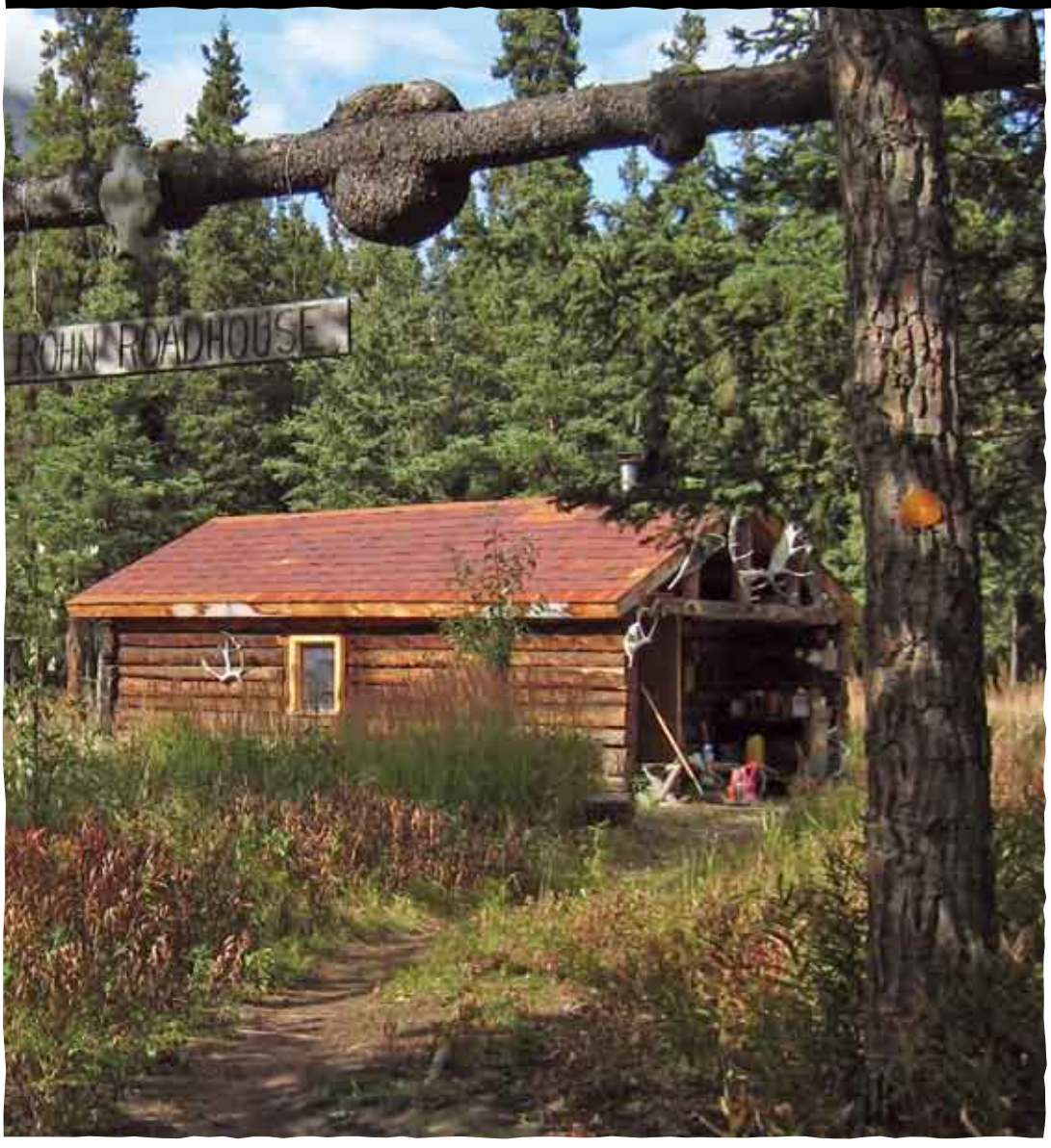
Iditarod Historic Trail

VISITOR GUIDE



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Welcome

to Alaska's National Historic Trail!

National Historic Trails commemorate major routes of exploration, migration, trade, and military actions that formed America. Across America, only 17 trails have been honored as National Historic Trails. The Iditarod is the only Alaska trail and the only winter trail. Moreover, the Iditarod is the only historic trail celebrating the indispensable role played by 'man's best friend' in the settlement of our state.

Given the broad swath of geography the Iditarod Trail crosses, it's only natural that a lot of different landowners are involved. The U.S. Bureau of Land Management was appointed in the National Trails Act to coordinate the efforts of federal and state land managers on behalf of the trail, along with volunteer efforts. As you get out on the trail, I encourage you to support the local groups that do so much for this trail. Mush on!

Gary Reimer
BLM Anchorage District Manager

Centennial Message

from the Iditarod Historic Trail Alliance

January 2008 marks the 100th anniversary of the start of efforts to open the now famous overland route from Seward to Nome. First scouted in 1908, the Iditarod Trail was completed by crews working through mid-winter temperatures of -50F in 1910 and 1911. Within a year, thousands of gold-seekers hiked or mushed the government trail to the Iditarod goldfields, and gold-carrying sled dog teams became a regular sight on the trail. As a result of population increases from the rush to the Last Frontier, Congress elevated Alaska to territorial status in 1912. To commemorate these epic achievements, an interagency and partner working group has chosen January 2008 to October 2012 as the official Iditarod National Historic Trail Centennial.

The Iditarod Historic Trail Alliance is a statewide, nonprofit corporation chartered to advance the knowledge and appreciation of the historic Iditarod Trail. We work with a variety of government and volunteer partners on projects to protect or improve the trail, or to provide information such as in this publication, which we helped produce. In the coming years, we will be working on projects that bring to life the old stories from the trail, along with seeing to it that the trail remains a vital resource for the next 100 years. Stay tuned, and if you would like to join the Centennial effort, look us up. See you on the trail!

Judy Bittner
President, Iditarod National Historic Trail, Inc.

You Want to Hit the Trail
AND YOU HAVE...

...AN HOUR

- Check out the paved bike path section along Resurrection Bay in Seward.
- Take in some exhibits on Beluga whales, and stroll on the trail at Bird Point along the Seward Highway.
- Ride the tram to the top of Mt. Alyeska for a great view of the Girdwood area and the route to Crow Pass.
- Visit the Eagle River Nature Center in Chugach State Park and in-season see spawning salmon.
- Check out the Knik Museum / Dog Mushers Hall of Fame and hike the trail out through the woods.

...A HALF-DAY

- Hike the Trail in Girdwood, stopping at Crow Creek Mine to pan for gold.
- Ride the Alaska Railroad into the Kenai Mountains and whistle stops in Chugach National Forest.
- Visit the Anchorage Museum of History and Art and take in the Alaska Gallery.
- Take a summer dogsled ride at the Iditarod Sled Dog Race headquarters, and visit the Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge afterwards to bird-watch.
- Drive out from Nome on the Council Highway to the Safety Sound Bridge, and walk the beach in the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge.

...THREE DAYS

- Backpack over the Crow Pass segment from Girdwood to the Eagle River Nature Center.
- Camp overnight in a yurt at the Eagle River Nature Center.
- Fly mountain bikes to Takotna and ride the state highways to the Ophir goldfields.
- Fish for silver salmon on the Unalakleet River on the Kaltag Portage.

...A WEEK OR MORE

- Fly into the BLM Rohn Shelter Cabin and backpack 40 miles over Rainy Pass for a floatplane pick up near Puntilla Lake.
- Float the winding rivers to and from remote floatplane pick up points in Innoko National Wildlife Refuge.

Why You Don't Want to Walk to Nome (in the Summer)

Five hundred miles of swamp and anklebusting tussocks. Clouds of mosquitoes. Enough creek and river crossings to make you want to grow webbed feet.

