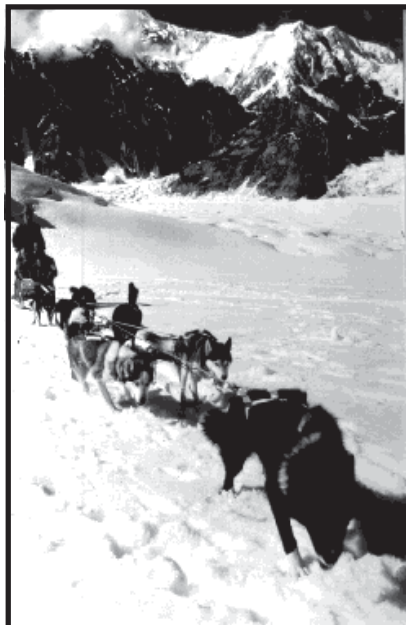


# Iditarod Sled Dog Adventure

## *INTRODUCTION*

Come experience the true essence of the Far North, traveling to remote wilderness cabins by dog sled and spending three days learning to "mush" your own team, before witnessing firsthand the indescribable "Last Great Race", the 1100 mile Iditarod Sled Dog Race from Anchorage to Nome, Alaska. After attending the Race start, we will fly by ski-equipped bush plane to a remote "roadhouse" seventy miles west along the Iditarod Trail to overnight and wait for the next day's arrival of the first teams as they navigate up the Susitna and Yentna river systems, to the official checkpoint of Skwentna. Toasty by our bonfire on the river, the succession of teams struggle in through the night, getting their first dose of the mercilessly mercurial conditions that will dictate their lives for the weeks to come. The next day it's back to Anchorage, with a visit to the chaos of Race Headquarters before good-byes in civilized comfort. This very special tour is for those that long to experience the real Alaska, and the reasons so many have chosen to call it home year around --from those that came for the gold rushes and decided not to leave, to those that still spurn the comforts of modern civilization for the adventure of frontier living. Offered only once a year, this incomparable tour by Adventure Alaska guarantees experiences that most will only read about . . .



## ABBREVIATED AGENDA

**Day 1 Anchorage-Hope:** Gear check and visit to Race Headquarters; travel by road from Anchorage through the Kenai Mountains to overnight in log cabins in the tiny end of the road gold rush village of Hope on Cook Inlet; evening mushing "intro"

**Day 2 Hope-Caribou Hills:** Morning departure for Homer on Kachemak Bay. Mushing class continuation at Outback Kachemak Kennels before before departing by dog sled for remote cabins (inaccessible by road) in the Caribou Hills above Homer

**Day 3 Caribou Hills:** Day trip from the cabins driving your own dog team if you choose (perfecting your technique), lunch and bonfire on the trail, relaxing by the woodstove, the northern lights will surely treat us to a show . . .

**Day 4 Caribou Hills-Hope:** Travel back to Homer by dog sled (you're an expert now!); return to Hope and overnight in the cabins along Bear Creek; dinner at local restaurant; pre-race briefing and footage of previous Iditarods

**Day 5 Hope-Skwentna Roadhouse:** Travel to Anchorage; attend the start (indescribable) of the Iditarod; early afternoon departure from Lake Hood by bush ski-plane for flight to a remote homestead 70 air miles northwest; dinner and overnight at historic lodge

**Day 6 Skwentna Roadhouse:** Morning explorations of the neighborhood by snowshoe or cross country skis; dinner and bonfire rendezvous on the Skwentna River as the first dog teams come through the checkpoint (northern lights . . . ?); second overnight at lodge

**Day 7 Skwentna Roadhouse-Anchorage:** Time to hang out at checkpoint; wander amongst the arriving mushers and race chaos; return flight to Anchorage and visit to bustling Race Headquarters

**7 Day / 6 Night**

**\$3745 p/person**

<i>2010 Tour Dates</i>	<i>Code</i>
March 2 - 8	7W1

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Trip cost includes all modes of transportation, lodging, meals and instruction. Supplementary arctic winter gear is supplied by Adventure Alaska with suggestions as to personal clothing sent upon deposit. Accommodations range from log cabins to very "Alaskan" (part of the experience!). Weather and conditions can necessitate last minute changes in the above itinerary. Alcoholic beverages and gratuities to guides not included. Group size limited to 12 persons.



