

Villagers to greet mushers

When this year's Iditarod mushers reach the historic gold rush city of Iditarod they will be greeted by thirteen village high school students eager to take care of their dogs.

The students - Beverly Petrusha, Shirley Petrusha, Neil Petrusha, Daniel Esai, David Nikolai and Luke Dennis from Nikolai, Ben Peters, Ronnie Turner, George Edwards, and Franklin Richards from Holy Cross; Mike Miller and Marin Wortman from Takotna and Richard Hart, Jr., from McGrath will head out to Iditarod this weekend to participate in a two week survival school which includes the establishment of a race check point.

Since Iditarod is now a ghost town with decaying buildings beyond repair the students plan to set up a warm tent check point where the mushers can relax with a cup of coffee, cook their meals over open fires and

tend their dogs. The students will also have a snowmobile which will be used to transport dogs and materials to Flat 50 that they can be flown to McGrath.

The purpose of the survival school is however, to teach students how to survive during the winter without the use of modern conveniences such as snowmobiles.

Iditarod School District Survival School Coordinator Laurie Bernard of McGrath says the students will work with Survival team leader Nick Dennis and Survival Expert Robert Payne, the Principal of Nikolai School to select a suitable checkpoint and set up camp before the mushers arrive.

The mushers are scheduled to start arriving in Iditarod, which is located approximately 85 miles from Ophir and

approximately 45 miles from Don's Cabin, the nearest check point, some time on March 14th. From there on, the students will be busy helping mushers tend their dogs.

Somehow though, they also need to find time to learn how to trap rabbits and wild game for their meals and to use traditional survival equipment.

The Iditarod School District has conducted a Survival School during the Iditarod race season for the past three years.

Each year the students select a different check point to maintain. Last year, the students manned a checkpoint at Rough Ridge.

"The students really enjoy the survival school because they get to learn how to survive within their own culture and help the Iditarod mushers at the same time," Bernard said.