Much of the country crossed by the historic Iditarod Trail is flat, boggy basins lined with permafrost and punctuated with black spruce. There's a reason the old-timers rode the steamers up and down the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers in the summer. There are good stretches of high country that will give you a taste of the trail (some listed on this page), but if you want to seek out the flats, know before you go!

Alaska's Enduring Trail

The Iditarod National Historic Trail (INHT) commemorates a 2,300 mile system of winter routes that first connected ancient Native villages and later opened up Alaska for America's last great gold rush.

When American explorers and prospectors arrived in the north, they quickly learned from Native Alaskans that sled dog teams were the only way to reliably move goods and people across the frozen landscape. Not by chance, the 'Seward to Nome Trail,' as the Iditarod was originally called, was first mapped and marked in 1908 by a four-person Alaska Road Commission crew supported by dog teams.

Nine months after the route was surveyed, two prospectors made a 'Christmas Day Strike' in the Iditarod Mining District, and the last great rush was on. Between 1910 and 1912, 10,000 gold-seekers came to Alaska's "Inland Empire" and in the following years worked $30 million of gold from the ground.

Roadhouses and Dog Barns

With the rush, roadhouses and dog barns sprung up along the trail at a convenient day's journey apart—about 20 miles—to shelter and feed trail users. Freight shippers, mail haulers, and well-to-do passengers relied on dogsleds. Less wealthy foot-travelers used snowshoes, skis, and the occasional bicycle.

By 1918 the stampede reversed itself. New winter mail contracts bypassed the fading town of Iditarod in favor of more direct routes to Nome, and World War I drew young miners and workers away from the gold fields.

Nome Serum Run Marks the Beginning of the End

In the winter of 1925, a deadly outbreak of diphtheria struck fear in the hearts of Nome residents. Winter ice had closed the port city from the outside world without enough serum to inoculate its residents. Serum from Anchorage was rushed by train to Nenana and picked up by a sled dog relay. Twenty of Alaska's best mushers and their teams carried the serum 674 miles from Nenana to Nome in less than five-and-a-half days!

This was to be one of the final great feats by sled dogs. Within a decade, air transport replaced the sled dog team as the preferred way to ship mail. With downturns in gold mining, most of the roadhouses closed, boom towns emptied, and the Iditarod Trail fell into disuse.

Pre-Russo-Euro Contact

NATIVE PEOPLE FROM SEWARD PENINSULA TO PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND MAKE TRAILS LATER USED AS THE IDITAROD TRAIL

Average team is three dogs although a better off man may have up to five.

1843

KALTAG PORTAGE DISCOVERED BY RUSSIANS

Lieutenant Zagoskin of the Russian American Co. discovers long-hidden Native trade route and shortcut between the Bering Sea and the Yukon River of Interior Alaska.

1867

ALASKA PURCHASED BY UNITED STATES

American fur trading companies take over Russian trading posts and continue to use the Kaltag Portage.

1900

NOME BECOMES INSTANT CITY

Word of gold discoveries in the beach sands cause one of Alaska's greatest gold rushes. By the summer of 1900, between 20,000 and 30,000 people arrive, many via Kaltag Portage.

1903

SEWARD FORMED AS START OF NEW RAILROAD LINKING COAST TO INTERIOR

1908

SEWARD TO NOME ROUTE EXPLORED

Alaska Road Commission scouts an 800-mile winter trail from Seward to Nome starting January 31 and finishing April 5.

1908

CHRISTMAS DAY STRIKE ON OTTER CREEK, A TRIBUTARY OF THE HAIDITAROD (IDITAROD) RIVER BY BEACON AND DIKEMAN

1910-11

AK ROAD COMMISSION SPENDS $10,000 TO CONSTRUCT SEWARD TO NOME TRAIL WITH A BRANCH TO THE IDITAROD GOLDFIELDS

"Meals were two dollars each, and blankets spread over wild hay on a pole bunk cost another two dollars. High prices for those days, but a cabin in the shadows of Mt. McKinley is a long way from civilization."

—Nuggets and Beans, Harold Peckenpaugh

A Partnership Effort Reopens the Iditarod Trail

"Trail work is never done."

—Joe Redington Sr., "Father of the Iditarod"

Forest and tundra reclaimed the Iditarod Trail for almost a half a century until Alaskans, led by Joe Redington, Sr., reopened the routes. To draw attention to the role dogs played in Alaska's history, Joe and his friends created an epic sled dog race from Anchorage to Nome following the route of the historic Iditarod Trail. The Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race ultimately revived dog mushing in Alaska and around the world. And after years of dogged effort by Joe and the Alaska Congressional delegation, the Iditarod was designated as a National Historic Trail in 1978.

"…having two basket sleds and 18 sets dog harness made…at Seward we spent five days "trying out dogs" and repacking the outfit ready for the trip..."—W.L.Goodwin 1908

Tripods Lead to Safety

For the past century, wooden tripods have been placed at close intervals along treeless sections of the Iditarod Trail to guide travelers safely through blizzards. A 1912 article titled "Trail Making in Alaska" described how Colonel Goodwin, leader of the Alaska Road Commission expedition to mark the trail from Seward to Nome, constructed the tripods:

"...tripods...consisted of three sticks of timber each, two of which were eight feet long and the third ten or eleven feet long. They are so fastened together that the longest of the tree sticks projects two or three foot over the others and directly above the trail."

The same design is still in use today, with volunteer groups and public land managers working to provide these safety markers over hundreds of miles of the trail.

1910-12
TEN THOUSAND STAMPEDERS RUSH TO MINING CAMPS BETWEEN IDITAROD AND RUBY

1912
ALASKA BECOMES A TERRITORY

1914
U.S. MAIL CARRIED THE LENGTH OF THE 'IDITAROD TRAIL'

Wells Fargo dog teams carry over 1,000 pounds of gold from Iditarod to Seward in 37 days.

1914
U.S. GOVERNMENT TAKES OVER CONSTRUCTION OF ALASKA RAILROAD; LOCATES HEADQUARTERS ON COOK INLET

1918
THE STAMPEDE IS OVER

New mail contract bypasses Iditarod. Wells Fargo dogsled "gold trains" make their last trek to Seward. World War I draws young miners and workers away from goldfields.

1925
DIPTHERIA EPIDEMIC THREATENS NOME

Twenty dog mushers relay the lifesaving serum 674 miles from Nenana to Nome over the Iditarod Trail in a little more than five days.

1973
THE FIRST IDITAROD SLED DOG RACE IS RUN TO NOME

Twenty-two mushers successfully complete the first Anchorage to Nome Sled Dog Race, with the winner traveling the 1,000-mile distance in just over 20 days.

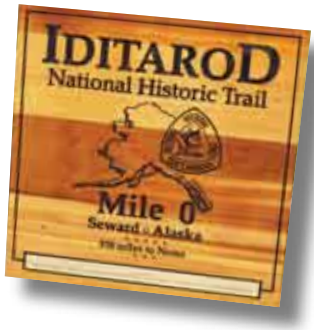
1978
IDITAROD NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL ESTABLISHED BY CONGRESS

The Iditarod Trail and three other American pioneering routes are designated as the first national historic trails.

Kenai Mountains Points of Interest

Seward (Mile 0):

Look for the tripod and historic Iditarod Trail monument located along the shoreline of Resurrection Bay next to the Alaska Sea Life Center. This is the southernmost terminus for the historic Iditarod Trail. Thousands of people set off from here trying to realize their dreams of fortune. A paved segment of the historic trail follows the bay for one mile to the small boat harbor.



