



Zuma's
Paw Prints

SUNDAY ON THE IDITAROD TRAIL

March 12, 2006

Hi Girls and Boys,

The first two teams are into the Unalakleet checkpoint. Jeff King arrived in first place at 12:26 p.m. just in time for lunch! Doug Swingley was close behind Jeff arriving at the Unalakleet checkpoint at 12:48 p.m. Do you think that 22 minutes will be enough of a lead for Jeff King to come in number one in Nome? We will just have to wait and see. Don't count other mushers out of the running either. Anything can happen. DeeDee Jonrowe is expected into Unalakleet any time now. She was two hours behind Doug leaving Kaltag and we will see if she got any closer to him as she traversed the Old Woman Pass in the mountains between these two checkpoints. Right now, these three are the top contenders for first place at the finish line in Nome. From here, the teams will be traveling down the coast to Nome, most often running on the Bering Sea ice.

Many of the mushers behind the leaders are still traveling the Yukon River all the way to Kaltag. Those that are traveling between Kaltag and Unalakleet will seldom have trouble in that area. The ghost of Old Woman will be watching over them to make sure they get through the pass in good condition. Many mushers have whispered about encountering the ghost of the Old Woman at the cabin named after her (Old Woman Cabin) where she has offered comfort to mushers who have had some rough going. She often offers to make the musher a cup of tea to warm them or a bunk in the cabin for the night or she will offer to just sit with the musher until he or she is ready to leave. She is a really nice ghost. I have talked to dogs that have met her in the past near the cabin when they stopped for a rest. They said that they could see her and feel the touch of her hand as she made it a point to pet each one of them. One team has reported being lost in white out snow conditions and the Old Woman led them to the cabin where they could get out of the wind and snow. They credit her with saving the life of every member of that team. And that, boys and girls is one of the legends of the Iditarod Trail.

There is often wind on the Yukon River and that makes for very cold wind chill factors. It has been windy on the trail from Ruby to Unalakleet this year. I hope it doesn't continue down the coast because winds along the Bering Sea coast often are 50 to 75 mph dropping the wind chill factor to almost 100 below zero and that is not very pleasant. The mushers really suffer in the wind and cold since they don't have any warm fur growing on their body to keep them warm like the dogs do. Often a team has to cuddle up really close to their musher to keep him or her warm until the storm quiets down enough for them to go on.



← Paul Gebhart runs down the drifted-in trail out of Kaltag on his way to Unalakleet on Sunday.

William Hanes runs on the Yukon River nearing Kaltag.
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← John Baker arrives at the Nulato checkpoint on Saturday afternoon.

Jeff King is greeted by Kaltag residents as he arrives at the village in first place on Saturday.
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← Ed Iten runs down the drifted-in trail out of Kaltag on his way to Unalakleet on Sunday.

Doug Swingley mashes up the bank of the Yukon river as a 35mph wind whips at his back arriving at the Kaltag checkpoint in second place.
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I hope you enjoy these pictures. Notice that Ed Iten has the seat built into his sled like Jeff King introduced a couple of years ago. Several of the mushers are now running sleds that have been modified to provide a seat while also giving extra storage. You see, the seat lid lifts up and there is storage space under it. Jeff has come up with a couple of very interesting new sleds in the past few years.

I want to thank Hale & Sue Conklin for the wonderful veggie pizza we had earlier today. It was very good. How did you guess that I was craving a veggie pizza for my Sunday meal?

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 about the race. Most of these pictures are from the Ruby checkpoint today.