



Iditarod National Historic Trail

Iditarod

Historic Trail



VISITOR GUIDE



Hit the Trail.....3



Historic Overview.....4



Birth of Racing.....20

Contents

Alaska's Enduring Trail.....	4
Kenai Area.....	6
Anchorage Area.....	8
Wasilla.....	11
Iditarod Trail Map.....	12
Travel Today.....	14
McGrath.....	16
Unalakleet.....	17
Nome.....	18
Dog Mushing History.....	19
Sled Dog Racing	20
More Than a Race Trail.....	21
Trip Planning.....	23

Iditarod Historic Trail

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Welcome

to Alaska's National Historic Trail!

National Historic Trails, as part of America's National Historic Trail system, commemorate major routes of exploration, migration, trade, and military actions. Across America only 18 trails have been honored as National Historic Trails. The Iditarod is the only National Historic Trail in Alaska, and the only winter trail in the entire National Historic Trail system. What's more, the Iditarod is the only Historic Trail celebrating the indispensable role played by 'man's best friend'—the dog—in the settlement of Alaska.



Given the broad swath of geography the 2,400-mile Iditarod Trail system crosses, it's only natural that a lot of different landowners are involved. 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 U.S. Bureau of Land Management was appointed in the National Trails Act to coordinate the efforts of public land managers and volunteers on behalf of the trail.

As we have celebrated the 100th anniversary of the opening of the Iditarod Trail, we have launched some exciting new efforts to help you enjoy the spirit and place of America's Last Great Gold Rush Trail. We hope you can enjoy the fruits of some of these efforts, and will help steward the trail through the twenty-first century. See you on the trail!

Gary Reimer
BLM Anchorage District Manager

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.
- ☛ Visit the historic Iditarod Trail exhibit at the Alaska State Fair in Palmer.
- ☛ 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.
- ☛ View waterfowl and the Knik River crossing of the historic trail at Reflection Lake, and then take a summer dogsled ride at the Iditarod Sled Dog Race headquarters in Wasilla.
- ☛ 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.
- ☛ Fly to McGrath, charter a small plane for a visit to the ghost town of Iditarod.
- ☛ 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.
- ☛ Snowmachine, skijor, or dog mush from village to village, stopping at public safety cabins along the way.

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

Five hundred miles of swamp and ankle-busting 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

At the turn of the twentieth century in Alaska, transportation between boomtowns like Nome, Fairbanks, and Valdez relied on river and ocean steamers in summer and sled dog teams in the winter. In 1908, the Alaska Road Commission (ARC) sought a shorter winter overland route to Nome than the 1,300-mile route from Valdez through Fairbanks. The ARC dispatched Colonel Walter Goodwin and a crew of three, provisioned with dog teams, to scout a winter trail from Seward over the Alaska Range to Nome.

Although the Seward to Nome route was found to be 400 miles shorter, Goodwin concluded that the lack of population and low demand for mail service made development unnecessary. But then a gold strike on Christmas Day 1908 changed all this.

In fall 1908, prospector's Johnny Beaton and Bill Dikeman had driven a small steamboat up the Haiditarod River, built a tiny cabin, and began melting and then hand-digging small exploratory shafts on likely streambeds. Beaton and Dikeman dug 26 shafts without any luck until on Christmas Day, at a depth of 12 feet, they hit pay dirt.

The Iditarod goldfields became the fourth most productive district in all of Alaska. The Iditarod rush was the last in an era of American gold rushes stretching back to California in 1849. Over 65 tons of gold, or \$1.77 billion dollars at today's value, was taken out of the Iditarod district—most of it was taken out by dogsled!



Goodwin expedition measuring the Seward to Nome route with cyclometer attached to a dogsled.

Boomtowns, Gold Trains and Roadhouses

Even by Alaska standards, the Iditarod goldfields were so remote that it wasn't until summer 1910 that stampedeers arrived. But within three months, gold-seekers built two towns populated with 2,000 citizens each. By winter 1911, "gold-train" sleddog teams packed with a half-ton of gold made the three-week run from Iditarod on their way to Seward. Tons of gold came out, and tons of freight, food, and mail went in.