Resurrection Bay Historical Society Museum

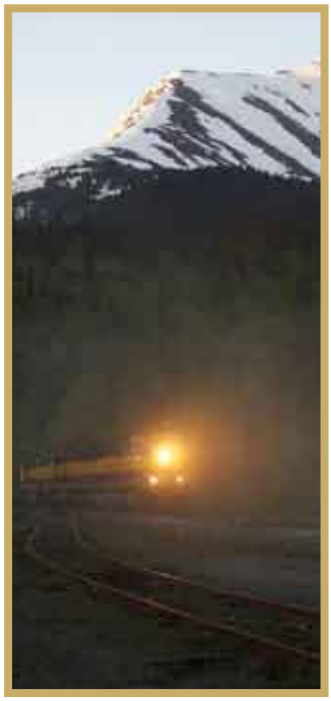
Photographs, artifacts, and documents tell the history of this area at this quaint little museum in downtown Seward. If you visit during the summer, be sure to catch one of their evening programs on the history of the Iditarod Trail.

Johnson Pass Trail & Trailheads

This 23-mile trail is part of the historic Iditarod Trail. Popular with mountain bikers and hikers, this trail offers spectacular scenery with hemlock forests, wildflowers, and sweeping vistas. This is an excellent trail for longer family outings. Wildlife viewing, hunting, and fishing opportunities also exist.

Alaska Railroad & Spencer Whistle Stop

Hop on board the Alaska Railroad and follow the main route of the historic Iditarod Trail deep into the inaccessible, roadless backcountry of the Chugach National Forest. The Spencer Whistle Stop is the first in a series of whistle stops that offers hiking, glacier viewing, and amazing scenery. Trips can be arranged through the Alaska Railroad at www.akrr.com.



Portage Valley – Trail of Blue Ice

A newly constructed segment of the historic Iditarod Trail system in the glacially carved Portage Valley. At Portage Lake, a 3-mile section connects to the Black Bear Campground, and at the west end of the valley, a one-mile segment connects the Explorer Pond to the Moose Flats Day Use site. All sections are accessible and great fun for a family outing.

Begich, Boggs Visitor Center

Built on the terminal moraine left behind by Portage Glacier, the visitor center offers interactive displays, videos, and educational programs to tell the story of the Chugach National Forest. The visitor center is open 7 days a week during the summer.

Seward Highway All American Road

When following the Seward Highway, you are actually following much of the historic Iditarod Trail. Today, the Seward Highway is considered one of the "best of the best" scenic byways in the United States.

Hope Historic District

The small, quiet communities of Hope and nearby Sunrise were once booming gold rush cities in the late 1890s. Many of the old buildings and charm of the gold rush days still remain. In fact, the downtown store opened in 1896 and is still serving customers today. Be sure to check out the Hope-Sunrise Historical and Mining Museum.

Seward of Yesteryear

"Seward Route to the Iditarod the Only Way"

Headline from Seward *Weekly Gateway* paper, Nov. 1909

Although 'officially' founded in 1903, the town of Seward bustled with prospectors for at least a decade prior to its incorporation. The year-round ice-free waters of Resurrection Bay made Seward an ideal port and supply point for booming Interior Alaska mining communities.

The first wave of commerce came to Seward in the late 1890s with the discovery of gold on the other side of the Kenai Peninsula at Hope and Sunrise. Then in 1908, community boosters made sure that Seward stayed on the map as they pressed for the development of a government trail leading to the new goldfields in the Upper Kuskokwim Basin.

Newspapers breathlessly repeated the advantages of the Seward route over the Richardson Trail from Valdez to Fairbanks. And in 1910 they were rewarded when the Alaska Road Commission decided to spend $10,000 to construct a trail connecting Seward to Nome.

Alaska State Library

Anchorage Area Points of Interest

Girdwood

Established in 1906 as a place to rest and reprovision before crossing the Iditarod Trail over the Chugach Mountains, Girdwood today hosts some of the most easily-accessed and historically intact segments of the historic route. Wide, paved bike paths parallel Alyeska Highway in the lower valley, while moss-shrouded rainforest sections start at trailheads from Mile 1.6 of Crow Creek Road. For more information, visit the U.S. Forest Service Glacier Ranger District office on Alyeska Highway, or look for maps at nearby trailheads.

Alyeska Resort Tram and Valley Overlook

Alyeska Resort operates a 60-person tram that carries passengers from sea level to an observation deck 2,300 feet above the Girdwood valley (year-round). The observation deck provides a grand view of the challenging terrain faced by Iditarod Trail users a century ago.

Winner Creek / Berry Pass Trails

Long a favorite with local residents, the Winner Creek segment of the historic Iditarod provides access to the spectacular Four Corners Gorge and an exciting hand-operated tram over the chasm. The Winner Creek Trail is accessible from both Crow Creek Road and the Alyeska Hotel. The Berry Pass Trail (also known as Upper Winner Creek) provides an improved 7-mile route to a spectacular alpine pass.

Crow Creek Mine – National Historic Place

Visitors can pan for gold, camp, and get a feel for life in the gold camps at this largest intact historic mine in Southcentral Alaska (summer only). During the early 1900s, Crow Creek Mine was the most productive placer mining camp in the Turnagain-Knik region, and a heavy user of the Iditarod Trail to Seward.

Crow Pass – Eagle River segment

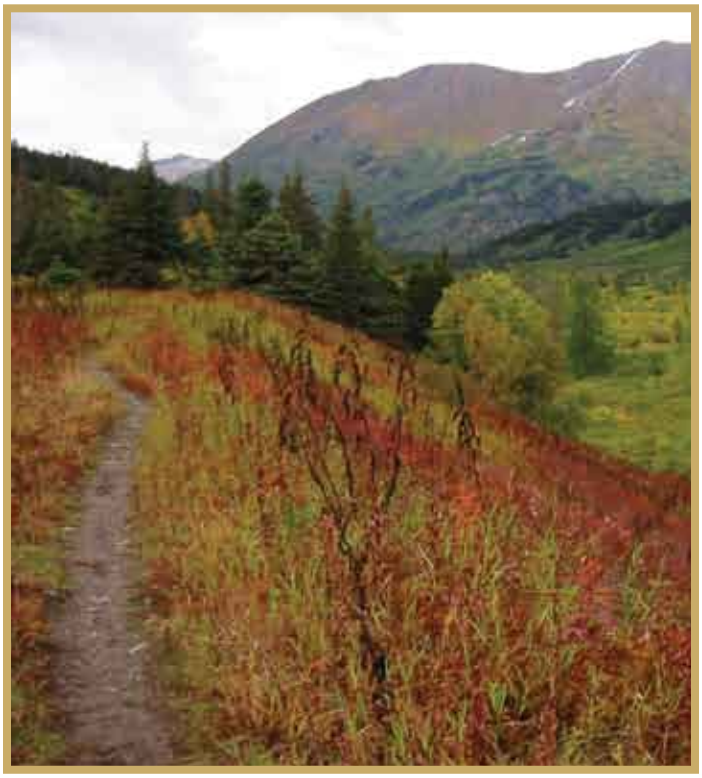
At the end of Crow Creek Road, a 3.5-mile segment of the historic route leads to Crow Pass, the highest point on the entire Seward to Nome trail and one of the most scenic hikes in all of Southcentral Alaska. Backpackers can continue over the pass on a 24-mile traverse of Chugach State Park, finishing at the Eagle River Nature Center. The Forest Service rents a public use cabin in the Crow Pass area. Summer use only is recommended due to avalanche hazards.

Girdwood to Indian Pathway

First cut by trail builders in 1908 seeking to avoid the avalanche prone Crow Pass Trail, today's route is a wide, 13-mile, bike-friendly asphalt trail. Frequent turnouts, numerous interpretive displays, and great opportunities for wildlife viewing.

Indian Pass – Ship Creek segment

A largely unimproved, 20-mile traverse through rainforest, alpine and sub-boreal forest, best done on skis in winter. Improved segments at either end provide enjoyable 'out-and-back' day trips. Access on the north end (Ship Creek side) is via scenic Arctic Valley Road just outside of Anchorage, off the Glenn Highway in Fort Richardson.



