Anchorage, while Wasilla rears its ugly face 40 miles north of Anchorage along the Parks Highway.

PALMER
For its first 20 years, Palmer (pop. 8,000) was little more than a railway depot for Alaska Railroad's Matanuska branch. Then in May 1935, during the height of both the Depression and a severe drought in the Midwest, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal selected 200 farming families from the relief rolls of northern Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin and shipped them here to colonize the Matanuska Valley. Starting out in tent cabins, the colonists cleared the dense virgin forest, built houses and barns, and planted crops pioneered at the University of Alaska's

Valdez and Cordova on both the high-speed **Chenequa** and the older (and much slower) **Aurora**, where a Forest Service naturalist is on board. In addition, the **Kennicott** has a once-a-month summer sailing across the Gulf of Alaska from Whittier to Yakutat, continuing south to Juneau and then all the way to Prince Rupert, British Columbia.

Agricultural Experimental Station. These hardy transplanted farmers endured the inevitable first-year hardships, including disease, homesickness, mismanagement, floods, and just plain bad luck. But by the fall of 1936 the misfits had been weeded out, 120 babies had been born in the colony, fertile fields and long summer days were filling barns with crops, and the colonists celebrated with a three-day harvest festival, the forerunner of the big state fair. In a few more years, Palmer had become not only a flourishing town but also the center of a bucolic and beautiful agricultural valley that was and still remains unique in Alaska.

Driving into Palmer from Wasilla along the Palmer-Wasilla Highway is a lot like driving into Wasilla from the bush on the Parks Highway time warp. The contrast between Palmer, an old farming community, and Wasilla, with its helter-skelter development, is startling. Suffice it to say that Palmer is more conducive to sightseeing.

Today, downtown Palmer is a blend of the old and new, with Klondike Mike's Saloon just up the street from a fine Tuscan-inspired bistro. Palmer is also home to the **National Outdoor Leadership School's** Alaska campus (907/745-4047, www.nols.edu). From this base, NOLS offers a range of courses that involve backpacking, sea kayaking, and mountaineering in remote parts of Alaska.

91 MATANUSKA-SUSITNA VALLEY

ANCHORAGE

The map shows the Matanuska-Susitna Valley region. Key features include:

- Towns:** Wasilla, Palmer, Wasilla, and Palmer.
- Rivers:** Matanuska River, Susitna River, and Kenai River.
- Lakes:** Lake Louise Park, Lake Louise, and Nancy Lake.
- Highways:** Parks Highway (1), Glenn Highway (2), and Palmer-Wasilla Highway (3).
- Landmarks:** Independence Mine State Historical Park, Government Park Recreation Area, and State Recreation Area.
- Other:** A compass rose and a scale bar (0-5 km) are included.

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4. "Iditarod Checkpoints: Open to Close." Interview: Terrie Hanke, November 8, 2023

What sense of place does Hanke evoke in her description of the Iditarod checkpoints? Which other concepts do you think are the most important in this interview?

Location checkpoints like Yentna, Skwentna, Finger Lake, Rainy Pass, Rohn, Ophir and Cripple are staffed by Iditarod volunteers. Those volunteers are supported by advanced set up/open up crews at Finger, Ophir and Cripple where tents and other facilities are set up. Skwentna for example is run out of the Delia outback/Homestead Cabin. There is a local who is in charge of opening the buildings up and making sure things are in operational order. From there, two groups take over, the River Crew and the Cabin Crew. The River Crew runs the checkpoint as far as setting up the area on the river where teams arrive, get drop bags – water, straw and Heet; then either park to rest or head down the trail. Setting up that part of the checkpoint is very labor intensive and is handled by a crew of 15 or more folks who come up every year from Washington state. They come in a day early on snowmachines they get from a Powersports dealer.

The cabin where all volunteers and mushers are fed is run by a group of people, mostly women, who call themselves the Skwentna Sweeties. They run the hospitality end of things – food for volunteers and mushers. Mushers can also sleep in the cabin. Volunteers alone number between 40 and 50 by the time you include vets, comms, judges along with the River Crew and the Cabin Crew. The Sweeties come in a couple days early clean the cabin and organize the food that Iditarod sends out. They also provide a large amount of the food.

These folks have run the checkpoint for a number of years and are a well-oiled machine. Every procedure has been tested and revised over the years. It's a beautiful dance to watch!

The river crew sorts and alphabetizes the drop bags, lays out the straw bales, set's up the propane stove to heat water, sets up the Skwentna Banner and also flags the route into and out of the checkpoint.

During the race mushers check in at the banner, indicate whether they are staying or going through. If going through, they park temporarily to do vet check and get their bags, straw and Heet. If they are staying, they park to bed the team down, feed them and do vet check. Then they go up to the cabin for a great meal and perhaps some rest.

Mushers send items back home in return bags and then put discarded items in a large pile that the area folks can sort through for usable dog food and other items. Not sure about what happens to the straw at Skwentna, it might go out with the ice or perhaps they rake it up and burn it. Humans use they one or two available outhouses.

