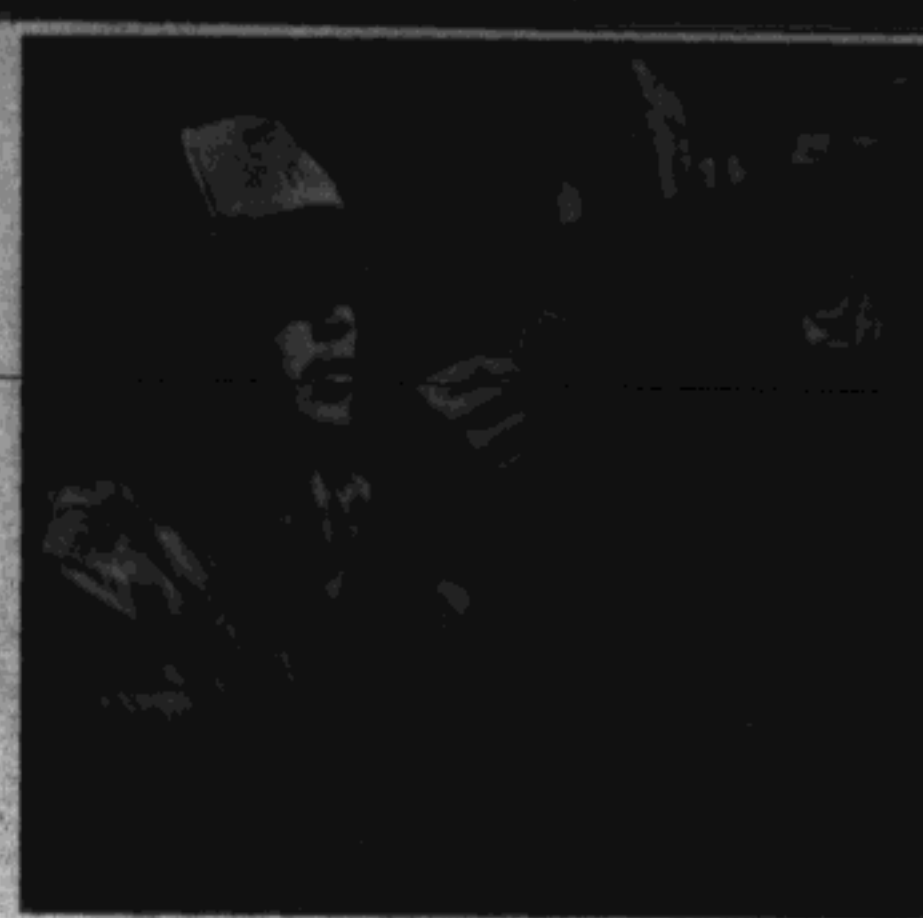


MUSHING



For Albert's Iditarod is a family affair of hard work

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ning again, it was only natural for Albert to begin thinking of racing again. He let a friend try the dogs out in the Ruby Long Creek Race, and he came in second.

The next winter, Albert took the dogs out trapping, then returned to Ruby to run on the Long Creek race himself. "I hoped I would come in at least third," Albert recalls the event. "I was the first one out of the chutes. I kept looking over my shoulder, waiting for someone to pass me up. I was holding back a bit for the 30 miles out." No one passed. At the 30-mile check point, Albert learned that one racer was a minute ahead of him, and another a half minute behind.

"So, you're going to win the race, huh?" the leader joked with him.

"Yea," Albert joked back. "I'm going to run faster going back!" That is just what he did, taking first place, and gaining 13 minutes on the original leader.

"My dogs gave me everything," Albert recalls. "My leader, Pepper, every time he looked back he acted as if he was doing this just for me!"

Now that he is back in the Iditarod, Albert says it would be nice to win, but he can't say that is his goal. "I wouldn't ask too much of my dogs to win," he explains.

"I run dogs because I like dogs, not just to win." To Albert, the attitude of his dogs is all-important. "I want my dogs to be happy," he says. That means a lot of talking to them, petting them, playing with them, and teasing them.

I means being sharp with them when necessary, but never beating or abusing them. Albert's dogs do not even

know what a whip is.

Just about everything Albert makes these days goes into his dogs. Not only will the carcasses from the beaver which he traps help to feed them on the trail but the money he

makes from the sale of the pelts, along with the martin furs he harvests, goes largely into buying the \$800 worth of food they are now consuming monthly.

Money is a problem for most

mushers seeking to run in the Iditarod. Not only is it expensive to train and feed the dogs, but the race itself can cost well over \$10,000 to run.

Albert has several sponsors, including Multi-Visions,

Klondike Furs, Alaska Grocery Shippers, Boatel Alaska Incorporated, EM Search, Inc., Ruby Trading Company and Dawson and Associates.

Still, he needs more. "I thought about selling my new

outboard motor, the house I just built and my (limited entry) fishing license," he notes. The financial picture has improved enough that he has eliminated those options, but is still considering borrowing money. If he does, he will

probably sell some of his dogs when he gets to Nome to repay the loan.

"I'd still have my pups," he explains.

Rose is pulling hard for her brother, but she admits to a tinge of envy that she will not

be racing this year, and looks forward to earning enough money to buy her own team and race in future years in competition shared by her brother.

Both relate similar feelings about dogs and the trail. Both

talk about the tough times, like when the dogs get so sleepy on the trail they just flop over and fall asleep, when a musher gets so frustrated, he just sits back and laughs because there's nothing he can do about it.

Both suffered the hallucina-

tions common to Iditarod mushers in nearly the same place.

Howard saw a green house which wasn't there, and Rose discovered a fish camp in the same place, complete with clothes hanging on the line. It disappeared when she looked harder at it. She also seemed to see life-sized snow sculptures of rabbits and deer—Walt Disney style. They were very pretty, she remembers.

Howard Albert notes somewhat ironically that he works all summer fishing and doing whatever else he can to raise money to care for his dogs, then works all winter trapping and training his dogs, and then in just over two weeks, the race is finished, and everything is over. Yet, he says, he has put so much into dogs and racing that it would be foolish to stop now.

"I was born to raise dogs, maybe," he muses. "It gets into your blood. You can never get it out."

Photo montage legend, top to bottom, left to right: Rose brings a dog to harness; sled dogs on the run; Rose works on snowmachine which quit running between Ruby and camp, a distance of 50 miles; Howard cooks for dogs; Howard shows a member of his team a little affection; Howard visits his lead dogs Tootsie and Victory after Rose gives them a little run; dog handler James Wright plays cribbage with Howard at day's end; Rose watches for her brother as he mushes up the Yukon; Rose chopping firewood; Howard blasts through ice to check beaver set; Howard pulls beaver from a set; and Howard and James with beaver, the meat of which will go to his dogs during the race.

Photos by
Bill Hess



Howard Albert mushes his dogs down the Yukon. Both Albert and his sister, Rose, see their efforts as representative of Native people. Albert believes that if more Native mushers find the sponsors to race in the Iditarod, more of the top mushers will be Native. "They've been working with dogs all their lives," he explains. "There's a lot of good teams out there."