Anchorage of Yesteryear

Anchorage was a blank spot on the map when the Seward to Iditarod government trail opened in 1910. All of this changed in 1915 when the federal government established the townsite of Anchorage as the headquarters of the soon-to-be-built Alaska Railroad. The main route of the Iditarod Trail soon included the new boomtown, and dog teams loaded with hundreds of thousands of dollars of Iditarod gold became a regular sight on Anchorage's main streets.

Every winter until 1919, when the railroad was finished to the ice-free port of Seward, Anchorage received its winter mail and supplies by dog teams traveling the Indian Pass-Ship Creek Trail. The main hotel in town even included dog kennels in the basement for visiting mushers!

Knik of Yesteryear

During the Iditarod gold rush, Knik was the last major outfitting center before stampeders struck out for mines 375 miles to the northwest. Stampeders would either travel by trail over the Chugach Mountains and around Knik Arm, or by steamship. At its peak, Knik was home to 1,500 people, a variety of businesses, and was the hub for a number of trails to goldfields and coalfields. The founding of Anchorage and the Alaska Railroad's bypassing of Knik caused the town's rapid decline—by 1920 it's population had moved on.

In 1948, Joe Redington Sr., "the father of the Iditarod Race," established a homestead in Knik because it provided easy access to the old Iditarod Trail. So Joe learned to mush from old timers who used to carry mail or run traplines, later earning a living with his dog teams by retrieving, piece-by-piece, military aircraft crashed in Alaska's wilds.

To draw attention to the role dogs played in Alaska's history, in the early 1970s Joe and his friends created an epic sled dog race from Anchorage to Nome following the route of the historic Iditarod trail. The Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race ultimately revived dog mushing in Alaska and around the world, and with it made the Knik area a favorite spot for twentieth century mushers to call home.

Iditarod Sled Dog Race Ceremonial Start

On the first Saturday of every March, dozens of mushers and dog teams start their journey to Nome with a warm-up trip over the trails of Anchorage. From Fourth Avenue teams fly down the Cordova Street hill to the paved Chester Creek bike path, and head east to the trails in Far North Bicentennial Park. Good opportunities for wildlife viewing can be had on these trails year-round.

Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center

Full-scale and miniature dioramas in the 15,000-square-foot Alaska Gallery, along with over 1,000 historic artifacts provide a broad overview of the history of Alaska. Look for the collection from the "Father of the Iditarod Sled Dog Race" Joe Redington, Sr., along with other fine art displays. Open year-round.

Alaska Public Lands Information Center

Interagency visitor center on Fourth Avenue that can provide details on Iditarod Trail-related recreation described in this guide, as well as other opportunities throughout Alaska. Open year-round.

Eagle River Nature Center

Located in the upper Eagle River Valley, which was once described a century ago by U.S. Army trail scouts as a "miniature Yosemite." Open year-round (winter weekends only), the nonprofit Nature Center provides nature studies for adults and children, 9 miles of hiking trails—including the historic Iditarod Trail—and overnight camping at a public use cabin and two yurts.

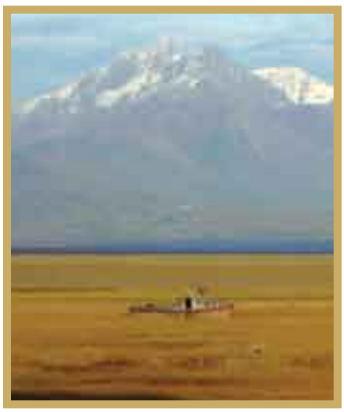
Eklutna Historic Park

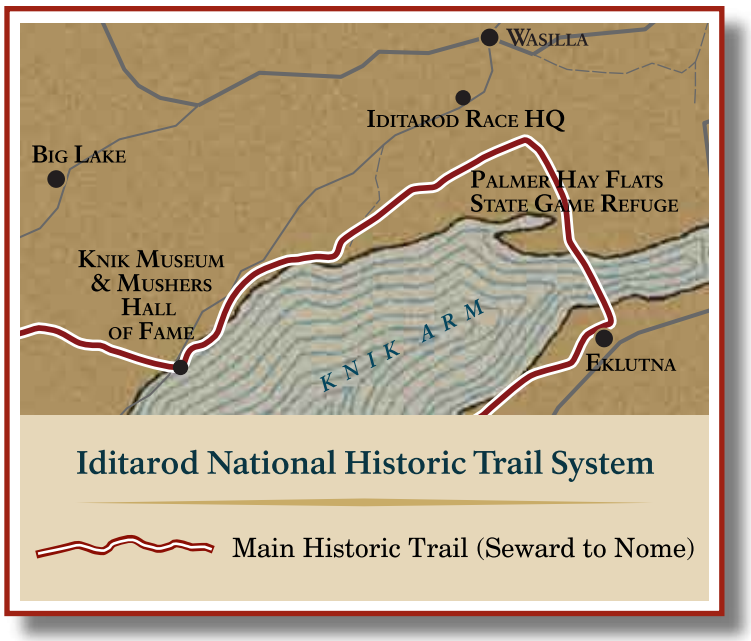
Dena'ina Athabaskan village site inhabited since 1650 was the winter river-crossing site for the historic Iditarod Trail. A museum, historic Russian Orthodox church from the 1840s, and colorfully decorated graveyard 'spirit houses' provide a window into the past.

Mat-Su Area Points of Interest

Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge

Tidally influenced wetlands traversed by the main route of the historic Iditarod Trail between Eklutna and Knik. The refuge offers magnificent views of the Chugach Mountains along with excellent waterfowl and wildlife viewing. Located 7.5 miles south of Wasilla. Take Fairview Loop Road south to Hayfield Road, continue south on Hayfield 1.25 miles to Scout Ridge Road, then right 0.4 miles on Scout Ridge, down hill to parking area at base of bluff. Bring rubber boots and binoculars.





Iditarod Sled Dog Race Headquarters

Large log building houses museum with memorabilia, displays, and photographs dating back to the first runs of the Iditarod Sled Dog Race in 1973. Dogsled rides May to September. Mile 2.2 Knik-Goosebay Road.

Knik Museum—Alaska Sled Dog Mushers Hall of Fame

Located directly on the main route of the historic Iditarod Trail where it passed through the gold rush era town of Knik. The museum building was previously used as a pool hall and roadhouse. The first floor contains artifacts and photographs from historic Knik, and the second floor the Sled Dog Mushers Hall of Fame. Visitors can take short walks on the historic trail from the museum. Mile 13.9 Knik-Goosebay Road.

What's In a Name? Place Names Along the

Seward
For Secretary of State William Seward, who arranged the purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867 for $7.2 million, or around 1.9 cents per acre.

Portage
Named for a bay on the Prince William Sound side of a mountain pass covered by a glacier of the same name.

Girdwood
For Colonel James Girdwood, who found and formed a number of mines in Glacier Creek valley.

Anchorage
First known as Ship Creek, the waters off t he creek were charted as "Knik Anchorage." The U.S. Post Office later shortened the name to Anchorage.

Wasilla
Named for a respected local Dena'ina Athabaskan chief.