Roadhouses and trail-marking 'tripods' lined the 520-mile route to Seward from Iditarod. Located a day's journey by foot or dogteam—about 20 miles—the roadhouses allowed travel without the need for overnight camping or carrying of three weeks of provisions. Thousands of fortune seekers, many on foot or snowshoe, traveled across Alaska on this trail system unmatched even today.

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 BEATON AND DIKEMAN

1910-11

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

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 goldfields.

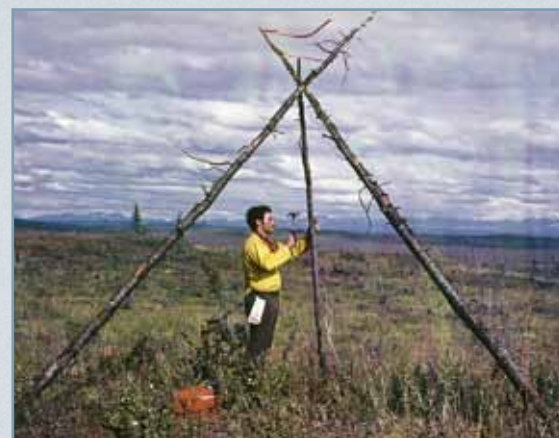
Nome Serum Run Marks the Beginning of the End

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, boomtowns emptied, and the Iditarod Trail fell into disuse.

A Partnership Effort Reopens the Iditarod Trail

Forest and tundra reclaimed the Iditarod Trail for almost 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.



Alaska Fire Service crew member puts the finishing touches on a tripod in the Farewell Burn, 1981.

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 feet 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 STAMPEDEES 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

DIPHTHERIA 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

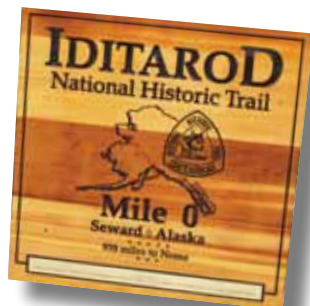
IDITAROD NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL ESTABLISHED BY CONGRESS

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

Kenai Mountains

Seward (Mile 0)

Look for the tripod and historic Iditarod Trail monument located along the shoreline of Resurrection Bay next to the Alaska SeaLife 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

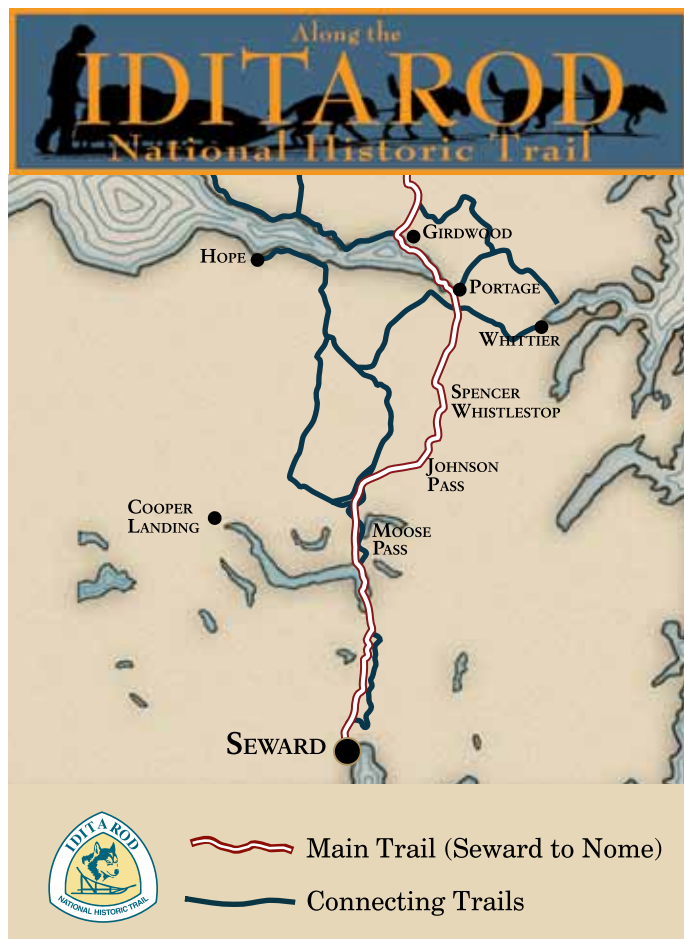
Photographs, artifacts, and documents tell the history of the area and the Iditarod at this quaint little museum in downtown Seward. If you visit during the summer, be sure to catch one of their evening programs on the history of the Iditarod Trail.

