



Historic Iditarod Trail

Ophir

Named by miners for the lost country of Ophir, the source of King Solomon's gold in the Old Testament.

Ruby

Named after the red-colored stones found on the riverbank, which were thought by prospectors to be rubies.

Iditarod

Originally 'hidehod' or 'Haiditarod', meaning a "distant place" in the Ingalik Native language, or "clear water" by the Shageluk Natives for the river of the same name.

Unalakleet

Means "from the southern side."

Nome

Town name created as a result of a spelling error. A government draftsman noted a prominent unnamed point on Norton Sound as "name?" The map engravers mistook the "a" for an "o", thereby naming the landmark Cape Nome.



Traveling Today

Except for intervillage travel in the dark months of December and January, much of the mid-winter Iditarod Trail lies snowed-in and unbroken. With lengthening days in February comes more travel, and the breaking of the trail from Wasilla to Nome for the long-distance Iron Dog snowmobile race. The glory days of winter travel happen from March into mid-April, when quickly lengthening days herald the coming of spring. But before summer, overland transportation bogs down into the break-up period when trails turn to mush and air travel becomes the only way to get around.

In June the land is quickly greening up, and high-country segments of the trail are passable. Daylight dominates Iditarod Trail country. The first hatch of mosquitoes is out with a vengeance, and in some places may never diminish through the summer. Salmon return to many streams, attracting two- and four-legged consumers. By August the rains of fall begin, with berries ripening and tinges of yellows and reds starting to show on tundra and forest plants alike.

Town/Place Name	Population	* Scheduled Air Service?
Rainy Pass Lodge	2	N
McGrath	320	Y
Ruby	180	Y
Galena	630	Y
Grayling	175	N
Unalakleet	730	Y
Koyukuk	368	N
White Mountain	224	N

*From Anchorage or Fairbanks; smaller towns require flights to regional population centers
 **smaller towns typically are served by "bed and breakfast"

“Termination dust,” new snow on the high peaks, signals the end of summer. September to November see the land lock up in a deep freeze, allowing for the use of the trails on snow and ice between Seward and Nome.

Tips for Bush Travel

Beyond the urbanized, cash-economy base of the Seward to Fairbanks railbelt lies the Alaska “Bush.” If you head out to the Iditarod Trail in the Bush, one of the many small towns along the trail will likely become a gateway to your experience. You may find that life moves at a different rhythm than you are accustomed to. Things may seemingly move slower, but that perception may result from not being present to see the intense bursts of seasonal activity in which much is accomplished.

Natural cycles such as weather, tides, the seasons, and wildlife migration are more dominant in Bush Alaska than in urban centers. Expect delays in transportation. Know that all food and fuel in rural Alaska, except locally harvested foods, have arrived by air or water. Expect higher prices on everything, and limited choices and quantities. If you know in advance that you’ll be enjoying someone’s hospitality, try to bring a gift such as fresh fruit or coffee.

Much of the lands adjacent to the trail around small towns and villages are privately owned. Cabins, camps, and mining equipment along the trail should be respected as private property and not used, unless marked as public. Historic artifacts should not be removed, as they are protected by law in order to help tell the story of life gone by.



** Lodging?	Food Store?	Points of Interest
Y	N	Historic hunting lodge on Puntilla Lake serves as a checkpoint for the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race
Y	Y	Regional population center for Upper Kuskokwim Valley. This is a gateway to the Iditarod National Historic Trail through Innoko National Wildlife Refuge, and abandoned mining towns of Innoko basin, including Iditarod, Flat, Cripple, and Diskaket. Checkpoint on the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race.
Y	Y	Small Yukon River community; checkpoint for the northern leg of Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race on even years.
Y	Y	Koyukuk Athabascan Yukon River community; checkpoint for the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race.
N	N	Yukon River community; checkpoint for the northern leg of the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race on even years.
Y	Y	Yup'ik townsite occupied since 300 A.D. Largest community between Wasilla and Nome; gateway to Kaltag Portage, Unalakleet Wild River, and Norton Sound.
N	Y	Inupiat Eskimo village, located 40 miles north of Cape Denbigh, where 6,000 to 8,000 year-old remains of man have been found. Mushers often travel across ice to reach this village.
N	Y	Eskimo Village is the western extent of trees on the Seward Peninsula.