Iditarod Trail

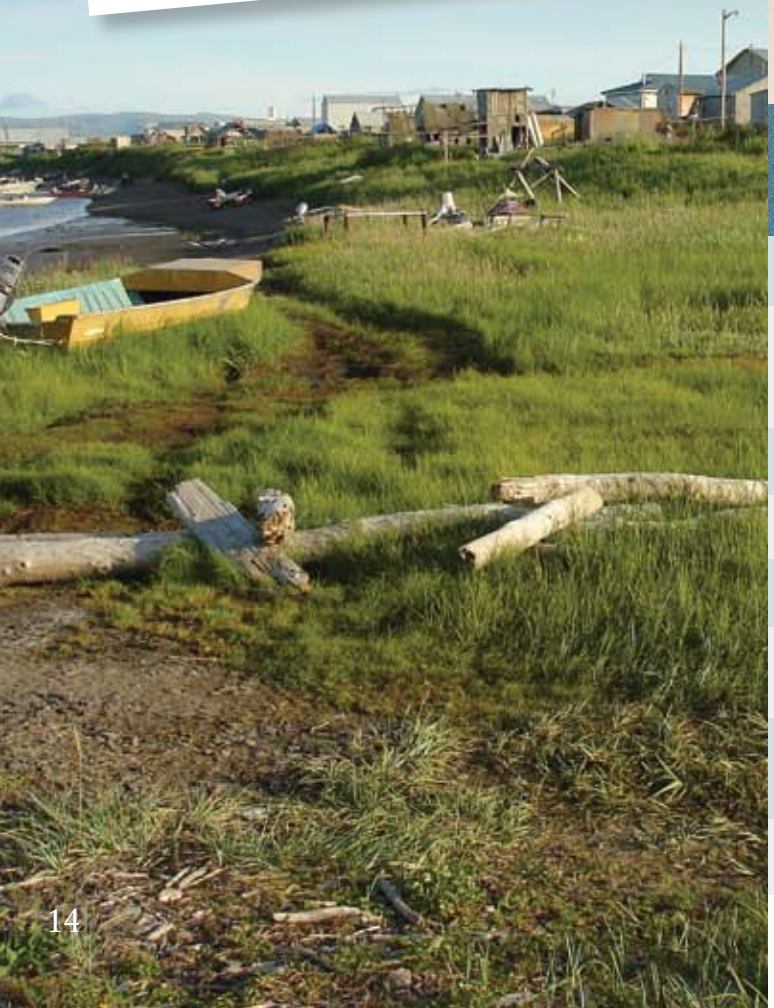
Ophir
Named by miners for the lost country of Ophir, the source of the King Solomon's gold in the Old Testament.

Ruby
Named after the red-colored stones found on the riverbank, which were thought by prospectors to be rubies.

Iditarod
Originally 'hidehod' or 'Haiditarod', meaning a "distant place" in the Ingalik Native language, or "clear water" by the Shageluk Natives for the river of the same name.

Unalakleet
Means "from the southern side."

Nome
Town name created as a result of a spelling error. A government draftsman noted a prominent unnamed point on Norton Sound as "name?" The map engravers mistook the "a" for an "o", thereby naming the landmark Cape Nome.



Seasons of Travel on the Trail

Except for intervillage travel in the dark months of December and January, much of the mid-winter Iditarod Trail lies snowed-in and unbroken. With lengthening days in February comes more travel, and the breaking of the trail from Wasilla to Nome for the long-distance Iron Dog snowmobile race. The glory days of winter travel happen from March into mid-April, when quickly lengthening days herald the coming of spring. But before summer, overland transportation bogs down into the break-up period when trails turn to mush and air travel becomes the only way to get around.

By June the land is quickly greening up, and high-country segments of the trail are passable. Daylight dominates Iditarod Trail country. The first hatch of mosquitoes is out with a vengeance, and in some places may never diminish through the summer. Salmon return to many streams, attracting two- and four-legged consumers. By August the rains of fall begin, with berries ripening and tinges of yellows and reds starting to show on tundra and forest plants alike.

Town / Place Name	Population	Scheduled Air Service?**	A
Rainy Pass Lodge	2	N	
McGrath	320	Y	
Ruby	180	Y	
Galena	630	Y	
Grayling	175	N	
Unalakleet	730	Y	
Koyuk	368	N	
White Mountain	224	N	

* smaller towns typically are served by "bed and breakfast"

**From A

"Termination dust," new snow on the high peaks, signals the end of summer. September to November see the land lock up in a deep freeze, allowing for the use of the trails on snow and ice between Seward and Nome.

Tips for Bush Travel

Beyond the urbanized, cash-economy base of the Seward to Fairbanks rail belt lies the Alaska "Bush." If you head out to the Iditarod Trail in the Bush, one of the many small towns along the trail will likely become a gateway to your experience. You may find that life moves at a different rhythm than you are accustomed to. Things may seemingly move slower, but that perception may result from not being present to see the intense bursts of seasonal activity in which much is accomplished.

Natural cycles such as weather, tides, the seasons, and wildlife migration are more dominant in Bush Alaska than in urban centers. Expect delays in transportation. Know that all food and fuel in rural Alaska, except locally harvested foods, have arrived by air or water. Expect higher prices on everything, and limited choices and quantities. If you know in advance that you'll be enjoying someone's hospitality, try to bring a gift such as fresh fruit or coffee.

Much of the lands adjacent to the trail around small towns and villages are privately owned. Cabins, camps, and mining equipment along the trail should be respected as private property and not used, unless marked as public. And historic artifacts should not be removed, as they are protected by law in order to help tell the story of life gone by.

Lodging Available?*	Food Store?	Points of Interest
Y	N	Historic hunting lodge on Puntilla Lake serves as a checkpoint for the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race
Y	Y	Regional population center for Upper Kuskokwim Valley. This is a gateway to the Iditarod National Historic Trail through Innoko National Wildlife Refuge, and abandoned mining towns of Innoko basin, including Iditarod, Flat, Cripple, and Diskaket. Checkpoint on the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race.
Y	Y	Small Yukon River community; checkpoint for the northern leg of Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race on even years.
Y	Y	Koyuk Athabascan Yukon River community; checkpoint for the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race.
N	N	Yukon River community; checkpoint for the northern leg of the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race on odd years.
Y	Y	Yup'ik townsite occupied since 300 A.D. Largest community between Wasilla and Nome; gateway to Kaltag Portage, Unalakleet Wild River, and Norton Sound.
N	Y	Inupiat Eskimo village, located 40 miles north of Cape Denbigh, where 6,000 to 8,000 year-old remains of man have been found. Mushers often travel across ice to reach this village.
N	Y	Eskimo Village is the western extent of trees on the Seward Peninsula.

Anchorage or Fairbanks; smaller towns require flights to regional population centers