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. Starting at the west end of the valley at the Moose Flats Day Use Site, this wide and well-surfaced trail runs five miles to the Begich, Boggs Visitor Center. 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 seven 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 Iditarod goldfields in the Upper Innoko 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.



Anchorage Area

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.

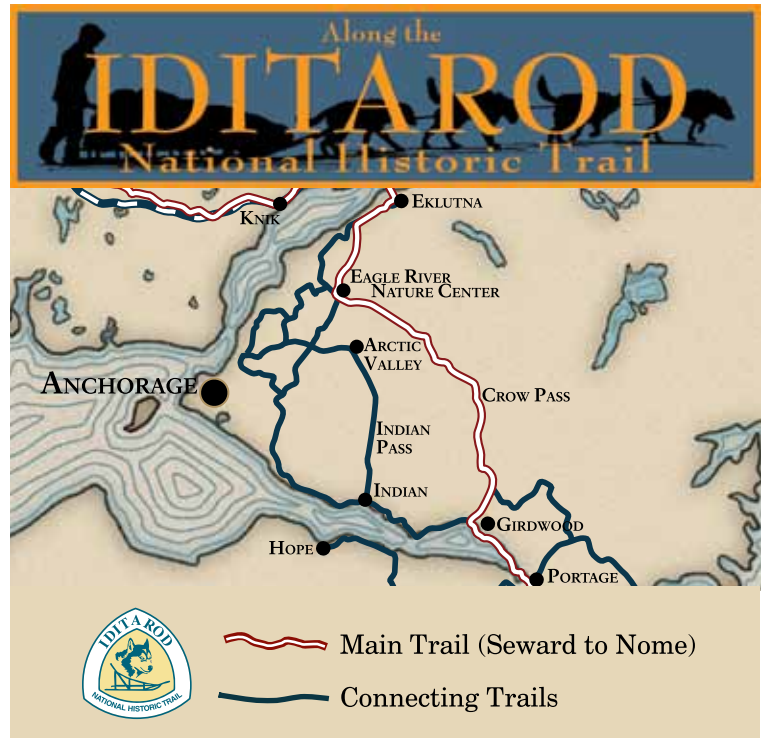
Roundhouse Museum at Alyeska Resort

The Roundhouse Museum, a historic lift terminal high above the Girdwood valley, lets visitors glimpse the life of area miners who used the Iditarod Trail, along with Alaska pioneers in skiing. Accessed via the Alyeska Resort tram, the museum provides a grand view of the Iditarod route across the Chugach Mountains. Open summer and winter.



Winner Creek/Berry Pass Trails

Long a favorite with local residents, the Winner Creek segment of the historic Iditarod Trail 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 seven-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.

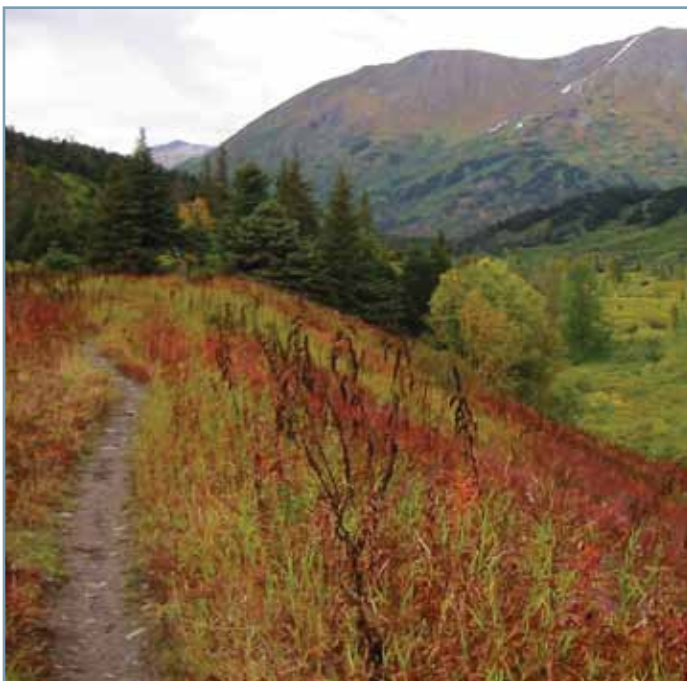


Girdwood to Indian Pathway

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 information 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 year-round on the Ship Creek side is via scenic Arctic Valley Road just north of Anchorage, off the Glenn Highway at Arctic Valley exit.



