

Iditarod Times

Iditarod . . . It's that time of year again. U.S. and International film crews, magazine and newspaper reporters and an odd assortment of folks in tight jeans converge on bush villages all along the trail. This year there is even a sweepstakes that offers tickets to the Moscow Olympics. Could the Iditarod, greatest test 'of man and beast' as one fellow wrote, be swallowed up in all the fuss?

Not a chance. And for the same reasons that the Brooks Range won't have a subway snaking through its peaks in the near future. Iditarod is too hard. The trail is rough, one that has been used since before the goldrush. Over the Alaska Range, down the Yukon and across Norton Sound. Sometimes I think that the guys who cut and mark it have a time seeing just how bad they can make it. I distinctly remember one section near McGrath where the trail went straight up the cutbank of the Takotna River, at least twenty feet. Then there is always Rainy Pass, once called a 'piece of cake' by a newcomer just before he fell off the sidehill into the river.

Sometimes I hear criticism about the new big business aspects of the race, complaints by some mushers that novices have no place out on the trail and disillusionment expressed by folks that have opened their homes but have never been thanked. Sadly there is truth in each of these sentiments but let's push back any shadows cast upon the race.

The Iditarod is a time for rejoicing in the unique spirit of Alaska. Not the travelodge concept of spirit where the bikini clad girl reclines on a glacier but our own celebration of an individual doing something that he enjoys for no other reason except that he enjoys it! The trail is a tough place to be, downright grim at times but the fact is, for some, there is no better, more beautiful place on earth.

-Shelley Vandiver