Iditarod of Yesteryear

Following the news of gold strikes at Otter and Flat creeks, stamperders boarded steamboats at Fairbanks and followed the outgoing Yukon River ice to the Iditarod River. On June 1, 1910, the first steamer navigated up the Iditarod River to within eight miles of the Christmas Day gold strike and disgorged passengers and freight. Other steamboats soon followed and two towns quickly sprang up. By August, 2,000 people inhabited the boomtown now named Iditarod, and another 2,000 lived just over the ridge at the site of the gold discovery in a town named Flat.

Iditarod was never a gold mining town, instead it was the financial, commercial, and transportation hub for the nearby goldfields. Because it was established in the twentieth century, Iditarod enjoyed amenities not available in the nineteenth century, like telephone service and wireless communication with the outside world.



McGrath

McGrath is the largest community on the Iditarod Trail between the Alaska Range and Unalakleet on Norton Sound. Served by daily commercial air service from Anchorage and encircling a massive airfield used as a fire-fighting base in the summer, the town is a gateway to new safety cabins on some of the wildest sections of the historic trail, and to the ghost town of Iditarod.

Tochak Historic Society Museum

A gem of a museum in McGrath with one-of-a-kind artifacts and insightful displays chronicles the challenging lives of the local Native Alaskans, and the Americans who followed in their footsteps to the goldfields.

Iditarod Sled Dog Race Checkpoint

Hardcore race fans can get an up-close look at race activities as dog teams pull in to McGrath on the first Tuesday and Wednesday after the Sunday start of the race. Mushers have completed one-third of the race route at this point.

Public Cabins Provide New Refuge to Winter Travelers

Although some of the most remote and exposed segments of the Iditarod Trail lie between McGrath and the Yukon River (on the Ophir to Ruby and Ophir to Anvik segments), the trail is now a bit more hospitable with the development of sturdy log cabins at approximately 40-mile intervals. Accessible only in winter, the shelters include a wood stove, bunk space for at least six persons, and are open to all without reservation.



Gateway to Recreational Gold Mining in the Takotna-Ophir Area

Recreational miners can visit summer mining operations west of McGrath and work old tailings piles for gold nuggets, chow down in old mess halls, and bed down in old crew quarters.

Innoko National Wildlife Refuge Headquarters

A small visitor center provides information and maps on the six million-acre wetlands refuge 50 miles west of McGrath.

Iditarod Ghost Town

The remains of the town of Iditarod are accessible year-round via small floatplane or ski-plane charters operating out of McGrath. The entire townsite is now state public lands, with removal of artifacts prohibited by law.

For more information visit
<http://www.mcgrathalaska.net>



Unalakleet

A tightly packed, beachfront community inhabited for almost 2,000 years, the residents of Unalakleet still heavily rely on the bounty of Norton Sound, the Unalakleet River, and nearby uplands. The largest community on the Iditarod Trail between Wasilla and Nome, Unalakleet is served by daily commercial air service from Anchorage, and is a transportation hub for villages in eastern and southern Norton Sound.

Unalakleet National Wild River

Residents and visitors alike enjoy a rich run of king, silver, chum, and pink salmon on this wild Alaska river. Fishing lodge and guide service available, along with remote camping on upper reaches of the river.

Iditarod Sled Dog Race Checkpoint

Visitors to Unalakleet can get a taste of the wind-swept ice pack faced by mushers, and join residents in welcoming mushers as they resupply for the last 250 miles of the race.