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 stampedeers struck out for mines 375 miles to the northwest. Stampedeers would travel to Knik either by trail over the Chugach Mountains or by steamship up Cook Inlet from Seward. 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.

"NORMALLY A SMALL AND QUIET VILLAGE, KNIK WAS IN THE THROES OF A BOOM. THE HOTEL WAS A NEW, TWO-STORY FRAME BUILDING, BUT CONSTRUCTION-WISE A MERE SHELL. FROM THE SMALL DOWNSTAIRS LOBBY ONE COULD HEAR A MAN CHANGE HIS MIND IN THE FARTHEST ROOM UPSTAIRS."—Harold Peckenpaugh, 1912, from *Nuggets and Beans*

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. 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 trail scouts on the Iditarod as a "miniature Yosemite." Open year-round (weekends only in winter), the nonprofit Nature Center provides nature studies for adults and children, nine miles of hiking trails—including the historic Iditarod Trail—and over-night camping at a public use cabin and two yurts. Located at Mile 10 on Eagle River Road.



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.

Wasilla Area

Reflection Lake and Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge



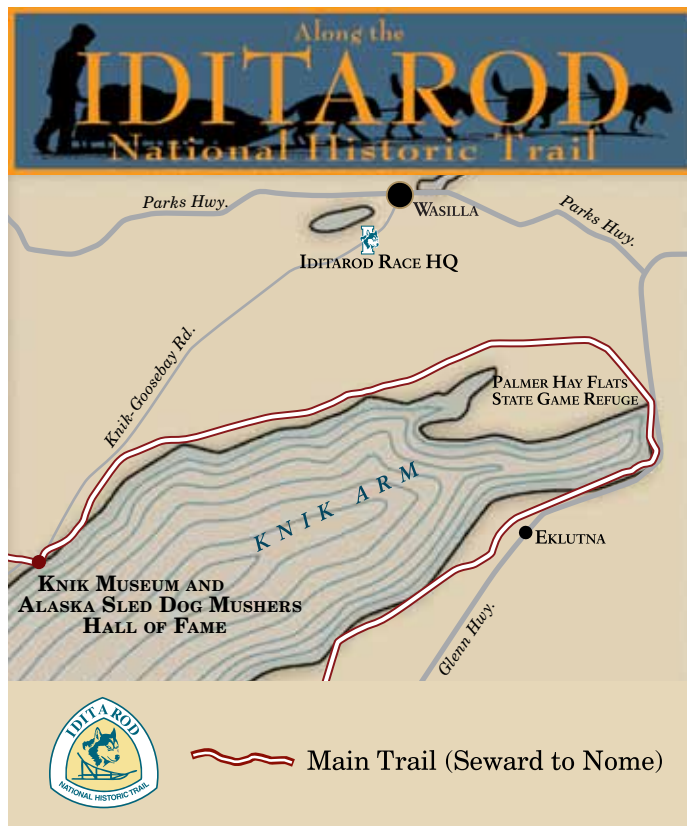
Excellent waterfowl viewing and stunning Chugach mountain scenery at the over-the-Knik River ice crossing site of the old Iditarod Trail. A flat gravel trail winds around the lake and offers hidden views into this unique intertidal wetland. Access at the Reflection Lake exit on the Glenn Highway.

