

## March 1, 2006 - Vet Check at Iditarod Headquarters



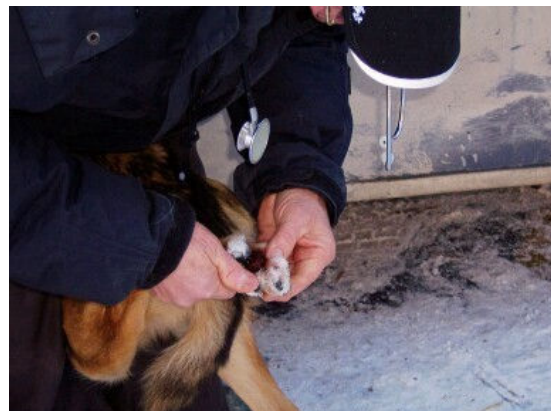
Vets, dogs, mushers & race fans converged on Iditarod Headquarters in Wasilla, Alaska for the pre-race vet check. The animals receive a thorough physical examination before qualifying for the Last Great Race. Mushers arrive with their trucks and dog boxes filled with the 20 dogs they're considering for the race. The dogs are unloaded and lined out around the trucks and then the vets

descend to examine the canine athletes, much the same as a kindergarten physical or a sport's physical. There's so much activity with teams coming and going, race fans admiring the dogs and vets carefully doing their job - it's a sight to behold.



The veterinarians methodically check the dogs from one end to the other. They check gums and teeth, manipulate joints, check heart function, listen to lungs, check feet and palpate abdomens. The vets use an acronym - HAW&L for checking the dogs. "H" stands for heart and hydration, "A" for attitude and appetite, "W" for weight and "L" for legs and lungs. Not only are the dogs checked before the race, but they also receive "field" physicals at crew, headed by Dr. Stuart Nelson, moves

checkpoints along the trails. The veterinarian is flown from checkpoint to checkpoint by the Iditarod Air Force according to the number of mushers that are on that portion of the trail. The vets work with great efficiency to make sure that each dog is fit to continue. Dr. Nelson says that mushers are the best judges of whether a dog is fit to continue the race. There are occasions when a vet and musher disagree about whether a dog should continue. In that case, the vet's opinion rules. The dogs have micro-identification chips for positive identification and tracking.





Good news from Team Cortte, they have arrived as planned from Tomahawk, Wisconsin. Leaving on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, Rod Cortte, Chad Schouweiller and handler, Martha Schouweiller arrived in Wasilla on Sunday evening about sundown. It was a long 2,500-mile drive. Imagine the process of getting everything packed, the dogs loaded and then finally hitting the road. Once on the road, stops are made every few hundred miles to drop the dogs and provide food, water and a bit of exercise. Since

arriving, all of the dogs have had the mandatory ECG (electro cardio gram) and physicals. I had the opportunity to schmooze with the dogs and give a few love-ups today at headquarters. They're looking good, especially now that their leader Dolly has arrived. She didn't make the trip with the rest of the team. Instead, she arrived today by Northwest flight 843.

Kim Kittredge running a team out of No Snow Kennel has been preparing for his rookie Iditarod. Kim and other mushers are doing short 15 to 20-mile fun runs - nothing taxing, just light exercise. The dogs will be well rested and ready to run for the start of the race. Sue Allen, operator and owner of No Snow Kennel helps Kim bootie



the dogs for a short run on Monday afternoon. The dogs wear booties to protect their feet from abrasions and cuts from the trail surface. Dogs aren't subject to frostbite on their feet. They have high metabolism, high body temperature, tough epithelial tissue on their pads and fur to keep their feet warm. They wear booties as we wear socks to prevent blisters and abrasions from our shoes.

The activities at the Millennium, race headquarters in Anchorage, are gearing up. Volunteers, media personnel, sponsors, mushers and dog teams are arriving. The teachers attending the Winter Professional Development conference were on a field trip today, venturing to Iditarod Headquarters for vet check and to Plettner Kennels for a hands on kennel experience. Stay tuned for further updates as the start of the race approaches. Happy Trails!