

# Troubles on the Iditarod

An Open Letter to Governor Sheffield:

As the 1983 Iditarod Race draws to a close it is our duty (racers, staff, fans, observers, etc.) to assess the race in the hope of ever improving it. I am afraid, however, that the race is terminally ill.

Many thought that by ignoring the issues raised by Gerald Riley in his suit against the Trail Committee, the problems he complained of would just disappear. Affidavit after affidavit filed in that case accused competing race officials with conflicts of interest, maltreatment of dogs, breach of contract with mushers, arbitrary and capricious enforcement of rules, denial of due process, and *racism*.

Riley specifically requested that Governor Hammond encumber the State's funding of the trail committee with the regulatory requirements incumbent on all persons receiving grants or contracting with the State. Hammond refused. Nor does the obviously political decision of Judge Blair in that case alter the fact that Riley's rights were severely violated by the Trail Committee so as to render Riley up as a sacrificial lamb to the Humane Society, despite no more proof of his mistreatment of dogs than by Roxie Woods in this

race.

The race has become an international fund-raising event with staggering political in-house maneuvering. No longer is it a sporting event. Mushers spend thousands of dollars to enter only to be disqualified without cause.

My own experience leads one to agree with Riley and Emmett Peters that the Trail Committee is subtly discriminating against Alaska Natives.

Another musher blocked the trail at the far edge of a ravine we had to cross by setting up his camp right in the middle of the trail. When I asked him to move his camp he basically indicated he wasn't about to disturb himself for a *squaw*.

This flagrant violation of race policy resulted in the crippling of several of my dogs and my eventual scratch in McGrath (due to both injuries sustained there and my subsequent education as to how the Trail Committee treats Natives).

I and a fellow musher I travelled with both filed protests (on official forms) against this fellow camping in the trail, both for the camping and for the racial comments he made and his refusal to move, apparently on racial grounds.

The Trail Committee immediately "lost" my protest and re-

fused to let me file a copy subsequently. The Committee also refused to take any action on the protest my companion filed (under race policy he should have been disqualified).

The Committee then announced that I had scratched — I still haven't scratched as the race officials know.

It is clear to me now that because I am a Native I am a second-class musher. This is intolerable in a State funded entity.

It is time, Governor, for the State to either regulate the race or stop supporting it.

Certainly it is clear that the Trail Committee is not maintaining or marking the trail properly. It is also evident that the Committee is regularly sanctioning various mushers on political reasons only, at a loss to mushers of dogs, money, and reputation. What is the race receiving state money for?

I myself am doubtful that I will ever again be involved in this race until things are straightened out. I also call on all Native mushers to boycott the race until it is either regulated by the State or foregoes state funding and I invite all other mushers to join us until we set the race right.

In the Spirit of the Last Great Race,

Beverly Jerue  
Anvik, Alaska

## Native history important undertaking

To the Editor:

Ever since editorials and newsprint have skirted this subject for the past several years, it has been my desire to write this article for your newspaper, as director of the Tsimshian Studies Institute of Metlakatla, Alaska.

The Tsimshian of Metlakatla know that the history of Alaska is not complete and won't be until they and other Alaskan Natives have written their chapters.

As appointed historian by both the Tribal Association and the Metlakatla Indian

Community, encouraged by the wisdom and some financial aid from the community council, I have hunted and captured both the written and spoken words of Tsimshian history for over thirty-five years.

My pursuit in the study and readings of the log-books of the early European scientific explorers are unique, because of my ability to recognize and understand, also interpret Tsimshian words and special customs they reported, with the scientific objectivity of the eighteenth century naturalists.

Similarly, because I know

both the Native language, also the waters and terrain of Southeast Alaska very well, the log-books of early traders, explorers and naval patrol vessels reveal clearly to me the poorly known fact that the Tsimshian people as a tribe, controlled territory with permanent settlements on both sides of the later established U.S. - Canadian border of this day.

This matter is not merely academic, for upon it depended the final inclusion of the Tsimshian Tribe in the ulti- (Continued on Page Sixteen)

# Importance of documenting history is great

(Continued from Page Ten)  
mate Alaska Native Land Claims Settlement Act as aboriginal Alaskans.

After many years of search I finally discovered the notebooks of William Beynon, the half-breed Tsimshian scholar who spent a life-time writing and translating most of the myths and stories of the Tsimshian Tribe as recorded both by Mr. Wm. Beynon and several early day anthropologists for whom he worked.

The Beynon Papers traced and proofread in the rare book vault of the Butler Library at Columbia University in New York City, witnessed by Mr. Gary B. Lewis, a friend and co-worker, are I believe to be the smaller part of all the late Mr. Beynon's work. Beside my grandparents, it was Mr. Wm. Beynon's efforts that caused me to become more interested in our tribal history. It is my desire to bring the rest of the historic papers back to the tribe to digest for themselves and share with the world.

Besides stalking academic collections and national archives for written facts or clues, I have captured much of the remembered history from Native elders here and elsewhere on magnetic tape. This living history is a valuable resource, all the more precious because it will certainly be lost if not recorded now to pass on. The old word for word memory commitment oral tradition of our forebearers is all but lost by recent generations.

Today, improved modern techniques and tools of the present oral historian must take its place. Included now in the records of the Tsimshian History Project are many hours oral history recordings carefully catalogued and stored in a fireproof safe for safe keeping.

Who is writing the factual history of the land claims settlement as it was experienced by each Native group or region? Who is writing seriously on the history of World Wars I and II or the start of our now

wonderful State of Alaska School System from the vantage of village Alaska? Who is documenting and writing about the true impact of early Alaskan Native industry on the State's (and Territory's) economy over the years since the discovery period and before?

In the form of museums, books, movie and television exposure, the history and true culture of the Alaskan Native peoples may be measurable source, capable of returning cost to author, sponsor or investor. Such historical material can be a help to villages which now have very little economic base.

This work requires scholarship, great patience, perseverance, integrity and ingenuity. Time consuming? Yes, but it is also intriguing detective work which leads to the surprise and excitement of discovery. It is a great hunt which can be read, re-read and talked about from generation to generation.

In order to be historically useful, recordings and notes must be transcribed and published. Documentary materials must also be collected, arranged with connecting commentary then published for scholarly scrutiny. If the process of writing Alaska's early Native history is to be

completed, this must happen soon in many places as well as in Metlakatla. The elderly resource people are steadily disappearing from our midst.

The Tsimshian History Project can serve as a valuable model for others. Tsimshians at Metlakatla and elsewhere supporting me should be encouraged to further develop that chapter in Alaskan history that only they could write. Though his work is unparalleled, even Mr. William Beynon would have accomplished more with assistance.

Yours truly,  
Ira C. Booth