

March 4, 2006 - Ceremonial Start of Iditarod XXXIV

Greetings to Iditarod Educators, Students and Race Fans,

Over night, the city of Anchorage was transformed for IDITAROD! Last evening there wasn't a flake of snow to be seen on 4th Avenue in Anchorage but when 10:00 pm rolled around, that all changed. Trucks began hauling clean snow onto 4th Avenue and the cross streets. Graders spread it to a depth of 12 inches and by morning, the Iditarod Trail was ready for the Ceremonial Start. AMAZING! Race officials estimate that 10,000 spectators cheered as the eighty-three mushers and Iditariders left the starting line for today's 11-mile leg of Iditarod XXXIV.



4th Avenue Anchorage

The volunteer aspect of this race is huge. People come from all over the world to volunteer to be a part of the Last Great Race. Volunteer positions include vets, pilots, trail guards, dog handlers, media, communications, logistics, information, sales, cooks, security and the list continues. It's estimated that there are between 1,800 and 2,000 volunteers that "make" Iditarod happen each and every year. Volunteering is a "hands on" way to experience the excitement of Iditarod. It's a fact that the race would never get off the ground without the volunteers who give so generously of their time and talents. THANK YOU!

The mushers are in a very jovial mood for the Ceremonial Start. It will be a different story tomorrow at the restart when they will be very focused and tending to business. The teams that take the Iditariders through downtown Anchorage consist of 12 dogs. Once a musher has declared the 20 dogs that will make up the team, he or she can use any of those dogs for the start and restart. Often, a musher will run some dogs in the restart as a final "tryout" for the journey to Nome.

My experience as an Iditarider was thrilling. I rode in a sled driven by Tollef Monson. Tollef is 27 and was born in Minnesota. He trains dogs for Ed Iten out of Kotzebue. In his second Iditarod, Tollef will be running Iten's puppy team with a goal of having the young dogs learn the trail. Tollef is a great dog driver and sled handler.





After passing through the streets of Anchorage, we followed the ski/dog trails through the Campbell Creek Recreation Area. With frequent stops to re-bootie the dogs, the 11 miles to Campbell airstrip took about 1.5 hours. I hope the dogs don't go through booties on the Iditarod Trail as fast as they did today. The scenery on the trail was beautiful, the dogs were on task and traveled at a pace that Tollef was pleased with. Tollef, thanks for a great Iditarider experience and good luck on your Journey to Nome. God Speed.



DeeDee Jonrowe bring her dogs to the starting line.