Heather's HARDCORE HUSKIES

Jan 25, 2008

The Hardcore Team traveling up the Chilitna River near Talkeetna on a training run.

TRAINING PACE PICKS UP – RACE GOALS SET

Hello again from Talkeetna. Iditarod 36 is only a few weeks away and training is going full speed ahead.

So farm I have logged over 1600 miles on the dogs. We are running five or six hours, resting for four hours, and then running again. The trails near where I live in Talkeetna are similar to what we'll find on the northern leg of this year's Iditarod. This year when we leave the Ophir checkpoint we head north to Cripple and then Ruby, Galena, and Nulato. Then we hit Kaltag which is where the northern and southern routes unite. From Kaltag it's off to Unalakleet where most Iditarod historians say the real race begins. Unalakleet is along the Bering Sea where the winds can get real nasty!

I've heard the weather has been warmer than normal along the route.

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MUSHING BASICS

When I visited schools in North Dakota last summer, I was asked a lot of questions about what it is like to be a musher and about the dogs. I have also received many questions from students in other States who were doing projects for class and following last years race.

I decided to take some of the most insightful questions I have received during the past year and post them on this website along with the answers. While the resulting dialog covers the simple basics, I thought that since some of my fans are probably new to the sport they might appreciate this information.

I hope you enjoy the questions and answers.

Q: What is it like to compete in the Iditarod or any sled dog race?
I find it enjoyable to be out with other musher's and teams. The dogs thrive off each other and the competition. The dogs love to race. The Iditarod, more than most other races, takes you to places mentally and physically where most people these days never go.

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SPONSOR APPEAL

Iditarod 36 is almost here and I really need your help in order to off set about $4,000 in final costs. The food/supply drop happens very soon which runs about $1200. I need lithium batteries for my headlight which run about $700 and 15 bags of dog foot $550.00. Paying for the dogs and I to return to Anchorage from Nome is about $1000. Any help is greatly appreciated.

Sponsorship Fees:

- $1000.00 - Sponsor the team - Have your logo on truck/sled/parka
- $500.00 - Sponsor Heather - Patch or logo on her parka
- $200.00 - Sponsor a dog - Patch or logo on dog coat during races
- $100.00 – Receive a Hardcore Huskies Honorary Musher Certificate

All contributions over $25.00 receive a personally autographed picture.

Please send your contribution to the address below or contact me for more information:

- Email: Hardcorehuskies@aol.com
- Address: Heather Siirtola
P.O. Box 190
Talkeetna, Alaska, 99676
- Website: ***www.Hardcorehuskies.com***

Training for Iditarod 36!
Con't

I haven't really heard much about how much snow is there. I know we've had more this year than last in Talkeetna so hopefully that holds true for the race. Last year there were several spots that lacked snow which made it tough for everyone, especially the dogs.

As for myself, I and running hills and hauling water three times a day to help get myself into race shape.

Someone sent me an e-mail the other day and asked if I were going to run a tune-up race before the Iditarod. I hope to run the Don Bowers 300 on January 25th. However the cost is $325 and I am not sure if I can afford it.

It is important that I get my meat and dog snacks together for the race. Race meat alone costs nearly $1,000. I have to get all of the food drop stuff ready by the third week in February because that is when the Iditarod Air force begins staging the food bags for all of the mushers at the various checkpoints. That will probably cost me about $1200.

My other race supplies are nearly set. Friends are helping put Gold Bond powder into the dog booties and then sorting the booties into groups of four. I am packing the plastic runners for the sled and getting my lithium batteries and other supplies ready to stage at the checkpoints along with the food.

The dogs for this year's race are about set. All of the dogs are happy and perky, Piggy and Earp are my main leaders this year, but almost all of my dogs are trail leaders, Minnie, Shadow, Wyatt, Snogo, Horst, Diamond, Louise, Tweety, Cal, Dixie, Colvin, and Pluto are good rail leaders, and the rest Bruner, Dexter, Kitty, Dolly, Fast Eddy are all on the team too. Some of you may have met Kitty if you were at the mall or Bismarck State College after last years race when I came to Bismarck. A lot of kids at the various schools also met her.

Last year my goal was to finish the race with a happy and health team. That is my goal again this year but I want to improve my time a lot. I really believe I can finish the race in 10 to 12 days. I will be resting a lot less in the checkpoints this year compared to last.

While my funds are a bit tight I know somehow it will all work out. Everyone has been so kind and giving and I want you to know the dogs and I truly appreciate all of the help you have given me these past couple of years. Without you, my dream of racing the Iditarod would not have come true. I am sorry that I cannot that you individually but please know that each and every one of you has a special place in my heart.

Thanks again and keep coming back to the website for more updates before and during the race! Wish me luck!

MUSHING BASICS Con't

You get tired, sore and sometimes hurt, and yet you find that you not only can keep going but also still have fun. It gives you new perspective on the rest of life.

Q: How do weather conditions affect the race, you and the dogs?
Warm weather slows the team and you must be careful of overheating the dogs. You need to snack them appropriately to keep them hydrated. In cold weather, the team travels faster but they burn more calories so more snacking is required. You also need to have them wear coats and protect the team from frost bite.

Q: What does it take to train a puppy and prepare it for a race? At what age do you usually start training?
Harness breaking is any where from 6 months to yearlings, basically letting them have fun along with showing them the wonders of the trail, water, sounds, and other animals. When they are around a year old, you begin short runs for the first few months and then gradual increase to a short race the following year. They can race until they're 9 or 10 years old. Many live to be 15, or older.

Q: What characteristics do you look for in a dog?
The main characteristics I look for are athletes, first, and a willingness to run in harness. If a puppy has those two things going for it, it will become a sled dog. Next I look for speed. Like people, dogs are not all equal in their abilities. Some run faster than others. I want a team to be evenly matched with plenty of speed. I also want them to have good fur to withstand cold weather.

Q: On the trail, what do you need to do for the dogs to keep them going?
The most important thing in keeping the dogs going is nutrition, care, and musher's attitude. The dogs sense everything so you need to keep the excitement level alive. You must also stop the team from time to time to let them to rest before they get too tired. The training I am doing now is what builds them up to keep them going in a race. Early in a race, I don't have to do much to keep them going. In fact, I have to work extremely hard to slow them down and get them to stop. The early part of the Iditarod is all about pulling over, resting and feeding to keep their energy level up. If they run too fast or too long early in the race, they won't have enough energy to finish strong late in the race, and they'll "fade," which means they'll run slower and slower.

Q: What does it feel like to cross the finish line and complete the Iditarod or any race?
In one word – humbling. It is a wonderful feeling to cross under the burled arch in Nome, or the finish line in any race, but the feeling is mixed because you know it is over. Part of you wants to keep going since it is all you have known for about two weeks, and all other thoughts have been shoved aside for that time. Mainly, you feel so proud of the dogs and amazed at their ability to cross more than 1,100 miles under their own power, carrying you along for the ride. Being one with my dogs and nature is my passion.

If you have other questions that I didn't answer here, send them to me at hardcorehuskies@aol.com and maybe I'll do this again"