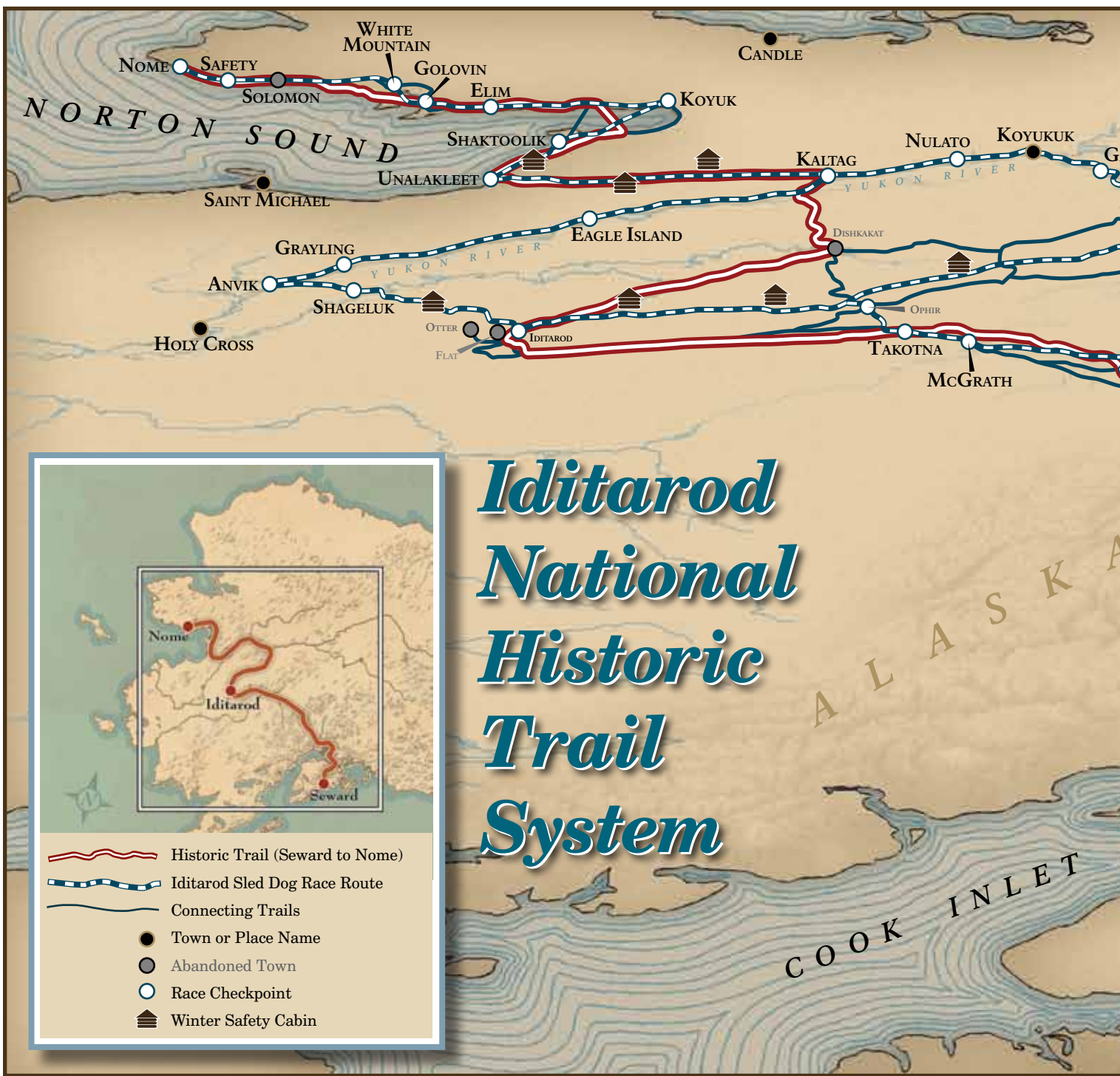
Iditarod Sled Dog Race Headquarters

A large log building houses a 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 the 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.



Historic Iditarod Trail

Ophir

Named by miners for the lost country of Ophir, the source of 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.

Traveling Today

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.

In 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?	
Rainy Pass Lodge	2	N	
McGrath	320	Y	
Ruby	180	Y	
Galena	630	Y	
Grayling	175	N	
Unalakleet	730	Y	
Koyukuk	368	N	
White Mountain	224	N	

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

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

“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 railbelt 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. Historic artifacts should not be removed, as they are protected by law in order to help tell the story of life gone by.

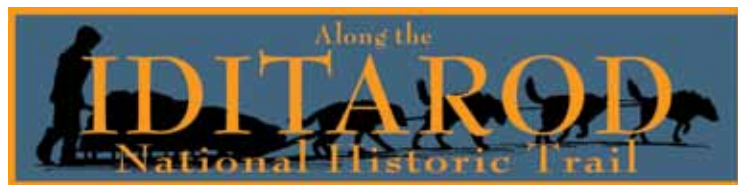


** Lodging?	Food Store?	Points of Interest
Y	N	Historic hunting lodge on Puntilla Lake serves as a checkpoint for the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race
Y	Y	Regional population center for Upper Kuskokwim Valley. This is a gateway to the Iditarod National Historic Trail through Innoko National Wildlife Refuge, 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	Koyukuk 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 even 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.

