



Zuma's
Paw Prints

Jr. Iditarod Starts

February 25, 2006

Five ... Four ... Three ... Two ... One ... Go! This is what you would have heard if you were at the start of the Jr. Iditarod in Willow Alaska this morning. At 10:02 Alaska time this morning, a record 23 junior mushers headed out into the wilderness in the oldest long distance sled dog race for juniors. The Jr. Iditarod is a race for young people between the ages of 14 and 17.

The first Jr. Iditarod took place in March of 1978. That year (and it was the only year) there were two divisions, the junior division for mushers between 11 and 14 and the senior division for mushers between 15 and 17. The junior division had 11 boys and 2 girls and was a run over two days, 18 miles each day for a total of 36 miles. A young musher named Joe Good of Palmer, Alaska, won this division. The senior division had 13 boys and that race was a total distance of 40 miles. The winner of the senior division was Mike Newman.

After the first race, the organizers decided to discontinue the junior division, lower the age on the senior division to 14 and increase the distance. In 1979, the total distance was 90 miles with an overnight layover at Port McKinsey in temperatures of -50°F. Clint Mayeur of Glenallen, Alaska, won that race. The mileage was increased again in 1980 to 120 miles; 1982 to 130 miles; 1988 to 140 miles; 1995 to 150 miles and in 1999 to 160 miles, the present distance. Junior mushers would like the race distance to be increased to at least 200 miles. Then it could be one of the required qualifiers for the Iditarod Race. Several of the 17 year old Jr. Iditarod mushers have gone on to run the Iditarod. If you go to the Jr. Iditarod Archives on their site at www.jriditarod.com, you can look at the final standings for each year. You will find several names you recognize from following the Iditarod Race.

The Jr. Iditarod is held on the the start of the Iditarod Trail Sled young mushers from all over as well as Europe with Thomas first international entrant in 1992.

This year, there are 10 girls and 13 rookies and 8 veterans. Snow was headed out to the layover dogs were excited and wanted to Charlotte Matheis' dogs, Axil who excited all winter. He and his country and that is always same trail all the time, and their of the chute!



weekend immediately preceding Dog Race each year and draws Alaska and from outside the state Krejci of Czechoslovakia being our

boys entered in the race with 15 falling this morning as the teams checkpoint at Yentna Station. The get on the trail. I talked to one of told me that he hasn't been this teammates were going to see new exciting. Dogs get bored with the team was going to be the first out

The teams really looked good at the start as you can see in the pictures I have chosen from Mr. Jeff Schultz's collection. He is an awesome photographer and allows me to use his photos in my stories.



← Charlie Allison and his team wait their turn to start.

Dustin Regar and his team head for the first checkpoint at Deshka Landing. →



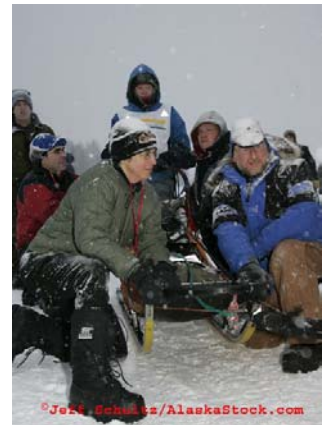
← Matheis gets one of her dogs out of the dog box to be harnessed.

This team is really smoking as they take off from the starting line. →



← My friend Axil wants to get started and is determined to get the team moving.

Volunteers have to hold the sled at the start line until the count down to keep the dogs from starting before their time. These sled dog athletes are very strong and it takes four volunteers to hold the sled and the musher stands on the brake while other volunteers are hold the dog back.



Robert Titium's team is being brought to the line with a handler holding the line between each pair of dogs. You will notice that some of the dogs are straining to get started. These handlers will stay with the dogs until the count of "one" when they will let go and take a step or two back to allow the team to go. Volunteer handlers are on hand to help with any team that

More next time,



Lots of Tail Wags,
Zuma