



April Newsletter Tagish Lake Kennel

Happy spring to you all! The swans have arrived here at Tagish Lake and that signals an end to our sledding season. We see incredible bird life this time of year and sadly we know now it is time to say goodbye to our sleds and look forward to the new busy summer tour season.



Thank you to you all that contributed to our successful year! It takes many to create a championship team and you were a large

part of that team. From all the support and love we felt confident moving forward with the best team we have ever had.



The spring has been a busy time after the races have ended with many tours down the lake and getting also ready for our second season at Tutshi Sled Dog tours. I wanted to recap the Yukon Quest race and include a journal of the Iditarod for all of you.

Yukon Quest 2017

My Yukon Quest 300 went fabulous. The temperatures at the start were fairly chilly but great for sled dogs. The whole race the temps went anywhere from minus 20 to minus 40. The minus 40 can be tough on the mushers but the dogs thrive at the colder temperatures between -20 to minus -30.

We got Ed and his dynamic team out of the chute with the help of many folks. After Ed's team had departed it was my turn to leave later in the afternoon. I was so happy to have gotten Ed off down the trail that I didn't have much time to be nervous.

The run to Braeburn went really well, there was a super crazy downhill that was part of a reroute at mile 14 of the start of the race but I managed to only have one good wipe out! The trail the rest of the way to Braeburn was very hard and fast. I had one foot on the drag the entire way and stopped and camped for a few hours about half way to Braeburn.

Arriving into Braeburn there was lots of excitement. Many Quest teams were there and I was happy to see Ed and his team. The dogs

looked good and all bedded down really well on the straw and all had a really good dinner. I had a small meal (still had the race jitters) and went into the bunkhouse and immediately fell asleep! Waking up after an hour and a half was a real challenge but I forced myself up, went and had a coffee then went out to my team and started getting ready for the next leg of our journey.

The next run goes from Braeburn to Carmacks. It is a very crazy run with lots of ups and downs, twists, lake crossings and make sure you don't fall asleep hills! I had over fed my team at Braeburn and they started off a bit sluggish. Temperatures had dropped and I wanted the team to snack every 2 hours to keep their energy up for this 75 mile run. After a few hours their dinners burned off and the team started eating again. We had a great run to Carmacks and arrived with a beautiful team and declared our 6 hour mandatory stop.

Leaving Carmacks the temperatures had dropped but the team was much energised. I pulled my hood tight and pulled the hook and headed off into the night. It was great run travelling up the Freegold Road then turning off and following the old Dawson trail, we crossed the jumble ice three times before McCabe. At one point, I was flipped in the rough ice and lost my team! Luckily the sled flipped on its side and I was able to catch them after about 100 metres. I took my big mittens off for the next two crossings so that wouldn't happen to me again! That really had my nerves on edge!

I had caught up to Ed at Mc Cabe and he was just getting ready to leave as I arrived. It was the worse time of night to run dogs, about 3 am at about minus 35 and he was a bit grouchy! His team looked super solid leaving though! I quickly went about my chores then went in to the shop to enjoy some hot soup and homemade bread and a short cat nap. Gerry woke me up after a 30 minute sleep and I struggled to get up off the warm mattress. I slurped down a coffee and gave myself a mental kick in the butt the headed out to booty

the team. The next section was a cold run for me but the dogs rocked it into Pelly. I struggled to stay awake and tried to keep kicking to keep warm and stay awake.

It was early morning when I arrived and it didn't appear anyone expected me! I got the team parked and put straw down right away. The team curled up and then enjoyed a nice hot meal. I watched my watch for the next team in the decided how long I would stay. Aliy Zirkle turned out to be a ways behind me so I decided to stay 5 hours and give the dogs a good rest for our last run.

The last run took us down the Pelly farm road on to the Pelly River to Stepping Stone then back on the Pelly farm Road. This would be more of a mental challenge for the dogs so I kept it upbeat as we travelled along the trail. It was a hard run as there were many hills but I was impressed with my group. It was tough to go through Stepping Stone with all the signs of burritos, hot soup, cinnamon buns etc!

Arriving in to Pelly we came in first with a terrific group of dogs! I was so happy to have such a great group of dogs at the finish and many people were there to cheer our team on and offer congrats. Afterwards at the awards ceremony I was given the vets choice award and I felt my heart would burst!

After the YQ 300 I caught some sleep at my good friend's Sandra's house in Pelly then travelled to Dawson to welcome Ed and the team in. Judy and Josh had gone the day before to put up our camp in the Dawson campground and get ready for the 36 hour layover.

Ed arrived really late in the night and was really tired. I mushed the team over the campground. I felt bad for the team as the ice road to the campground this year was 5 miles long and took the dogs back towards where they came back in from. A few of the dogs looked back at me as if to say "are you crazy?" I kept reassuring them we

would be at a cozy camp soon and finally after what seemed an eternity we arrived at the campground. Josh and Judy greeted the team and we hustled to get their coats, booties and harnesses off then a big warm meal in the bellies and some great cuddles and massages.

The time in Dawson went quickly; I stayed at the camp the whole time and focused on dog care. Ed had one sleep in Dawson then spent the remainder of the time at the camp. Judy and Josh were a great help and Ed's team was in great shape when he left. He decided to drop Dojo as he had been sick and had lost too much weight.