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 first steamer navigated up the Iditarod River to within eight miles of the Christmas Day gold strike and disgorged passengers and freight. Other steamboats soon followed and two towns quickly sprang up. By August, 2,000 people inhabited the boom-town now named Iditarod, and another 2,000 lived just over the ridge at the site of the gold discovery in a town named Flat.

Iditarod was never a gold mining town, instead it was the financial, commercial, and transportation hub for the nearby goldfields. Because it was established in the twentieth century, Iditarod enjoyed amenities not available in the nineteenth century, like telephone service and wireless communication with the outside world.



McGrath

McGrath is the largest community on the Iditarod Trail between the Alaska Range and Unalakleet on Norton Sound. Served by daily commercial air service from Anchorage and encircling a massive airfield used as a fire-fighting base in the summer, the town is a gateway to new safety cabins on some of the wildest sections of the historic trail, and to the ghost town of Iditarod.

Tochak Historic Society Museum

A gem of a museum in McGrath with one-of-a-kind artifacts and insightful displays chronicles the challenging lives of the local Native Alaskans, and the Americans who followed in their footsteps to the goldfields.

Iditarod Sled Dog Race Checkpoint

Hardcore race fans can get an up-close look at race activities as dog teams pull in to McGrath on the first Tuesday and Wednesday after the Sunday start of the race. Mushers have completed one-third of the race route at this point.

Public Cabins Provide New Refuge to Winter Travelers

Although some of the most remote and exposed segments of the Iditarod Trail lie between McGrath and the Yukon River (on the Ophir to Ruby and Ophir to Anvik segments), the trail is now a bit more hospitable with the development of sturdy log cabins at approximately 40-mile intervals. Accessible only in winter, the shelters include a wood stove, bunk space for at least six persons, and are open to all without reservation.



Gateway to Recreational Gold Mining in the Takotna-Ophir Area

Recreational miners can visit summer mining operations west of McGrath and work old tailings piles for gold nuggets, chow down in old mess halls, and bed down in old crew quarters.

Innoko National Wildlife Refuge Headquarters

A small visitor center provides information and maps on the six million-acre wetlands refuge 50 miles west of McGrath.

Iditarod Ghost Town

The remains of the town of Iditarod are accessible year-round via small floatplane or ski-plane charters operating out of McGrath. The entire townsite is now state public lands, with removal of artifacts prohibited by law.

For more information visit
<http://www.mcgrathalaska.net>



Unalakleet

A tightly packed, beachfront community inhabited for almost 2,000 years, the residents of Unalakleet still heavily rely on the bounty of Norton Sound, the Unalakleet River, and nearby uplands. The largest community on the Iditarod Trail between Wasilla and Nome, Unalakleet is served by daily commercial air service from Anchorage, and is a transportation hub for villages in eastern and southern Norton Sound.

Unalakleet National Wild River

Residents and visitors alike enjoy a rich run of king, silver, chum, and pink salmon on this wild Alaska river. Fishing lodge and guide service available, along with remote camping on upper reaches of the river.

Iditarod Sled Dog Race Checkpoint

Visitors to Unalakleet can get a taste of the wind-swept ice pack faced by mushers, and join residents in welcoming mushers as they resupply for the last 250 miles of the race.



Public Shelter Cabins

In the tradition of roadhouses and shelter cabins found along the historic Iditarod Trail, one can still enjoy the simple pleasure of backcountry lodging on this famous route. On the Johnson Pass and Crow Pass segments of the historic Iditarod, the Chugach National Forest rents public use cabins. Reservations are required. Visit www.recreation.gov

Just north of Anchorage, on the Eagle River side of the Crow Pass-Iditarod Trail, two public yurts are available for rent year-round outside the Eagle River Nature Center. Reservations are necessary. Visit www.ernc.org

Between Rainy Pass and Norton Sound, 10 public shelter cabins are found along the trail (see map pages 12-13). Accessible in winter only, the cabins do not require a reservation, although users are expected to share the cabin with other parties. Five of the cabins are maintained by the Bureau of Land Management, and five are maintained by local trail partners under permit from the State of Alaska.