Public Shelter Cabins

In the tradition of roadhouses and shelter cabins found along the historic Iditarod Trail, one can still enjoy the simple pleasure of backcountry lodging on this famous route. On the Johnson Pass and Crow Pass segments of the historic Iditarod, the Chugach National Forest rents public use cabins. Reservations are required. Visit www.recreation.gov

Just north of Anchorage, on the Eagle River side of the Crow Pass-Iditarod Trail, two public yurts are available for rent year-round outside the Eagle River Nature Center. Reservations are necessary. Visit www.ernc.org

Between Rainy Pass and Norton Sound, 10 public shelter cabins are found along the trail (see map pages 12-13). Accessible in winter only, the cabins do not require a reservation, although users are expected to share the cabin with other parties. Five of the cabins are maintained by the Bureau of Land Management, and five are maintained by local trail partners under permit from the State of Alaska.



Nome of Yesteryear

Nome sprang into existence almost overnight with the discovery of gold by the “three lucky Swedes” in 1898. Tens of thousands of “down on their luck” miners migrated from the played-out Yukon goldfields at Dawson, and by 1900, Nome was the largest community in the far north.

With steamship service cut-off by sea ice for six months of the year, the town quickly came to rely on the “Seward Trail” (later to be known as the Iditarod Trail) for mail and transportation “Outside”—to the Lower 48. In 1925, Nome became the center of national attention, as teams of mushers and dogs raced a curative serum across Alaska to prevent the outbreak of a diphtheria epidemic.



Nome

“Nome knows how to welcome the wanderer from the wilderness and make him altogether at home.”—HUDSON STUCK, 1914

Last Train to Nowhere—Council City and Solomon Railroad

A rich gold-strike 50 miles inland from the town of Solomon (on the Iditarod Trail) encouraged entrepreneurs to build a railroad over the tundra in 1903. A huge Norton Sound storm in 1913 washed out the tracks, stranding the engines where they can still be seen today. Road accessible, 35 miles east of Nome on the Council Highway.

Nome—Council Highway

Drive or bike a scenic 35-mile section of the historic Iditarod Trail starting in Nome and heading east along the coast of Norton Sound. The gravel road passes Cape Nome and parallels Safety Sound to the Solomon River. In the winter, the road is unplowed and becomes the Iditarod Trail; look for trail marking tripods. Great birdwatching in summer.

Carrie McLain Museum

Nome’s only museum showcases the history of the gold rush, the century old sport of sleddog racing, and the historic lifestyles of local Native people with artifacts and an extensive collection of photography.

Recreational Gold Panning

Recreational panning is allowed on the beaches east of town to the Fort Davis Roadhouse. Dress to get wet!

Swanberg’s Dredge

Within an easy walk of downtown (one mile east), this dredge operated in the 1940s and 50s, seeking gold in the relic beach ridges only a few hundred yards inland from today’s beach.

St. Joseph Church

Built in 1902, St. Joseph’s Church steeple was electrically lit at the expense of the city to serve as a beacon for miners and mushers during the darkness of winter and blizzards. The church survived the disastrous fire of 1934, and has since been relocated and restored as a community hall.

From Moose Hide Webbing to Kevlar Runners— Alaska Dog Mushing History

When Russian and then American pioneers moved into the Alaska frontier, they found a culture already greatly shaped and supported by its interaction with dogs. Alfred H. Brooks, the head of the US Geological Survey (and for whom the Brooks Range is named), wrote at the beginning of the twentieth century: “Countless generations of Alaskan natives have used the dog for transport, and he is to Alaska what the yak is to India or the llama to Peru.”



Before contact with the Russians in 1732, Inupiaq and Yup'ik peoples of the Bering Straits had already adapted their masterfully designed wood

latticed and gut-skin covered kayaks into an over-the-snow craft, minus the skin but plus ski-like runners to glide over snow when pulled by dogs. The average team was three dogs, with their master running ahead to guide their dogs between villages, fish camps, and hunting camps. Unlike today, teams were harnessed like a fan, with no leader.