## *Expanded Itinerary* **7-Day Iditarod Sled Dog Race Adventure**

**Day 1** Our adventure starts at 9AM, meeting in downtown Anchorage at your previously arranged B&B or hotel. Here we'll make a quick check of gear. We'll then make a stop if necessary at REI, an outdoor gear supplier, if anyone decides that they might need additional items. Before we head out of town, we'll make a stop at the Millennium Hotel, the official headquarters of the Iditarod Race. Located on the edge of Lake Hood, the world's largest seaplane base in summer and home to many that equip their planes with skis and operate from there in the winter. As things build toward the Race several days away, preparations are evident as the phone banks are installed, radio communications set up and of course the Official Iditarod Store doing a brisk business. Afterwards we'll head out of town hugging the edge of the Turnagain Arm, between the Chugach Mountains and the sea. Crossing Turnagain Pass in the Kenai Mountains we'll take the 16 mile cutoff to the tiny end-of-the-road town of Hope. The oldest gold rush town in Alaska, (far older than Anchorage) this sleepy little village of 150 souls still has a definite frontier flavor with most of the buildings of log, from the old Social Hall still used for weddings and most town functions to the old church. We'll overnight here in log cabins overlooking Bear Creek and after dinner, have our first introduction to mushing.

**Day 2** After an early breakfast we'll head through the Kenai Mountains and along Cook Inlet to Homer, overlooking beautiful Kachemak Bay. After a scrumptious lunch at a local eatery, we'll drive on out to the end of East End Road where we'll meet Jason & Kelly, owners of Kachemak Kennels overlooking the Bay. Starting off with a "briefing" and some additional tips for the trail, we'll meet the other assistant mushers and the vocal crew of dogs out back, as ready to hit the trail as we are. It takes a bit to load everything and ready the sleds, so you'll be pressed into service immediately, helping to harness the dogs and keep them from heading down the trail without us. Our gear will travel to the lodge on sleds pulled by snowmachine, or "iron dog" as they have come to be known, since in many places it is now a vital means of winter transport. Then with magnificent glacier views, it's over the snow covered muskeg and frozen lakes to the remote cabins we'll call "home" for the next two nights, taking turns driving the teams while the others glide along the trail in the sled basket. We arrive by dinner time, welcomed heartily by our hosts and a wonderful home cooked meal. After dinner, those inclined may assist the mushers with dog care or just relax by the bonfire. Later that evening the northern lights will surely see their way fit to give us a display.

**Day 3** With a hearty breakfast in the belly, harnessing up the dogs begins to feel like a natural part of a day's routine (the Call of the Wild is not species specific...). Then it's off down the trail taking turns driving your own team as we snake through the Boxcar Hills, over Caribou Lake and further into the Caribou Hills. Exploring a glacial valley, we'll stop frequently to examine stories told by the animal tracks in the snow and some of the other seasonal phenomena that are hard to put into words when someone asks, incredulously, why one would enjoy winter. Lunch is on the trail wherever the urge hits, gathered around a warming fire should things get chilly. Then we're off again for more mushing before heading back to the homestead for another wonderful meal. The northern lights will have an opportunity to either top their previous night's performance, or make amends for a no-show.

**Day 4** A send-off breakfast, possibly with local goodies will get us ready for the trail back... hitching up the teams and mushing giving you the thought that maybe you could easily get used to a life of... someday, maybe... After early afternoon good-byes to new friends, both two and four-legged, we'll head back into Homer

before retracing the road back to Hope. Dinner is at nearby Tito's Discovery Cafe before an evening briefing on the Iditarod itself via video, at Discovery Cabins on Bear Creek.

**Day 5** Breakfast is early to hit the road and get to the Race start in downtown Anchorage. The start has an atmosphere all its own as literally thousands of dogs and people are crowded into a tiny area, all focused on the event that for many, is the experience of a lifetime. You'll have lots of vantage points for great pictures or just plain gawking. The perennial contenders have their own professional determination while many others are participating for the first time, though every one of the mushers, spouses, and handlers are concentrating on the grueling and perilous 1100 miles of wilderness ahead. After watching the teams be released at two-minute intervals and taking probably dozens of photos, we'll head to Lake Hood, to board our bush ski-planes for the 70 mile trip to the remote Skwentna Roadhouse on the Skwentna River, just a few hundred yards from the first official Iditarod Race Checkpoint. Landing on a tiny airstrip here you'll see how folks live far from roads and the rest of the world. Dinner is of course sumptuous, after exploring a bit about the neighborhood on snowshoes or skis.