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 Trail) 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.



Nome

“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 Fort 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.”



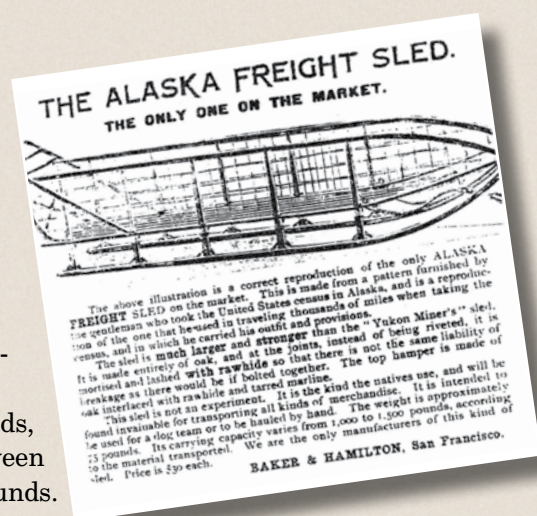
Before contact with the Russians in 1732, Inupiaq and Yup'ik peoples of the Bering Straits had already adapted their masterfully designed wood

lattice 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. Handlebars 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 yesterday weighed in around 75 pounds, and pulled between 100 and 150 pounds.

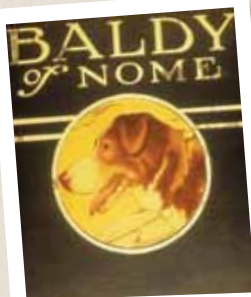


Sled designs proliferated, with manufactured sleds joining the ranks of toboggan-style handmade sleds. Most every sled at the turn of the twentieth century was equipped with a “gee pole.” The gee pole was a stout pole lashed to, and projecting from, the front of the sled, which the sled driver could 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.

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. With lots of time and dogs on their hands between the snow-free seasons, it was only natural that Nomeites 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 1908, the Nome Kennel Club was founded to improve the care and science of dogs and sled racing. Kennels modeled after Kentucky horseracing stables developed the most effective diets, hitches, and sled materials, and 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.

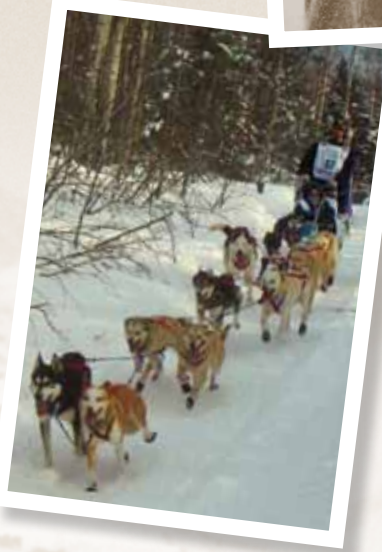
Until the 1909 All Alaska Sweepstakes Race, dogs of all breeds, shapes and sizes were entered in the race. Then, a Russian trader named William Goosak entered a team of Siberian huskies. Skeptical locals initially referred to Goosak's relatively small dogs as "Siberian Rats," but after they nearly won, 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 stood until 2008.

In the following years, perhaps 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 team later became nationwide celebrities for the crucial role they played in the delivery of diphtheria serum to epidemic stricken Nome in 1925.



Leonhard Seppala





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 competitive events on the trail visit:

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



Photo?

A New Century on the Iditarod

Along with celebrating the 100th anniversary of the opening of the Iditarod National Historic Trail, partners and volunteers from Seward to Nome have been building resources to increase the understanding, enjoyment, and appreciation of the old trail.

Resources for Teachers

Iditarod Trail to Every Classroom!*, or *iTREC! is a year-long series of seminars aimed at Alaska teachers interested in developing place-based, service-learning curriculum based on the variety of educational opportunities associated with the historic Iditarod.

Iditarod Trail History Mystery is a colorful site designed to engage students in solving the mysteries of the old Iditarod Trail. See http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/res/Education_in_BLM/Learning_Landscapes/For_Kids/History_Mystery.html

Resources for Trail Travelers

The State of Alaska has designated over 1,500 miles of the Iditarod Trail as permanent public access, allowing for the completion of new safety cabins along the trail. To help guide trail users between cabins and communities, volunteers and agency partners are installing modern-day tripods and safety markers along some sections of the trail.