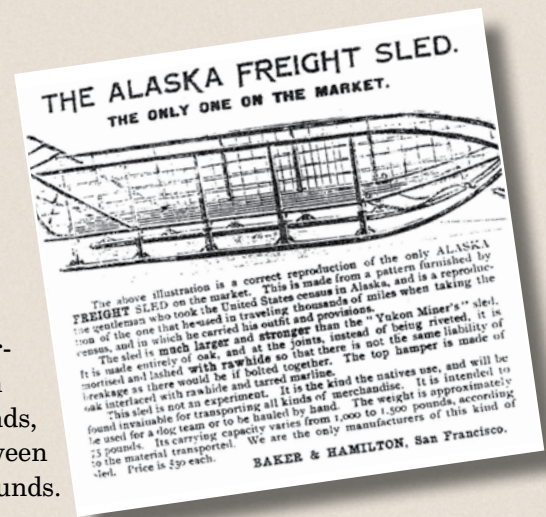
With their long distance fur-gathering forays, the Russians brought new efficiencies to dog mushing. Teams harnessed in single file or pairs were introduced, along with the concept of a lead dog that would follow voice commands and keep the team in order. Handlebars were added to sleds. Larger teams of dogs were used, with sleds sometimes carrying passengers.

Demand for dogs and sleds skyrocketed exponentially with the gold rushes to Alaska in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. During one of the big rushes it was said that no stray dogs could be found on the streets of Seattle, having all been rounded up and shipped to Alaska. Malemutes, huskies, and other breeds were mixed to haul freight and passengers.

Unlike today's relatively small and sleek long-distance racing sled dogs, the breeds of yesterday weighed in around 75 pounds, and pulled between 100 and 150 pounds.

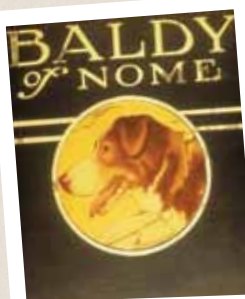
Sled designs proliferated, with manufactured sleds joining the ranks of toboggan-style handmade sleds. Most every sled at the turn of the twentieth century was equipped with a “gee pole.” The gee pole was a stout pole lashed to, and projecting from, the front of the sled, which the sled driver could use to leverage and steer the sled. Most dog drivers still did not ride the sled, instead running besides or riding skis or a sort of early snowboard between the dog team and sled. Riding the sled-runners was used only by drivers of light and fast mail and race teams.

With the replacement of the dog team for intervillage travel by the airplane, sled technology and dog breeding languished for half a century. Sprint dog racing took the forefront after World War II, until Joe Redington Sr. and others reintroduced the concept of long distance sleddog travel—this time for racing purposes. Because racing loads are minimal, smaller breeds of dogs have gotten more popular. Sleds now incorporate lightweight plastics, and a design with a mid-sled seat for the musher is becoming popular. Nonetheless, dog drivers still use commands from the mid-eighteenth century—“haw, gee”—to guide their teams on sleds that use centuries-old designs by Alaska's Native people.



The Birth of Sled Dog Racing

With the same fervor that brought gold-seekers north, ice-bound Nome residents a century ago pioneered sled dog racing as we know it today. With lots of time and dogs on their hands between the snow-free seasons, it was only natural that Nomeites started some friendly competition. The first races were short distance affairs to nearby Fort Davis or Cape Nome, but the races quickly lengthened as popularity with the sport grew.



In 1908, the Nome Kennel Club was founded to improve the care and science of dogs and sled racing. Kennels modeled after Kentucky horseracing stables developed the most effective diets, hitches, and sled materials, and prohibited dog cruelty and abandonment.



The biggest event of the year—held at the end of the racing season in April—was the 408-mile All Alaska Sweepstakes from Nome



to Candle and back. Race events featured all the pomp and ceremony of the Kentucky Derby with starting bugles, a race queen and court, and lots of betting with the gold pulled from the hills the previous summer.

Until the 1909 All Alaska Sweepstakes Race, dogs of all breeds, shapes and sizes were entered in the race. Then, a Russian trader named William Goosak entered a team of Siberian huskies. Skeptical locals initially referred to Goosak's relatively small dogs as "Siberian Rats," but after they nearly won, opinion began to change.

