

March 12 - Unalakleet

Greetings to Iditarod Educators, Students and Race Fans,

Before leaving Galena this morning, I chatted with both Tollef Monson and Bryan Bearss. I rode in Tollef's sled for the ceremonial start in Anchorage. Jason was the first musher into Skwentna where I was locating food bags. Both of these guys were born in the lower 48 and have come to Alaska to run dogs. Tollef and Jason are currently running in 47th and 43rd place respectively. They are very happy with how their teams are performing. Check the musher biographies to see which Mid-western states Tollef and Bryan were born in. Good luck guys as you continue on down the trail. It's been a great opportunity to move down the trail with the teams and see the mushers at various checkpoints.

Sydney Huntington, a respected community member and visionary, lives in Galena. Huntington, age 92, tells his life story in the book, Shadows on the Koyukuk. He believes that education is extremely important for the youth of today. Without educating the youth of the villages, there will be no future for the villages or the people. He encourages people in the villages to become educated and move beyond subsistence living. When Sydney grew up, life was simpler but very difficult. I left Galena with an autographed copy of Shadows on the Koyukuk. I hope you will find a copy so that you can read about life in the interior villages as through the eyes of Mr. Huntington.



Bering Sea Sunset

While flying from Galena to Unalakleet, we observed many mushers on the trail as well as the villages of Nulato and Kaltag. Nulato has a population of 345. Before the Russians established Nulato as a trading post in 1838, it was a trading site for Athabascan Indians and Inupiat Eskimos. In the late 1800's it was a center of missionary activity. Fifty miles further lies the village of Kaltag. This Koyukan Athabascan village has a population of 223. This village is the home of Edgar Kalland, an original serum-runner. Kaltag is

famous for its annual Stick Dance Festival, which brings in many visitors from surrounding villages. The Iditarod Trail leaves the Yukon River at Kaltag to wind up Old Woman Pass to the Bering Sea. Old Woman Cabin is a spot that many mushers take a rest. There is a myth that if mushers leave food for the old woman, she will bring them good fortune on the trail. What myths or tales have you read about in literature?

The high light of the flight today was spotting two moose on the river. We could see tracks in many places throughout the flight. Finally we spotted a pair. It's one thing for us to see

them from the air but it's an entirely different issue for mushers to encounter moose while on the trail. Do an Internet search to find out about Susan Butcher's experience with a moose a few years ago on the Iditarod Trail.

When approaching Unalakleet, I could tell the wind was howling by the amount of snow that was blowing. The winds were steady at 40 miles an hour with gusts even higher. It was almost impossible to walk against and would push you along from behind without even moving your feet. Mushers who train up here on this part of the trail would have a decisive advantage over folks from the lower 48 whose dogs never experience these winds. Unalakleet has a population of 747. This village has long been a major trade center and an important winter travel route connection to the Yukon River. This is the first village where I've seen the traditional parky being worn. You might enjoy researching traditional Yupik, Inupiat or Athabascon clothing.



Mother and Daughter in Traditional Parky



Jeff King Wins the Gold Coast Award

As Wells Fargo's Teacher on the Trail™ I was thrilled to be at the checkpoint when Jeff King arrived as the first team to reach the Gold Coast. Wells Fargo presented Jeff with a trophy and \$2,500 dollars in gold nuggets. Jeff didn't stop long to savor the moment, he was eager to get his dogs bedded down and fed. After his dogs were tended to, Jeff signed many autographs and took a nap. When he returned to his sled to head on to Shaktoolik, people asked him where his handle bar heater had gone. Jeff, always

willing to share a good story said that he modified it to crank up the BTUs; which worked fine until he stopped at Kaltag. Forgetting to extinguish the flame, the heater got so hot that his sled bag caught fire. The sled bag survived but the heater didn't.

Thirty minutes after Jeff King arrived, Doug Swingley also hit the Gold Coast. Dee Dee Jonrowe arrived 5 hours later. Aliy Zirkle should be in well before breakfast followed by several teams around daybreak. No questions that the race will be a close one. Will Jeff's dogs have the power to maintain the lead or will Doug Swingley put some magic into his team

and power past Jeff. Is it possible for Dee Dee to make up the 5-hour difference? All teams have one more required 8-hour rest at White Mountain. From there the push will be on toward the Burled Arch in Nome. Any estimates as to when the winner will arrive?

The cans pictured yesterday were required equipment for mushers. The mushers must carry a cooker and a pot capable of holding at least 3 gallons of water. Mushers use heat as fuel for their cookers to heat water. Some checkpoints provide hot water while others don't. Check the Iditarod website for rules that cover required equipment. What is the purpose of these mechanisms between the runners at the rear of the sled?



Dee Dee feeds in Unalakleet



Happy trails to all,
Terrie