Iditarod of Yesteryear

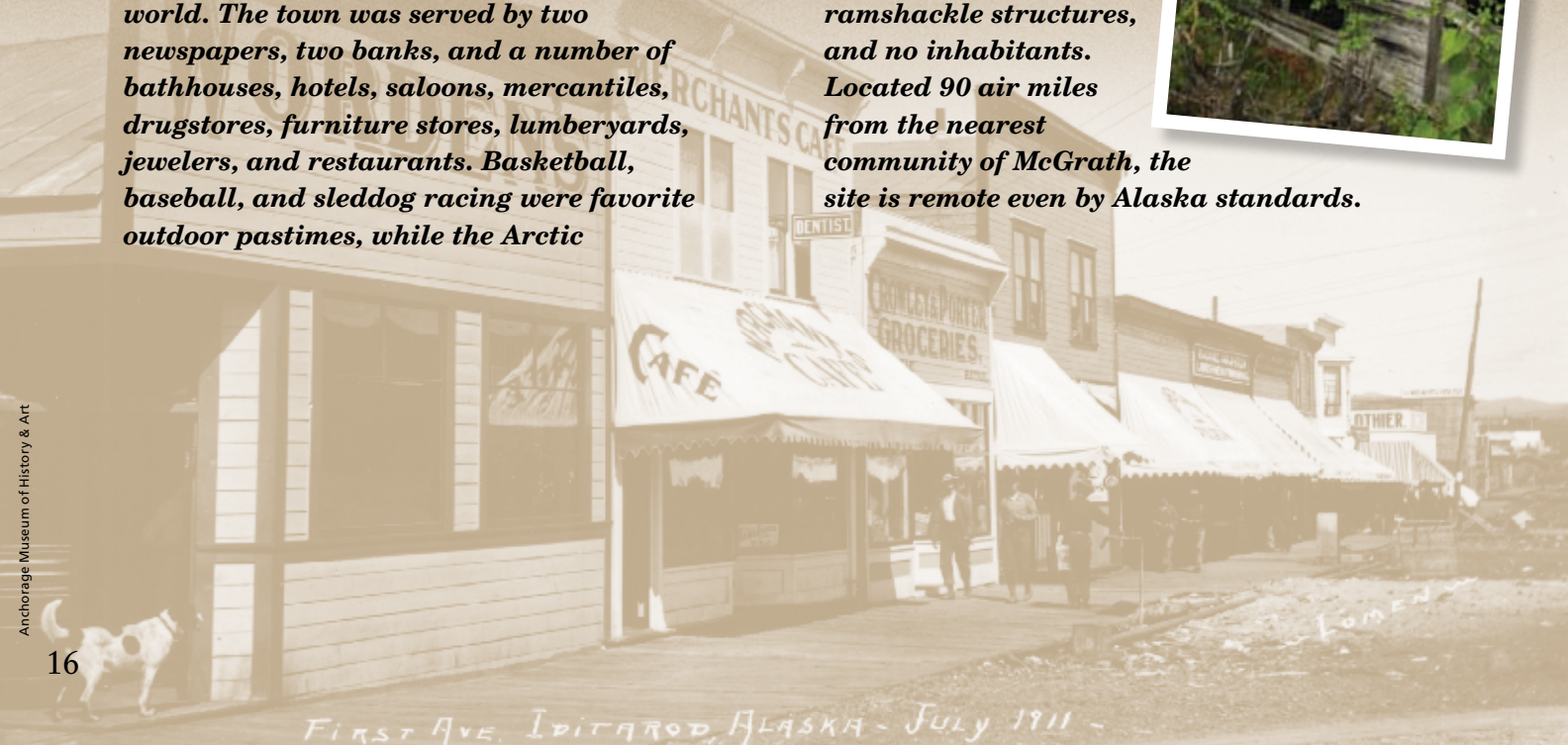
Following the news of gold strikes at Otter and Flat creeks, stampeders boarded steamboats at Fairbanks and followed the outgoing Yukon River ice to the Iditarod River. On June 1, 1910, the* S.S. Tanana *ran upriver as close as possible to the goldfields. Where it ran aground is where it dropped its passengers and freight and the new town of Iditarod was platted. Other steamboats soon followed and Iditarod became an instant city.

Iditarod was never a gold mining town, instead it was the commercial and transportation hub for the nearby goldfields. Rather than a rough-and-tumble affair, Iditarod was a civic-minded town populated by experienced miners and merchants from the Dawson and Nome gold rushes. By August, 2,000 people populated the mushrooming town. The tent city that first sprung up on the bend of the Iditarod River was soon replaced by wide (if not always passable) streets, two-story framed buildings, and planked sidewalks.

Because it was established in the twentieth century, the town of Iditarod enjoyed amenities not possible in the previous century, such as telephone service and wireless communication with the outside world. The town was served by two newspapers, two banks, and a number of bathhouses, hotels, saloons, mercantiles, drugstores, furniture stores, lumberyards, jewelers, and restaurants. Basketball, baseball, and sleddog racing were favorite outdoor pastimes, while the Arctic Brotherhood hall hosted rollerskating and movies, along with dances and men's "smokers." And for six months of the year, Iditarod's only overland link to the outside world was via the "Seward" trail. The comings and goings of travelers were discussed daily in the newspaper, along with constant calls for the improvement of the trail.

By 1912 the rush had subsided and Iditarod's population began to decline. The Guggenheim Syndicated bought all the mining claims on nearby Flat Creek, and shipped in a huge flat-bottomed dredge to replace hand laborers. As Iditarod de-populated in favor of Flat, a number of merchants moved their buildings 15 miles over the tundra and muskeg from one town to the other. In 1922, flooding and re-channeling of the Iditarod River left the townsite cut off from the river, further hastening its decline. By 1930, the population of Iditarod was listed as three persons.

Today the townsite is mostly overgrown with a few remaining ramshackle structures, and no inhabitants. Located 90 air miles from the nearest community of McGrath, the site is remote even by Alaska standards.



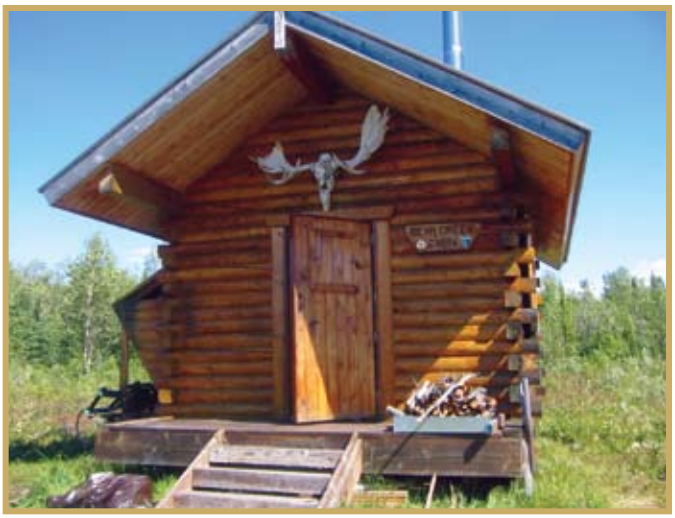
Anchorage Museum of History & Art

Public Shelter Cabins

With downturns in mining and trail use around the time of World War I, many roadhouse owners closed up their businesses, leaving large stretches of the trail without any shelter. In response, the Alaska Territorial Government built a series of shelter or "relief" cabins along popular sections of the trail. Although little more than four walls with a roof and a wood stove, the cabins were an important fixture on the trail for the next two decades. But as aircraft increasingly handled shipments of freight and mail between villages, the cabins fell into disuse and the program was ultimately abandoned in the early 1940s.

One of the most famous shelter cabins—the Rohn Cabin—was originally built in 1939 for pilots stranded on the north side of the infamous Rainy Pass. In 1999, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) restored the cabin with a new roof and floor. The BLM also built and operates three other shelter cabins open to winter travelers. Two are found on the heavily traveled Kaltag Portage between Unalakleet and Kaltag, and the other between Nikolai and Rohn. Except for the Rohn Cabin, all are accessible only during the winter. Use of these cabins is free, and no reservation is required, although users are expected to share the cabin with other parties if necessary.

The U.S. Forest Service also rents public use cabins along the Johnson Pass and Crow Pass segments of the trail. Reservations are required. For more information go to **www.recreation.gov** or contact the Alaska Public Lands Information Center.



The Men Who Blaze the Trails

By Sam. C. Dunham, copyright 1913

Let others sing of those who've won
Full hoard of virgin gold!
I strike the lyre for those who've none,
But yet are strong and bold—
Who've blazed the trails through a pathless waste
And on the world's new chart have traced
The lines that lead where the treasure's placed,
And all their secrets told.

They search the streams and hillsides rend,
The hidden truth to learn:
They trudge where land and sky-line blend,
And gaze till eyeballs burn;
They scale bleak heights whence vast plains sweep,
And sow for those who come to reap,
While wives and sweethearts in homeland weep
And pray for their return.

Afar in regions of night-gloomed day
Their slender shadows leap;
O'ver snow-crowned peaks they fight their way
To where the Gold-gods sleep;
Where the congelations of the ages lie,
And athwart the dome of the midnight sky
Aurora's moon-drenched splendors fly,
Onward their footsteps creep.

Out where Deathland, reft of bush or tree,
Spreads like a sun-browned land;
To the verge of the rigid, ice-locked sea,
Where twilight weds the dawn;
Where a sheenless moon sails the sunlight night,
Where inert and dim bides the Mystic Light,
And the white swan ends his vernal flight,
They still are pressing on.