The next year a rich young Scotsman, Fox Maule Ramsay, went to Siberia and purchased 70 Siberian huskies. He entered three teams of the imported Huskies in the 1910 All Alaska Sweepstakes Race. Again, the Siberian huskies excelled, with Iron Man Johnson running one of the teams to a record that stood until 2008.

In the following years, perhaps the greatest dog driver ever honed his skill working and racing around Nome—Leonhard Seppala. Seppala won the Sweepstakes three years in a row with his unparalleled ability to handle and train Siberian sled dogs. Seppala and his team later became nationwide celebrities for the crucial role they played in the delivery of diphtheria serum to epidemic stricken Nome in 1925.



Leonhard Seppala





More Than A Race Trail for Dogs

Every February and March, professional and recreational racers put their minds, muscles, and machines to work on epic long-distance races on the historic Iditarod Trail.

Harkening back to the All Alaska Sweepstakes of yesteryear, the tradition was reborn with the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, now in its thirty-sixth year. On the first weekend of every March, over 80 sled dog teams line up to recreate the rush to Iditarod and beyond. With the frontrunners covering up to 100 miles a day, the winners usually arrive in Nome around ten days after the start.

Before the running of the dogs, events start every weekend in February that help “break the trail” to Nome. The second weekend of February sees the start of the world’s longest and toughest snowmobile race—the Tesoro Irondog. Traveling at speeds approaching 100 mph, racers travel from Wasilla to Nome in about three days, and then race back another three days to the finish line in Fairbanks.

On the third weekend of February, an expedition of 15 mushers with snowmobile support start at Nenana and race downriver to join the historic Iditarod Trail

at Ruby. The Serum Run 25 commemorates the courageous effort of the original dog drivers and teams responsible for bringing the life-saving diphtheria serum to Nome in 1925.

The final weekend of February sees the start of the Iditarod Trail Invitational human-powered marathon in Knik. Using modes not unknown during the heyday of the gold rush, 50 racers ski, bike, or run to McGrath (350 miles) or Nome (1,100 miles). With a minimum of support, racers are expected to be self-contained and overnight on the trail as necessary.

Typically these events are run by nonprofits and volunteers who support people getting out on the Iditarod Trail. Working to provide food, shelter or an open trail, these spirited folks help recreate the camaraderie of yesteryear on the historic Iditarod Trail.

To find out more about competitive events on the trail visit:

**www.irondog.org
www.serumrun.org
www.alaskaultrasport.com
www.iditarod.com**



Photo?

A New Century on the Iditarod

Along with celebrating the 100th anniversary of the opening of the Iditarod National Historic Trail, partners and volunteers from Seward to Nome have been building resources to increase the understanding, enjoyment, and appreciation of the old trail.

Resources for Teachers

Iditarod Trail to Every Classroom!*, or *iTREC! is a year-long series of seminars aimed at Alaska teachers interested in developing place-based, service-learning curriculum based on the variety of educational opportunities associated with the historic Iditarod.

Iditarod Trail History Mystery is a colorful site designed to engage students in solving the mysteries of the old Iditarod Trail. See http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/res/Education_in_BLM/Learning_Landscapes/For_Kids/History_Mystery.html

Resources for Trail Travelers

The State of Alaska has designated over 1,500 miles of the Iditarod Trail as permanent public access, allowing for the completion of new safety cabins along the trail. To help guide trail users between cabins and communities, volunteers and agency partners are installing modern-day tripods and safety markers along some sections of the trail.



Partners

Alaska Geographic is the official nonprofit education partner of the Iditarod Historic Trail. Our mission is to connect people to Alaska's magnificent wildlands through experiential education, award-winning books and maps, and by directly supporting the state's parks, forests, and refuges. Over the past 50 years, Alaska Geographic has donated more than \$20 million to help fund educational and interpretive programs throughout Alaska's public lands.

