

# Mushers are setting a blistering pace

Kotzebue's Roger Nordlum vaulted into the lead of the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race Thursday, pulling out of Shaktoolik at 12:26 p.m., He was exactly 30 minutes ahead of Larry Smith, who had held the lead for much of the race.

The front runners were setting a blistering pace, and the winner is expected to traverse the final 28 miles to Nome by late Thursday evening or early Friday morning.

That is, unless they burn themselves over the final stretch.

Warm weather along the trail has made life comfortable for the mushers, but hasn't suited the dogs quite well.

Temperatures were reported in the 20-30 degree range, with a fast track and variable winds - a relief for the mushers who, in the past, have had to face the gales howling off Norton Sound.

In third place was Eep Anderson of Tokotna, who along with Smith and Nordlum, have kept up a continual jockeying for the lead. Anderson pulled out of Shaktoolik at 1:12.

Herbie Nayokpuk, who led for most of last year's race before falling victim to his own blistering pace, has crept into fourth place, pulling out of Shaktoolik at 4:55 p.m.

Still in Shaktoolik were Rick Swensen, Susan Butcher and Sonny Lindner, all of whom seem content to hang back and let the leaders burn themselves out.