Partners

Alaska Geographic is the official nonprofit education partner of the Iditarod Historic Trail. Our mission is to connect people to Alaska's magnificent wildlands through experiential education, award-winning books and maps, and by directly supporting the state's parks, forests, and refuges. Over the past 50 years, Alaska Geographic has donated more than \$20 million to help fund educational and interpretive programs throughout Alaska's public lands.

Alaska Geographic operates 48 bookstores across the state, including nine locations along the historic Iditarod Trail:

- Kenai Fjords National Park Visitor Center, Seward
- Begich, Boggs Visitor Center, Portage
- Chugach National Forest Ranger Station, Girdwood
- Alaska Public Lands Information Center, Anchorage
- USGS Map Store, Anchorage
- Campbell Creek Science Center, Anchorage
- Innoko National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center, McGrath
- Koyukuk/Nowitna National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center, Galena
- Bering Land Bridge National Preserve Visitor Center, Nome

Your purchases at these locations directly support Alaska's park, forests, and refuges—a portion of every sale helps fund educational and interpretive programs throughout Alaska's public lands.

To find out more, become a member, or browse our selection of Alaska books, maps, and films, stop by any Alaska Geographic bookstore or visit our website at www.alaskageographic.org



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www.alaskageographic.org

Planning Your Trip

Visit Alaska Geographic bookstores along the historic Iditarod Trail to find books, maps, films, and gifts related to the natural and cultural history of this famous trail.

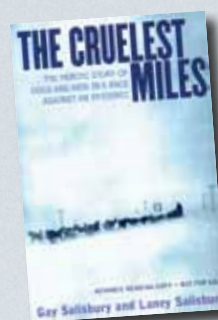


Iditarod Vol. 28, No. 4

By Alaska Geographic

The Iditarod National Historic Trail is an icon of excitement and endurance and this colorful book celebrates the race, the dogs, and the origins of the trail.

\$14.95

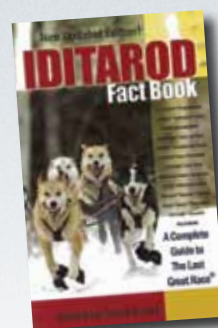


The Cruellest Miles:

By Gay and Laney Salisbury

The heroic story of dogs and men in a race against a deadly epidemic, never fully told until now.

\$14.95



Iditarod Fact Book

By Tricia Brown

This is the complete guide to the Last Great Race, including facts and figures about the mushers, dogs, sleds, volunteers, race rules, and more.

\$14.95



Kenai Trails

By Alaska Geographic

Grab your pack and head to the Kenai Peninsula to explore the rich variety of trails with this full-color, comprehensive trail guide that includes historic trails of the Iditarod.

\$7.95

Also available online at
www.alaskageographic.com

Volunteers Keep the Trail Open

Every year local groups and individuals contribute personal time, equipment, and money to improve or maintain the historic Iditarod Trail. The Iditarod Historic Trail Alliance is a nonprofit organization that supports local volunteers and communities with publications like this one, and provides grants and assistance for trail improvements. You can support these efforts and the hard work of trail volunteers by becoming a member of the Iditarod Historic Trail Alliance.

*To join or to learn more, visit
www.iditarodnationalhistorictail.org*



For More Information

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

Recreation

**Alaska Public Lands
Information Center**
605 W. Fourth Ave.
Anchorage, AK
907-644-3661
www.alaskacenters.gov

Alaska Museums

Museums Alaska
www.museumsalaska.org

Visitor Centers

Begich, Boggs Visitor Center
Portage Glacier
Mile 5 Portage Hwy.
907-783-2326
www.fs.usda.gov/chugach

Eagle River Nature Center
Mile 12 Eagle River Rd.
Eagle River, AK
907-694-2108
www.ernc.org

Iditarod Race Headquarters
Mile 2.2 Knik-Goosebay Rd.
Wasilla, AK
907-376-5155
www.iditarod.com

**Innoko National Wildlife
Refuge**
McGrath, AK
907-524-3251
<http://innoko.fws.gov/iditarod.htm>

Nome Visitor Center
Nome, AK
907-443-6624
www.nomealaska.org