So while others sing of the chosen few
Who o'er the Fates prevail,
I will sing of the many, staunch and true,
Whose brave hearts never quail—
Who with the dauntless spirit of pioneers
A State are building for the coming years,
Their sole reward their loved ones' tears—
The men who blaze the trail!

Nome of Yesteryear

Nome sprang into existence almost overnight with the discovery of gold by the "three lucky Swedes" in 1898. Tens of thousands of "down on their luck" miners migrated from the played-out Yukon goldfields at Dawson, and by 1900 Nome was the largest community in the far north.

With steamship service cut-off by sea ice for six months of the year, the town quickly came to rely on the "Seward Trail" (later to be known as the Iditarod) for mail and transportation "Outside"—to the Lower 48. In 1925, Nome became the center of national attention, as teams of mushers and dogs raced a curative serum across Alaska to prevent the outbreak of a diphtheria epidemic.

All photos here courtesy of Anchorage Museum of History & Art

Nome Points of Interest

"Nome knows how to welcome the wanderer from the wilderness and make him altogether at home." –Hudson Stuck, 1914

Last Train to Nowhere – Council City and Solomon Railroad

A rich gold-strike 50 miles inland from the town of Solomon (on the Iditarod Trail) encouraged entrepreneurs to build a railroad over the tundra in 1903. A huge Norton Sound storm in 1913 washed out the tracks, stranding the engines where they can still be seen today. Road accessible, 35 miles east of Nome on the Council Highway.

Nome - Council Highway

Drive or bike a scenic 35-mile section of the historic Iditarod Trail starting in Nome and heading east along the coast of Norton Sound. The gravel road passes Cape Nome and parallels Safety Sound to the Solomon River. In the winter, the road is unplowed and becomes the Iditarod Trail; look for trail marking tripods. Great birdwatching in summer.

Carrie McLain Museum

Nome's only museum showcases the history of the gold rush, the century old sport of sleddog racing, and the historic lifestyles of local Native people with artifacts and an extensive collection of photography.

Recreational Gold Panning

Recreational panning is allowed on the beaches east of town to the Ft. Davis Roadhouse. Dress to get wet!

Swanberg's Dredge

Within an easy walk of downtown (one mile east), this dredge operated in the 1940s and 50s, seeking gold in the relic beach ridges only a few hundred yards inland from today's beach.

St. Joseph Church

Built in 1902, St. Joseph's Church steeple was electrically lit at the expense of the city to serve as a beacon for miners and mushers during the darkness of winter and blizzards. The church survived the disastrous fire of 1934, and has since been relocated and restored as a community hall.

From Moose Hide Webbing to Kevlar Runners—

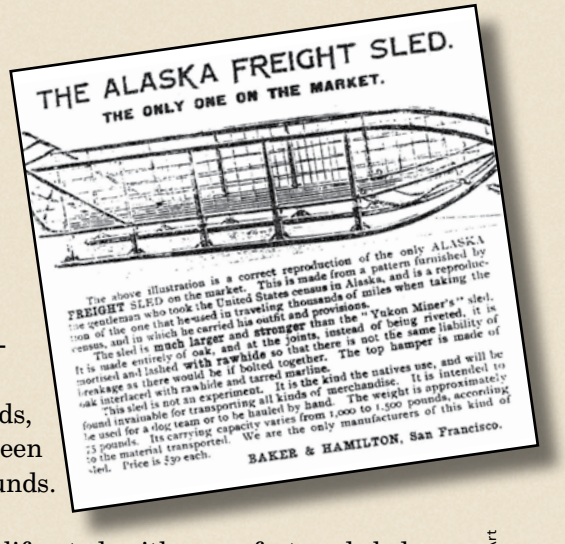
Alaska Dog Mushing History

When Russian and then American pioneers moved into the Alaska frontier, they found a culture already greatly shaped and supported by its interaction with dogs. Alfred H. Brooks, the head of the US Geological Survey (and for whom the Brooks Range is named), wrote at the beginning of the twentieth century: "Countless generations of Alaskan natives have used the dog for transport, and he is to Alaska what the yak is to India or the llama to Peru."

Before contact with the Russians in 1732, Inupiaq and Yup'ik peoples of the Bering Straits had already adapted their masterfully designed wood latticed and gut-skin covered kayaks into an over-the-snow craft, minus the skin but plus ski-like runners to glide over snow when pulled by dogs. The average team was three dogs, with their master running ahead to guide their dogs between villages, fish camps, and hunting camps. Unlike today, teams were harnessed like a fan, with no leader.

With their long distance fur-gathering forays, the Russians brought new efficiencies to dog mushing. Teams harnessed in single file or pairs were introduced, along with the concept of a lead dog that would follow voice commands and keep the team in order. Handle-bars were added to sleds. Larger teams of dogs were used, with sleds sometimes carrying passengers.

Demand for dogs and sleds skyrocketed exponentially with the gold rushes to Alaska in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. During one of the big rushes it was said that no stray dogs could be found on the streets of Seattle, having all been rounded up and shipped to Alaska. Malemutes, huskies, and other breeds were mixed to haul freight and passengers.



Unlike today's relatively small and sleek long-distance racing sled dogs, the breeds of yester-year weighed in around 75 pounds, and pulled between 100 and 150 pounds.

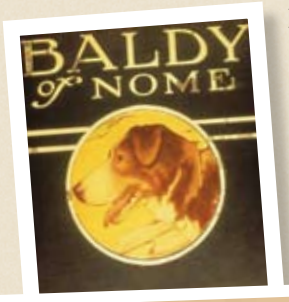
Sled designs proliferated, with manufactured sleds joining the ranks of toboggan-style handmade sleds. Most every sled at the turn of the twentieth century was equipped with a "gee pole." The gee pole was a stout pole lashed to, and projecting from, the front of the sled, which the sled driver could use to leverage and steer the sled. Most dog drivers still did not ride the sled, instead running besides or riding skis or a sort of early snowboard between the dog team and sled. Riding the sled-runners was used only by drivers of light and fast mail and race teams.

With the replacement of the dog team for intervillage travel by the airplane, sled technology and dog breeding languished for half a century. Sprint dog racing took the forefront after World War II, until Joe Redington Sr. and others reintroduced the concept of long distance sleddog travel—this time for racing purposes. Because racing loads are minimal, smaller breeds of dogs have gotten more popular. Sleds now incorporate lightweight plastics, and a design with a mid-sled seat for the musher is becoming popular. Nonetheless, dog drivers still use commands from the mid-eighteenth century—"haw, gee"—to guide their teams on sleds that use centuries-old designs by Alaska's Native people.

All photos here courtesy of Anchorage Museum of History & Art

The Birth of Sled Dog Racing

With the same fervor that brought gold-seekers north, ice-bound Nome residents a century ago pioneered sled dog racing as we know it today. On their hands during the snowbound season, it was only natural that Nome-ites started some friendly competition. The first races were short distance affairs to nearby Fort Davis or Cape Nome, but the races quickly lengthened as popularity with the sport grew.



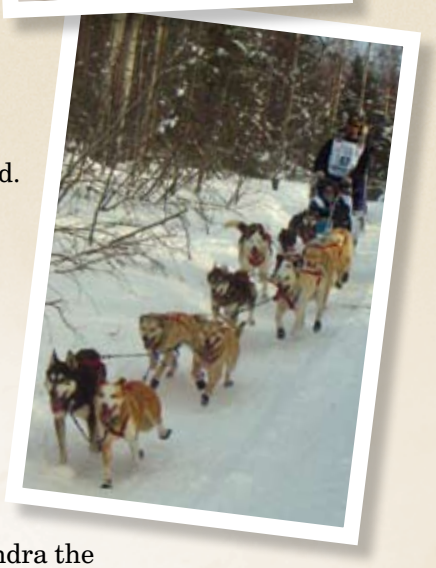
In 1907, the Nome Kennel Club was founded to improve the care and science of dogs and sled dog racing. Kennels modeled after Kentucky horseracing stables developed the most effective diets, hitches, and sled materials, and the club prohibited dog cruelty and abandonment.

