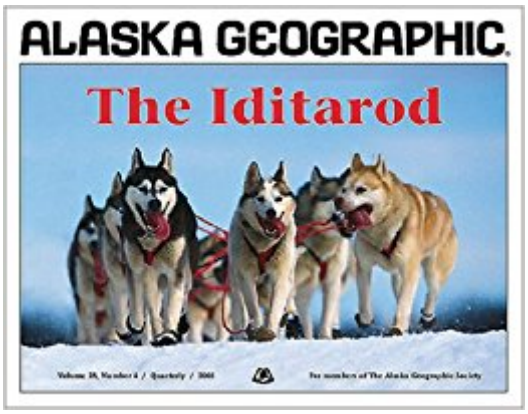
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Iditarod (Alaska Geographic)



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Synopsis

Alaska Geographic is an award-winning series that presents the people, places, and wonders of Alaska to the world. Over the past 30 years, Alaska Geographic has earned its reputation as the publication for those who love Alaska. The series boasts more than 100 books to date, featuring communities from Barrow to Ketchikan, animals from bears to dinosaurs, history from the Russian explorers to today, and natural phenomena from the aurora to glaciers. Written by leading experts in their fields, these books are illustrated throughout with world-class photography and include colorful maps for reference.

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Customer Reviews

...shorter and less demanding than the Iditarod itself, [this book] will leave the reader feeling close to the action. -- Kenai Peninsula Online, March 7, 2002...will interest casual observers as well as hard-core Iditarod followers. -- Alaska Star, March 2001More than 100 photographs illustrate pioneer sled dog travel and the excitement of the modern Iditarod... -- Team and Trail, February 2002This history would be of interest to all who appreciate the dedication of man and dog to the elements. -- VicDog -Victorian (Australia) Canine AssociationWith "The Iditarod," Alaska Geographic has hit a home run with a subject most Alaskans...can identify with. -- Frontiersman, January 9, 2002

Introduction On the first Saturday of every March, at the starting line of the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog

Race, downtown Anchorage swells with people and dogs. Veteran and rookie mushers, hundreds of yipping huskies, and thousands of race fans gather, the official countdown booming over them on Fourth Avenue. "Five-four-three-two-one-GO!" The spectators cheer, drowning out their mitten-muffled applause. Another team has begun the uncertain days and nights of the famous race from Anchorage to Nome. For man people, the word "Iditarod" brings to mind the modern race: sled dogs barking at the starting line, mushers bundled in parkas against the wind and winter cold, mountains and frozen coastline, auroral nights with only the whisper of dog feet and the sled’s runners moving along the trail. The Iditarod National Historic Trail, home to the Iditarod Trial Sled Dog Race, also encompasses a history rich in early exploration, gold discoveries, and pioneer footsteps across nearly 1,000 miles of Alaska’s wilderness. This book celebrates the race’s 30th anniversary in 2002. Commonly said to be 1.049 miles, the Iditarod is actually a series of trails that varies in length, depending on the route taken. The race alternates between a northern route in even years and a southern route in odd, from Anchorage to Nome; at about 1,100 miles each, they are longer than the historical route. Race officials adopted the 1,049 figure as a symbolic distance, rounding the number down and echoing Alaska’s induction as the nation’s 49th state. While Anchorage and Nome are only 537 air miles apart, traveling the Iditarod Trail can be compared in length to going overland between Denver and Los Angeles or Minneapolis and Washington, D.C. The race route loosely follows the historic route, passing through many of the same remote villages. The Iditarod Trail originated in the same way as many modern transportation corridors—from game trails. From Alaska’s Native people hunting animals, to explorers in search of furs and converts, to miners seeking their fortune in goldfields and creek bottoms, thousands of feet have trod the famous course. Today’s sled dog race reflects the determination of 20 men in 1925 who delivered, via dog team relay, a package of diphtheria serum to Nome, using part of the same trail, after an outbreak of the disease erupted among the town’s people. For prospectors, gold rush mail carriers, and adventure seekers, the Iditarod Trail has always been a place to test one’s survival skills and face Alaska on its own terms. In 1978, Congress formally recognized the Iditarod Trail’s importance as a historical transportation route and added it to the United State’s handful of other national historic trails, designated for their scenic, recreational, or historical significance. Stretching between Seward and Nome, the trail’s primary historical route covers 938 miles over rugged mountains, through forests, across rolling tundra, and along the windswept coast of the Bering Sea. Many Native communities along the trail today, some used as checkpoints during the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, were once seasonal subsistence camps, but mining camps began popping up on the

landscape at the turn of the twentieth century. Seward, in the early 1900s, billed itself as the gateway to the goldfields of the Interior, and thousands of prospectors entered Alaska through this ice-free port when the frozen Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers prevented boat traffic. Most travelers arrived in the mosquito-infested muskegs of the Interior via steamboat during spring and summer, but a few made their way in winter by foot, skis, or dog team to mining camps such as Ophir, Flat, and Iditarod. Others traveled from Nome. As these mining camps evolved into settlements and full-fledged towns, the importance of winter trails connecting them to the outside world grew. Initially utilitarian, but now considered just as valuable for recreation, the Iditarod Trail has always been a winter route due to its numerous muskegs, easily navigable only when frozen. Alaskans and visitors use two sections of the trail regularly during summer. Hikers traverse Crow Pass, a part of the trail between Girdwood and Eagle River, near Anchorage; every July, contestants run a footrace over this terrain in the "Crow Pass Crossing." Walking the Bering Sea shoreline east of Nome is another way to explore the trail during snow-free months. But for those in search of outdoor challenge and media coverage, the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race kicks off from downtown Anchorage every year, bringing thousands of spectators to trailside to watch and encourage their favorite mushers. Other races, such as the Jr. Iditarod, Iditasport, and Iron Dog also pit the stamina and skill of boys, girls, men, and women against often harsh conditions on this time-honored trail. The Iditarod Trail cuts across federal, state, municipal, private, and Native Corporation lands, creating a management challenge for all involved. Now under Bureau of Land Management (BLM) control, it’s also administered by the Iditarod National Historic Trail Advisory Council, a group representing the Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture, Governor of Alaska, and private land managers and users. Another group, the Iditarod Trail Blazers, provides volunteer trail maintenance and construction help. Many modern mushers consider the dogs the true athletes in the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race. Since the first race from Anchorage to Nome in 1973, the Iditarod Trail Committee (ITC) has created and amended rules about dog care, required equipment, musher qualifications, and trail etiquette, transforming what began as a three-week "camping trip" into an organized event that draws high-caliber competitors and international attention. Nearly 100 years ago, when a U.S. Army survey crew blazed and measured what was to be the Seward to Nome Mail Trail, it took them more than two months. Today’s front-runners, following nearly the same route, reach Nome in scarcely more than one week. Here is the story of the Iditarod National Historic Trail and the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race. Hop aboard the sled runners and take a ride on the Iditarod.

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