



Zuma's
Paw Prints

TEAMS SPREAD OUT ON TRAIL

March 7, 2006

Hi Boys and Girls,

Tonight, as I look at the standings, I see mushers on the trail all the way from Rainy Pass to Nikolai. At the end of the race running in the Red Lantern position, is Ben Valks, a rookie from Holland. (<http://www.noicenolife.com/>) He checked into the Rainy Pass checkpoint at 3:19 p.m. today.

Ben attended the Haarlem Business School (Holland) where he graduated in 1992. Since then he has lived and worked in Venezuela and Japan before setting up a business in the desert oasis of Dubai, United Arab Emirates. His passion for both animals and competition has enabled him to win the Dutch junior dressage championship (a discipline of horse riding that is sometimes referred to as "ballet on horseback"). During his first experience mushing in Alaska in 1999, he fell in love with the nature, the competition, the dogs (the real athletes), and longed to become a part of the challenge and the history of the Iditarod. After several visits to Alaska to learn more about the Iditarod, he sold his business in Dubai and settled in Alaska to train full time for the race. His goal? Nome!



At the front of the race, Doug Swingley of Montana arrived in Nikolai with 16 dogs at 12:56 p.m. this afternoon (Tuesday) and departed for McGrath at 7:09 p.m. Doug, 52, began mushing in 1989. He is a four-time champion of the Iditarod and hopes to make it five in 2006. Doug is a member of the Montana Mountain Mushers, Mush with P.R.I.D.E. and the ITC. He is married to Melanie Shirilla, also a musher. Together they are raising and training competitive sled dogs at their kennel in Montana.

Between these two mushers, there are 79 other teams, somewhere on the trail tonight. From back of the pack to the front, there are six teams in the Rainy Pass checkpoint. Between Rainy Pass and the Rohn checkpoint there are only two teams. Into the Rohn checkpoint but not yet departed are twelve teams. I believe that some of these teams are taking their 24-hour layover at the Rohn checkpoint. Out of Rohn and on the trail to Nikolai I see 31 teams while 28 teams followed Doug into Nikolai this afternoon and this evening. Only two others have departed the checkpoint as of this report.

Lori Townsend scratched today at the Rainy Pass checkpoint. Her dogs told me that she was in quite a bit of pain by the time she made it to the checkpoint. They were just glad that her injuries were not worse. They said that she took several tumbles from the sled coming over from Finger Lake and had cracked or broken her ribs during one of them.

It is nothing new for a musher to take a spill or two off their sled during the winter. Sometimes a tree just jumps right into the middle of the trail and the musher can't maneuver the sled fast enough to keep from hitting it. There are dangers all along the trail. Tumbling down the side of a hill is not unheard of, but the mushers and their teams know how to handle these and most of the time are able to avoid serious injuries. However, sometimes an injury requires more care than can be given in the checkpoints and the musher will chose to scratch and race another year. This is what happened in Lori Townsend's case. Don't worry, boys and girls, you will see Lori in future races.

This afternoon I was taking a little nap while my helpers didn't need me for anything and just as I dozed off, I heard someone come into the room. I looked up to see who it was and spotted Pauline greeting a PIZZA MAN! Oh boy, pizza! I was really excited. I got up and trotted over for a closer look.



Now that looked really good and I was drooling just looking at it. Oh the aroma was so nice. Mrs. Wade's class in Polar Grove, Illinois had sent me a pizza. They knew how much I love it and that was such a thoughtful thing to do. Of course I invited my volunteers to share it with me.

Before I had a chance to grab a piece, another deliveryman came into the room with a SECOND pizza! This one was from Mrs. Missler's 4th grade class in Lewisville, Texas. Oh boy, oh boy, I ate until I was stuffed. I did share generously with my volunteers and even offered a couple of slices to the folks who man the computer crew that updates the standings. We all share at Iditarod Headquarters. Thank you so much boys and girls, I really enjoyed my pizza and, don't tell anyone, but I hid one piece for a late night snack. See you all tomorrow. I'm going to finish off my pizza and get to bed so I can report on tomorrow's events.



Before I go, I want to share some pictures from my friend Jeff Schultz from the trail and checkpoints.



Musher in the Fairwell Burn.



A musher travels the trail near Fairwell Lake. →



Doug Swingley arrives in Nikolai checkpoint.



Doug leads his team to a parking area at Nikolai. →



Iditarod Trail Veterinarian, Roger Troutman examines a team at the Nikolai checkpoint. There are over 40 veterinarians involved with the sled dogs in the race. There is no human trail doctor. Interesting.

Attention Insiders: The four-hour archive video of the live start is now available for Insiders. If you didn't get to see it on Saturday or you missed some of it, here is your chance to see watch it at your convenience. New videos that have been added in the past 24 hours include a clip on Iditarod's Command Center; dog handlers; Behind the Ceremony; Restart in Willow; A Rookie to Skwentna; Skwentna Sweeties; Skwentna Checkpoint Report; Trouble on the Trail; Rohn Checkpoint Report and Musher Danny Seavey.

Until next time,



Lots of Tail Wags,
Zuma

Don't forget to visit the rest of the Iditarod website at www.iditarod.com where you will be able to find the latest updates plus terrific stories by my good friend, June Price, as the teams travel the trail to Nome.