**Day 6** A great breakfast makes the morning leisurely, with plenty of time to relax by the woodstove, or catch up on your journal. If the weather is clear, Mt. McKinley, North America's tallest mountain should give proof just to the north. In the afternoon we'll wander over to the checkpoint to watch the dozens of Iditarod volunteers busy about preparations, as the dog teams race our direction. After dinner, we'll bundle up and head out by foot or snowmachine to the river bonfire and await the first dog teams, straining our eyes in the darkness for the first glimpse of a bobbing headlamp in the distance. After a short while the checkpoint will be buzzing with dozens of dog teams and mushers, meticulously checking their dogs over, before tending to their own needs. It is evident here the experience of each musher in their efficiency in checking each dog, feeding the team and bedding it down as well as themselves, in preparation for the days and days of sleepless trail ahead. It is a scene that is difficult to put into words and one that will stay with you long afterwards. Hopefully the northern lights will grace us and lead us back to our cozy homestead, with thoughts no doubt of those on the trail, the sled bag their only accommodations.

**Day 7** After breakfast we'll bundle up and head back out to the checkpoint to see who remains; some teams strategically resting, others in despair contemplating the end of their Iditarod dreams. Though weary, the former are often quite congenial and open to chatting about their experience thus far. Lunch is back at the Roadhouse and afterwards we'll await the arrival of our bushplane ride back to Anchorage and civilization, though not without a different appreciation for the unique world of the arctic winter and the people and passions that are so much a part of it. Stopping in at the Iditarod Headquarters for a musher update, your mind might wander to how, that while in so many ways the world has changed, in some ways and places it hasn't much at all. And now, though the trip is officially over, those staying the night might want to get together for a culminating dinner and do a bit of reminiscing...



## *Client Pre-Trip Information*

### *7-Day Iditarod Sled Dog Race Adventure*

#### **Accessibility/Fitness**

This is a participatory winter trip and though not overly strenuous, clients should be moderately physically fit and not averse to cold temperatures as this is an arctic environment. Clients are provided supplementary arctic clothing and boots, and while comfort is our overriding concern, by nature of our activities we will be outdoors a considerable amount of time, and temperature is a very definite factor. Dog mushing in these circumstances is not overly strenuous, though some of the optional activities such as cross country skiing and snowshoeing can be if pursued vigorously. We will also be traveling by bush plane to and from the Skwentna Roadhouse Lodge, and those apprehensive about small plane travel will want to take this into account.

#### **Weather/Temperatures**

Always a subject of great interest and occasionally, a few choice words. By early March, Old Man Winter has just begun loosening his hold on things, but has been known to come back with a good swipe or two, to remind us just why bananas don't grow very well here. Temperatures could be in the upper thirties, or, they could be minus thirty. Most typical would be from ten to 25 degrees Fahrenheit, generally being much milder near Homer and the ocean where we will be mushing, and potentially colder at the remote interior lodge, with the coldest being during the often cloudless nights. Being well prepared is of course the key, allowing one to enjoy why winter is actually the favorite season of many. Even if these temperatures seem beyond comprehension, you'll be surprised what good equipment will do for you, though we promise that you won't win any fashion contests. Weather is of course a factor in the flying portions of the trip, and it is advisable to allow an extra day in Anchorage in case of possible delays. Besides, when was the last time you had being trapped in a remote winter cabin in Alaska as an excuse . . .