Alaska Geographic operates 48 bookstores across the state, including nine locations along the historic Iditarod Trail:

- Kenai Fjords National Park Visitor Center, Seward
- Begich, Boggs Visitor Center, Portage
- Chugach National Forest Ranger Station, Girdwood
- Alaska Public Lands Information Center, Anchorage
- USGS Map Store, Anchorage
- Campbell Creek Science Center, Anchorage
- Innoko National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center, McGrath
- Koyukuk/Nowitna National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center, Galena
- Bering Land Bridge National Preserve Visitor Center, Nome

Your purchases at these locations directly support Alaska's park, forests, and refuges—a portion of every sale helps fund educational and interpretive programs throughout Alaska's public lands.

To find out more, become a member, or browse our selection of Alaska books, maps, and films, stop by any Alaska Geographic bookstore or visit our website at www.alaskageographic.org



Alaska Geographic
810 East Ninth Avenue
Anchorage, AK 99501
907-274-8440 or toll-free at 866-AK-PARKS
www.alaskageographic.org

Planning Your Trip

Visit Alaska Geographic bookstores along the historic Iditarod Trail to find books, maps, films, and gifts related to the natural and cultural history of this famous trail.

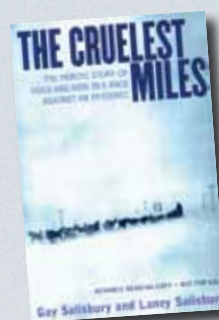


Iditarod Vol. 28, No. 4

By Alaska Geographic

The Iditarod National Historic Trail is an icon of excitement and endurance and this colorful book celebrates the race, the dogs, and the origins of the trail.

\$14.95

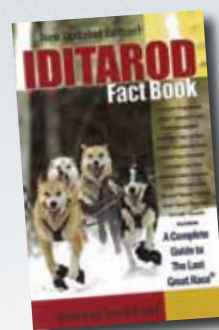


The Cruellest Miles:

By Gay and Laney Salisbury

The heroic story of dogs and men in a race against a deadly epidemic, never fully told until now.

\$14.95



Iditarod Fact Book

By Tricia Brown

This is the complete guide to the Last Great Race, including facts and figures about the mushers, dogs, sleds, volunteers, race rules, and more.

\$14.95



Kenai Trails

By Alaska Geographic

Grab your pack and head to the Kenai Peninsula to explore the rich variety of trails with this full-color, comprehensive trail guide that includes historic trails of the Iditarod.

\$7.95

Also available online at
www.alaskageographic.com

Volunteers Keep the Trail Open

Every year local groups and individuals contribute personal time, equipment, and money to improve or maintain the historic Iditarod Trail. The Iditarod Historic Trail Alliance is a nonprofit organization that supports local volunteers and communities with publications like this one, and provides grants and assistance for trail improvements. You can support these efforts and the hard work of trail volunteers by becoming a member of the Iditarod Historic Trail Alliance.

*To join or to learn more, visit
www.iditarodnationalhistorictrail.org*



For More Information

**Iditarod National
Historic Trail Program
Bureau of Land Management**
Anchorage Field Office
907-267-1246
www.blm.gov/ak

Recreation

**Alaska Public Lands
Information Center**
605 W. Fourth Ave.
Anchorage, AK
907-644-3661
www.alaskacenters.gov

Alaska Museums

Museums Alaska
www.museumsalaska.org

Visitor Centers

Begich, Boggs Visitor Center
Portage Glacier
Mile 5 Portage Hwy.
907-783-2326
www.fs.usda.gov/chugach

Eagle River Nature Center
Mile 12 Eagle River Rd.
Eagle River, AK
907-694-2108
www.ernc.org

Iditarod Race Headquarters
Mile 2.2 Knik-Goosebay Rd.
Wasilla, AK
907-376-5155
www.iditarod.com

**Innoko National Wildlife
Refuge**
McGrath, AK
907-524-3251
<http://innoko.fws.gov/itarod.htm>

Nome Visitor Center
Nome, AK
907-443-6624
www.nomealaska.org