The biggest event of the year—held at the end of the racing season in April—was the 408-mile *All Alaska Sweepstakes* from Nome to Candle and back. Race events featured all the pomp and ceremony of the Kentucky Derby, with starting bugles, a race queen and court, and lots of betting with the gold pulled from the hills the previous summer.

Until the 1909 *All Alaska Sweepstakes Race*, dogs of all breeds, shapes and sizes were entered into the race. Then a Russian trader named William Goosak entered a team of Siberian huskies. Skeptical locals initially referred to Goosak's relatively small dogs as "Siberian Rats," but after they nearly won, opinion began to change!

The next year a rich young Scotsman, Fox Maule Ramsay, went to Siberia and purchased 70 Siberian huskies. He entered three teams of the imported huskies in the 1910 *All Alaska Sweepstakes Race*. Again, the Siberian huskies excelled, with Iron Man Johnson running one of the teams to a record that stands to this day—74 hours and 14 minutes.

In the following years, arguably the greatest dog driver ever honed his skill working and racing around Nome—Leonhard Seppala. Seppala won the sweepstakes three years in a row with his unparalleled ability to handle and train Siberian sled dogs. Seppala and his dogs later became nationwide celebrities for the crucial role he and his dogs played in the delivery of diphtheria serum to epidemic stricken Nome.



In 2008, modern mushers will get a chance to break Iron Man Johnson's record. To celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of the *All Alaska Sweepstakes*, the Nome Kennel Club and others are sponsoring only the second running of the historic race since 1918. For incentive to enter the 408-mile historic route over the treeless tundra the purse is $100,000—winner take all!

For more information on sled dog racing visit:

Nome Kennel Club
www.nomekennelclub.com

All Alaska Sweepstakes
www.allalaskasweepstakes.org

More Than A Race Trail for Dogs

Every February and March, professional and recreational racers put their minds, muscles, and machines to work on epic long-distance races on the historic Iditarod Trail.

Harkening back to the All Alaska Sweepstakes of yesteryear, the tradition was reborn with the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, now in its thirty-sixth year. On the first weekend of every March, over 80 sled dog teams line up to recreate the rush to Iditarod and beyond. With the frontrunners covering up to 100 miles a day, the winners usually arrive in Nome around ten days after the start.

Before the running of the dogs, events start every weekend in February that help "break the trail" to Nome. The second weekend of February sees the start of the world's longest and toughest snowmobile race—the Tesoro Irondog. Traveling at speeds approaching 100 mph, racers travel from Wasilla to Nome in about three days, and then race back another three days to the finish line in Fairbanks.

On the third weekend of February, an expedition of 15 mushers with snowmobile support start at Nenana and race downriver to join the historic Iditarod Trail at Ruby. The Serum Run 25 commemorates the courageous effort of the original dog drivers and teams responsible for bringing the life-saving diphtheria serum to Nome in 1925.

The final weekend of February sees the start of the Iditarod Trail Invitational human-powered marathon in Knik. Using modes not unknown during the heyday of the gold rush, 50 racers ski, bike, or run to McGrath (350 miles) or Nome (1,100 miles). With a minimum of support, racers are expected to be self-contained and overnight on the trail as necessary.

Typically these events are run by nonprofits and volunteers who support people getting out on the Iditarod Trail. Working to provide food, shelter or an open trail, these spirited folks help recreate the camaraderie of yesteryear on the historic Iditarod Trail.

To find out more about the trail visit:

www.irondog.org
www.alaskaultrasport.com
www.serumrun.org
www.iditarod.com

Stewardship of the Historic Trail

When the National Trails Act established the Iditarod National Historic Trail in 1978, it included not only the main route between Seward and Nome, but also a number of connecting trails that were important during "America's Last Great Gold Rush." Of the over 2,300 miles of the historic Iditarod System, 1,500 miles are still in use today.

Most of the historic Iditarod Trail is located on public lands or easements managed by the State of Alaska or federal agencies (although a few segments pass over private lands). No one entity manages the entire Historic Trail—management is guided by a cooperative plan adopted by federal and state agencies in the mid-1980s. The federal Bureau of Land Management coordinates cooperative follow-up on the plan, along with coordinating and assisting volunteer efforts.

Volunteerism plays a huge role in keeping the trail open. Every year local groups and individuals contribute personal time, equipment, and money to improve or maintain the Iditarod Trail. The statewide nonprofit Iditarod Alliance Historic Trail helps protect and upgrade the trail, all while keeping the "lore of the trail" alive. Your support of these efforts, like the hard work of the Iditarod trail breakers, will ultimately keep the route open for another century.

For more information on trail stewardship visit:

www.iditarodnationalhistorictrail.com

www.blm.gov/ak

Partners

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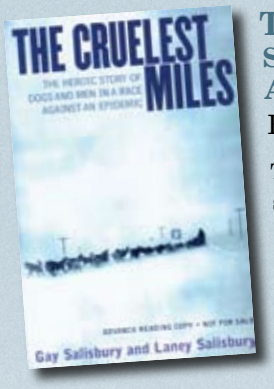
Iditarod, Vol. 28, No. 4

Alaska Geographic

The Iditarod National Historic Trail is an icon of excitement and endurance. This book celebrates the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race and examines at the history of the trail.

$14.95

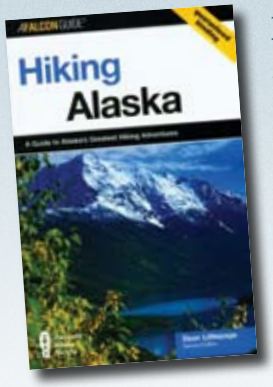


The Cruelest Mile: The Heroic Story of Dogs and Men in a Race Against an Epidemic

By Gay Salisbury

This is the true story of the delivery of life-saving serum to Nome, Alaska by relays of twenty dog teams. This heroic dash inspired the annual Iditarod Dog Sled Race.

$14.95 paperback
$24.95 hardcover

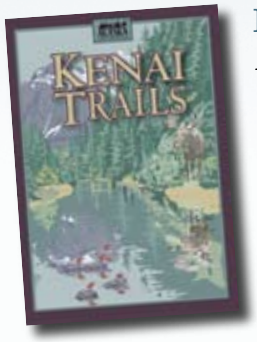


Hiking Alaska: A Guide to Alaska's Greatest Hiking Adventures

By Dean Littlepage

This guide to the entire state of Alaska features 100 hikes for all ages and abilities. Contains photos, maps and graphs.

$16.95



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For More Information

Trail Management

Iditarod National Historic Trail Administrator
Bureau of Land Management
Anchorage Field Office
907-267-1246
www.blm.gov/ak

State of Alaska
Department of Natural Resources
Public Information Center
907-269-8400
www.dnr.state.ak/pic

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Produced and Designed by

Alaska Geographic

BLM Coordinator
Kevin Keeler

Contributors
Judy Bittner, Annette Heckart, Kevin Keeler, Robert King, Jeff Kowalczyk, Joe Kurtak, Gary Reimer,

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Chugach National Forest
907-743-9500
www.fs.fed.us/r10/chugach

Innoko National Wildlife Refuge
907-524-3251
http://innoko.fws.gov/iditarod

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Open in Summer

Eagle River Nature Center
Mile 12 Eagle River Road
Eagle River, AK
907-694-2108
www.ernc.org
Open all year

Iditarod Sled Dog Race Headquarters
Mile 2.2 Knik-Goosebay Road
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