#### **Clothing/Equipment**

Because this is a winter trip and due to the fact that conditions this time of year can on occasion be severe, personal clothing should be chosen very carefully to ensure comfort. Adventure Alaska will provide you with the supplementary arctic outer wear to complement the basic clothing that you probably already have, or might need to supply. We provide the following: arctic coveralls (very stylish!) for the very coldest weather; arctic pak boots for the feet; arctic mittens; and a cold weather hat. Items that you will need to supply include the following:

**Clothing:** Two to three changes of warm but versatile clothing are recommended (please refer to luggage restrictions in a separate section) which can be layered if needed. This is a time to throw thoughts of fashion to the wind and consider above all else, the function of each item. Besides, if your stylish in the Bush in winter, you'll stick out like a sore (and cold!) thumb. Relatively loose clothing is warmer than skin tight, with wool or polypropylene pile pants and sweaters ideal. Long underwear should be of medium weight and preferably polypropylene. Several pairs (to allow for changes) of heavy wool and/or polypro socks will help keep your feet happy, and work best if layered.

**Outerwear:** A good, warm winter jacket is a must, with down and some of the synthetics having the best warmth-to-weight ratio. This, coupled with sweaters or pullovers and other clothing, should be sufficient and allow needed flexibility for most of our activities, with the coveralls handy for those times when it is colder or we are inactive. A medium weight hat or stocking cap that covers the ears is a must as well as a pair or two of medium weight gloves; an additional scarf is also preferred by many.

**Footwear:** Sorel-style arctic pak boots are provided for each participant if needed for our outdoor activities (please specify men's shoe size in advance). If you already have your own they probably fit well and you should consider bringing them. Those subject to chronically cold feet (and hands) might want to consider a supply of the disposable chemical heat packets sold at many sporting goods stores. Footwear for indoors and travel should be comfortable and warm, many preferring to throw in an additional pair of down booties or slippers to lounge around in.



## Client Pre-Trip Information - cont. 7-Day Iditarod Sled Dog Race Adventure

**Sleeping "Equipment":** Most prefer to sleep in their long underwear as opposed to pajamas (after all, you want to dress the part).

**Miscellaneous:** A good flashlight or headlamp is important; water bottle (quart); sunglasses (UV cutting); camera. Earplugs are also helpful, as individual bedtimes and noise levels can vary considerably.

### Luggage

Soft-sided suitcases or duffel bags are preferred. As dog sleds and small airplanes have limited space, total amount of personal gear for the trip should not fill more than approximately two standard grocery sacks (four cubic feet); suitcases, extra clothing, etc., can be stored in Anchorage during the trip. A small daypack is recommended for in the van and on the dogsled, for items you might want handy.

### Accommodations

**Accommodations:** Include a remote homestead with several bedrooms and out-cabins, log cabins in Hope and the Roadhouse on the river. All established facilities are set up for double occupancy but the remote sites will sometimes necessitate more of a "slumber party" approach, flexibility being the rule in the Bush. Bathroom facilities at the remote locations are "rustic", sometimes of the tried and true, non-running water type (part of the experience!).

### Legal Requirements

**Insurance:** Health: Adventure Alaska cannot require participants to provide proof of insurance but it is more than strongly recommended to retain and review your personal policy; NOTE: Adventure Alaska cannot be expected to and will not assume payment liability for medical care or treatment of any kind. Traveler's: It is likewise strongly urged to carry traveler's insurance in case you have to cancel or cut short your trip for any reason as the cancellation policy is quite strict. Or, though remote, the possibility exists also of a delay in our return to Anchorage on the last day due to weather. Cancellation of activities or additional costs incurred due to weather or safety concerns will not necessarily result in refund for that segment, and may require additional payment.

### Pre/Post-Trip Lodging

Many types are available in Anchorage as are independent extensions after the trip. Please advise us well in advance so that we are able to guarantee suitable accommodations. Do remember that the bush plane flight to and from the Skwentna area is dependant on the vagaries of weather—at least a day should be left open at the end of the trip before unchangeable travel arrangements.

### Suggested Reading

The Far North is a story teller's dream of history, wildness, and people. Each client's appreciation will be immeasurably heightened by gaining some background beforehand of Alaska and the areas visited, as well as detailed information on the history of sled dogs and mushing. A wide selection of books and information is available from Alaska Geographic: 810 E 9th Ave, Anchorage, AK 99501; (866) 257-2757; [www.alaskageographic.org](http://www.alaskageographic.org) and also from our local bookseller, Title Wave Books, in Anchorage - [www.wavebooks.com](http://www.wavebooks.com); 907-278-9283. Also, the Iditarod's official website - [www.Iditarod.com](http://www.Iditarod.com) - has a book list which is quite extensive.