The River Crew takes everything down and returns it to storage. The Sweeties take care of the extra food and close up the cabin. Comms, vets and other race people are flown out via small plane on Monday after the mushers have departed. Sweeties and River Crew leave Tuesday or Wednesday.

Iditarod has a monster food list that is purchased and packed up and shipped out to the checkpoints. That food is for volunteers. In the non-village checkpoints, the mushers have their own food. In the villages, people bring food to the checkpoint for volunteers and mushers. It's a fantastic smorgasbord – moose or caribou stew, moose chili, salmon, egg bakes, sweet rolls, pies, cakes and many other native favorites. The villagers are very generous with their gifts of food. In a place like McGrath which is a flight hub, pilots and logs people eat up near the air strip while comms, vets, and mushers eat at the checkpoint on food that courtesy of the villagers and food that Iditarod provides. At UNK, pilots and some volunteers eat at the bunk on food that Iditarod provides. Mushers and volunteers also eat at the checkpoint – the specialty is sourdough pancakes and bacon along with stews, pizza and whatever shows up.*

Every checkpoint seems to have their clean up procedure – straw is raked and towed away to be burned or there was a time when hay went out to Rainy Pass and that was raked up and fed to the horses. Some is left to back to the earth in non-village locations. When a checkpoint closes (after the last team has left and the dropped dogs are transported out) the tents are taken down, packed and returned to Wasilla for storage. Return bags also go back to Wasilla for pick up.

**Tanana and Huslia on the Low Snow Route have very special food memories! Tanana had organized providers for every meal. In the morning, great egg bakes, pancakes, French toast, bacon etc. would arrive. Somebody would come fetch a few loave of bread and for lunch, salmon sandwiches would show up. For super it would be stews and roasts and many deserts. Huslia was an all-day smorgasbord. Egg bakes, sweet rolls, bacon, fried spam, French toast and pie for breakfast. Wonderful soups and sandwiches for lunch and really hearty meals for supper. Volunteers, mushers and villagers alike, came to enjoy the meals and the fellowship in the community center. I was talking to one lady who said she had a moose head in the crock pot for lunch and a rack of moose ribs in the over for super. The moose head wasn't really a head but all the edible parts of the head.*

There is a special memory from Ruby – Susan Butcher, David and their daughters were at Ruby. Susan was in treatment for cancer, but her numbers were good enough to be out on the trail. Tekla, who might have been 10 at the time, was morning chef, doing pancakes for one and all!

5. Interview, Keeli Cullen, preschool teacher in Sharon, MA, November 6, 2023

Keeli and her students have personalized a trail within a specific landscape. After reading about the trail, what aspects of human geology can be applied? What factors inspire you to explore or create your own trail?

Our school is in a farmhouse with 350 acres of woodland. It is an outdoor nature preschool, so the students are exposed to the outdoor environment every day, for 2 1/2 hours during the day. We use items in nature for our learning,

so for example we make sequences with different colored leaves in the fall. We count and sort natural items like sticks, rocks, and colorful leaves, and we find different kinds of insects, trees, plants, and animals and learn about the life cycles. When we go back to the school building, we represent what we have learned by painting, drawing, building models, or sharing stories. There are 14 locations in the woods where students can explore or play. It takes about 30 minutes—with 4-5 year olds!—to hike to the location. We make a plan for which location we want to visit each day.

Here are names of some of our play spaces... The Cellar Hole (which was once the site of a house and barn), the Woodland Lookout (when at the top of the hill you look down into the forest), the Wetland Lookout (area overlooking the wetlands area where we often see geese, hear songbirds and frogs) Log Land, Wood Lot, the Perfect Playground, See-Saw Playground, Spider Meadow, Crabapple Hill, Fern Forest, Rocky Hill, the Vernal Pool, the Pollinator Garden, the Big Lawn, the Little Woods and the Pen. Each spot lends itself to different exploration/discoveries where the children can use their imagination as well as build on many different skills. Our hiking adventures are about 2 21/2 hours each day, and then we go back to school for lunch. (We eat outside every day we can on the lawn under the tree or on our patio. We don't eat out if it's raining or cold enough to need gloves.) Lightning, ice, wind and extreme heat/cold are the only things that keep us from hiking. Gear is temperature dependent: Warm days - sturdy sneakers or hiking shoes/boots, hats. Long pants vs shorts if we're going to be where there are a lot of thorns, ticks. Rainy days-rain coats, rain pants (if it's not too hot), rain boots. Cool days- sweater/sweatshirt/light jacket, hiking shoes/boots, (hat & gloves/mittens their choice) Cold days-base layer, pants, snow pants, shirt, sweater, winter jacket, wool socks, winter boots, hat, gloves/mittens. We recommend waterproof gear, non-tie shoes/boots, and layers. (We ask this question when it's time to get ready for hikes, especially in the fall as the weather changes, Is it a one layer, two layer or three layer day?) Each child carries a backpack with a sit-upon (piece of yoga mat), and their water bottle. This is so they can always access water and they can carry their layers back to school if they get too warm.