

# IDITAROD: VILLAGE - STYLE

By Enid Brown

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The beginning of March is greeted with much anticipation from the people in White Mountain, and the surrounding areas. Some reasons are the longer daylight hours, the warming temperatures, the time of the oogrük hunt, more crabbing. The wonderful, healing snowmachine trips to the hot springs at Lava Creek.

It is also the time that the villagers are gearing up for the Iditarod. First of all, the "Dog Drops." Bags and bags of gear, which need to be sorted out and arranged in some semblance of order, so that once the teams start reaching the village in numbers their gear can be dispensed in a timely fashion. Dog food, booties, people food and extra socks, gloves, batteries, are sent to all the

checkpoints. In addition, bales and bales of hay are shipped out. This so the dogs can have something warm to lay on while they get much needed rest.

There was a time, way back in the stone ages when the Iditarod operated on a shoestring, when the "Air Force" was Larry

Thomson and several other guys. For some unfathomable reason some one/persons decided that it would be better to knock White Mountain off as a check point. Well, imagine the offense that swept thru the community of 200 souls. Post hastily we started one of them

petitions together and rushed it off to Iditarod Headquarters. I heard that at the Banquet before the start of the race someone had said something about "White Mountain raising such a stink about being knocked off as a Checkpoint, I guess we'll  
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just have to keep them on."

It's a good thing, too. As the years go by, that particular check point has become a very strategic factor for the front runners in the grueling race.

White Mountain is one of several mandatory rest stops along the trail. It

a while. One of the guys from the Kotzebue area had seen some lights. He couldn't tell if he was hallucinating or if it was a UFO. He said to make sure he grabbed a good hold of his sled. "If they're going to take me, they're going to have to take my dogs and all!"

Another guy imagined

necessary.

The mushers take care of their dogs before themselves. Cooking up, or heating up precooked food, watering, and bedding them down. Then it was food for themselves, and maybe a nap. I used to feel so sorry for them, they looked exhausted. Often

## *Another guy imagined he was running between a tunnel of rows and rows of refrigerators.*

went from one to two to four to six, and now 12 hours are required for each dog and musher.

My former husband, Robert Lincoln had checked the first 10 Iditarods. At the time we were living in a tiny rebuilt shack. What an experience! He had to get up, and/or out for each and every musher coming through, get their supplies, checklist their gear, and made sure they stayed for their mandatory time. I got to sleep. He got interrupted sleep. Thank goodness for Brian Blandford. He came over from Nome and helped.

Although the mushers were and are still required to have 'people' food shipped, I tried to feed them a home cooked meal. I can remember cooking up a great big pot of crab chowder, and heating a little at a time, so that I wouldn't have to cook meal after meal after meal in a space of three or four hours.

Oh, the stories that we heard from the mushers! By the time the front runners had reached the village, they had been on sleep deprivation for quite

that he was running between a tunnel made of rows and rows of refrigerators.

Back then the Iditarod was a lot less restricted. There was a team with a couple of brothers. They figured if one got tired the other could mush the dogs. Well, guess what, the dogs needed to rest, too. One of my brothers was asked by a musher to break trail and lead him to the coast. He promised my brother payment upon reaching Nome. The trusting soul never heard from the musher, again.

The first races were stretched over 20 some odd days. After the excitement of the first mushers going through, it seemed you were so tired that you would never be able to catch up on your sleep. But once we heard by ham operator that there was another team on its way from Golovin, 18 miles down the coast, we had to wait. Up, if

times they ask you to wake them up at a certain



time. Sometimes I had to wake them up two or three times before they would fully awaken. I used to think "Gee, he can use another 15 minutes, or half an hour more of rest." But that just wouldn't do. They trusted you to wake them up, and you did.

*Editor's note: The author will continue to cover the Iditarod and other features for the Tundra Times.*