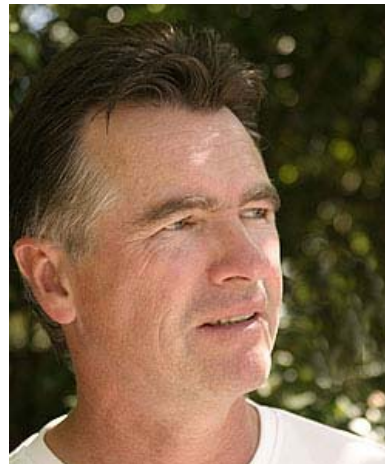


## Rich Montagna, Smithsonian Study Leader 2010

Rich Montagna is a professional photographer and tour guide with over 30 years experience exploring and photographing the Alaskan frontier. He has a degree in Natural Resource Management from the University of Alaska Fairbanks and later studied commercial photography at several institutions. For a number of years Rich was involved with Alaska Native Land Claim issues and resource management, working with Native groups from the Alaskan interior. He spent much of the last 25 years living in the village of McGrath, one of the remote checkpoints along the Iditarod Trail, and started one of the 1st companies to offer tours of the Iditarod Sled Dog Race. This will be his 13th year leading an Iditarod tour and he looks forward to sharing his knowledge and experiences of "The Last Great Race."



### Questions & Answers with Rich Montagna 2009

#### **Q: What is unique about the Iditarod race and what does it mean to Alaskans?**

A: There really isn't another event in North America that pits man and dog together against such harsh conditions as a dog sled race across the Alaskan wilderness. The Iditarod was the first race to do this and was started by a small group of mushing enthusiasts who wanted to bring mushing back into the villages. From that start it has grown into the world famous event it is now. Alaskans consider it to be the greatest adventure sporting event in the world and it is their own.

#### **Q: The first Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race was run in 1973. How did the Iditarod Race become the "The Last Great Race on Earth"?**

A: In 1978 a British reporter named Ian Woolridge, wrote an article about the race. In the article he used the words, "The Last Great Race on Earth" to explain his thoughts and observations about the race. Later the Iditarod committee got permission from Ian to trademark the term.

#### **Q: Thousand of fans and volunteers from all over the world return each year for the Race. Why does the Iditarod continue to draw an international audience?**

A: Well people love dogs, and the excitement of the thousand or so frenzied sled dogs at the start is quite the experience. People also love adventure and I think many vicariously experience the challenges and rewards of traveling through wilderness areas of Alaska on a dog sled by following the race and getting to know the mushers and what they endure along the trail. It has to be one of the greatest adventures in North America.

#### **Q: What kind of dogs race the Iditarod?**

A: Most Iditarod sled dogs are Alaskan Huskies, a mix of different breeds that have been selected to optimize their ability to pull a sled over a long distance at a fast trot. At the core of mix is the Siberian Husky, a working dog who was born to run and pull and is well suited to the arctic climate. Other breeds that have been mixed in include hounds, greyhounds, whippets, labs and others. These mixed breed dogs have now developed into lines of dogs that have their own pedigree.

#### **Q: How are the dogs cared for along the race route?**

A: First off each dog has a computer chip inserted under its skin that is scanned at the checkpoints for identification. At the checkpoint veterinarians will check each dog for general health, sore feet, injuries and dehydration. The vet has the authority to pull a dog from the team if they feel it is unfit to continue. Along the trail the mushers rest and snack their dogs usually every few hours or so, check feet, change booties if they need to and make sure the dogs get enough calories and water to keep them going. At the checkpoints the dogs have straw to lay on and are always watered fed and looked after before the mushers takes care of themselves.

#### **Q: What happens to a dog if it gets hurt while on the trail?**

A: The musher will put the injured dog into the sled bag that is on the sled and carry it to the next checkpoint where the vet will examine and treat the dog. If the dog has to be dropped from the team it will be flown back into Anchorage and taken to an animal hospital if needed or to the dropped dog lot at the Eagle Correctional Institute where the inmates care for them until they are picked up.

**Q: All of the dogs are extreme athletes. How many calories does a dog typically consume per day?**

A: During the race their average consumption is about 10,000 per day.

**Q: What got you into leading groups to the Iditarod Race and why do you continue year after year?**

A: I had lived for a number of years in the McGrath checkpoint on the Kuskokwim River and saw how much friends of mine who came to watch the race enjoyed mingling with the mushers, being volunteers and feeling like they were a part of the event. So I started a tour company that gave the clients as much of the Iditarod race experience as I could. Some of my clients tell me their Iditarod tour has been one of the best experiences they have ever had and I thoroughly enjoy the time I spend with my clients making sure they get the most from their Iditarod adventure.

**Q: The Iditarod Race is almost fully run by volunteers. What volunteer opportunities are there for Smithsonian Journeys travelers?**

A: The Smithsonian Journeys travelers will be able to go through the Iditarod dog handler certification training if they choose and then be able to help bring the dog teams up to the starting line at the restart in Willow. They can also choose to work security at the race starts.

**Q: You're also a photographer. Do you have any tips of advice on shooting the dogs during the race?**

A: I have a series of shots that I tend to do each race. In the early morning I wander through the starting area photographing the dog teams in their boxes or being pulled out and hooked up. This is also a great time to get close-up photos of the mushers. I use a wide angle (12-24mm) telephoto lens and a mid length (28-105mm) telephoto lens. I also bring a flash unit. After the race starts I go to the end of the road at the 1st turn and use a long lens (200mm or longer ) to photograph the teams coming at me and taking the corner. On Sunday I do the same thing at the restart in Willow.

[Contact Us](#) | [Press](#) | [About Us](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [FAQ](#) | [Site Map](#)