After Ed and the team had left, I headed back to 10 mile to pick up my Iditarod food drops to take to Fairbanks. I visited with our dogs and Ingabritt then hit the road early for the 16 hour drive to Circle, Alaska.

The drive went pretty well until just past Canada customs by Beaver Creek I heard a thud. I pulled over quickly then looked out and realised I had lost the bearing on my trailer and had no tire on

the axle anymore! I called Carmen in Beaver Creek so she could send me the number of the towing company then transferred all my drop bags (all 1800 lbs of them) into the back of my truck. It was a tight fit! I pulled the trailer to the side of the road made a call to the towing company then headed towards Fairbanks! Huge thank you to Spike and Lindy for helping me fix this problem. Spike located all the parts in Fairbanks got them for me and spoke with the mechanic.

I kept watching the tracker as Ed left Dawson and noticed that speeds had really dropped off. It seemed that the cold weather had arrived and it was making it very slow trail! I saw a video of his team pulling in to Eagle and they looked good.

After Eagle the trail looked even slower, I heard temperatures had dropped to 50 below at night and teams were travelling at slow speeds. I went and visited my good friend Jodi Bailey and ended up staying the night then leaving early in the morning to head on the windy road to Circle. It was below 40 when I reached Circle and the mushers arriving looked cold. Ed's team arrived in to Circle and he was suffering from some food poisoning but his team looked solid. He quickly went about his chores and then headed in for a well deserved gourmet meal at the Circle fire hall. After a solid break he headed down Birch Creek towards Central.

He didn't have a great run to Circle and stopped for a break at Cochrane's cabin on Birch Creek. Arriving into Central he decided to drop Mac and Splash. Splash had some tendonitis and Mac was tired and had lost too much weight in the cold weather.

Next obstacle was Eagle Summit and his team left Central looking great. They did a great job all the way up to the climb then Ed said they just seemed tired and he ended up having to walk in front of the team the whole way up. He had hoped to catch Allen Moore on this stretch but it didn't work out that way and he ended up taking a break at 101 before heading to the last checkpoint at Two Rivers.

Reaching Two Rivers he took his mandatory 8 hour break and enjoyed a huge meal and finally had a good sleep. The team left Two Rivers looking great and he had a great run to Fairbanks. Arriving in the middle of the night I was waiting to greet the team and give them huge hugs and treats.

After a few days relaxing in Fairbanks and getting some solid R&R we headed back home to rest before the next big adventure!

At home I spent a lot of time feeding the dogs and doing short runs to stretch them out. Ed had done a fabulous job taking care of the dogs and they were in excellent shape. It was a hard choice to decide which 16 I would take on the race. I eventually settled on 18 for the team and we decided we would make our final picks in Fairbanks.

Iditarod 2017

The Iditarod route had been changed because of the low snow in key areas and also a lack of freezing on certain rivers. Ed decided he would skidoo the Iditarod trail with our good friend Tom Huntington. The trail would be much easier to travel by snow machine without the gorge and the burn to travel through.

Josh had returned to the kennel to help again for a few months and he came up with us to help Ed care for the dogs while I did all the pre race meetings and city stuff. They stayed at a small cabin in Willow called the Eagle Quest Lodge and had a great time running the dogs out on the Iditarod trail there.

Spike graciously had gotten me a room at the Millennium Hotel so I was very lucky to be able to relax and focus on my race plans. I met my Iditarider Tiffany, who was such a sweet young girl and her family.

First big event of the Iditarod is the start banquet and I drew number 9! I was super happy to have a great number! The banquet

was a lot of fun and it was nice to reconnect with old friends again at the dinner.

Ed and Josh brought the dogs in on Friday and we got ready for our next big event which would be the ceremonial start. It was a chilly morning in Anchorage and the dogs were absolutely crazy to go. Tiffany only weighed probably 60 lbs so I decided that we would put Kelly, a close friend in the tag sled with Doug steering. We always have a tag sled for the ceremonial start in case of any problems with the dogs. It's always super exciting to run the dogs through downtown Anchorage!

After the ceremonial start we went for a giant brunch then headed back to Willow and Eagle Quest Lodge to relax before the big drive to Fairbanks. Early in the morning we awoke and headed to Fairbanks. It was a beautiful clear day and we were lucky enough to see Denali on the drive. Arriving in Fairbanks Ed went to do some shopping for his big adventure and I spent some time checking out my gear. That night it was tough to sleep and I spent a lot of the night rolling around in my bed!

Sure enough we woke to cold temperatures again and it was at least minus 35 when we went down to drop the dogs and give them a warm breakfast.

We drove to the race start and hung out in the truck for a bit before we had to work in the cold temperatures. The sun was rising in the sky and temperatures starting warm fairly quickly. There was lots of hustle and bustle and we all worked to get my gear packed and have the dog's harnessed and ready for race start.

There were some tense moments as we went up to the start line I lost a lot of my volunteers but luckily I had some veteran helpers that held on and didn't let the team get away! I gave Ed a big hug then it was my turn in the chute and before I knew it was my time to head off once again down the Iditarod trail. Viper tripped and

ended up dragging for a few moments before he could get up on his feet. This worried me but he was super happy once he got up and heading down the trail.

It was a beautiful run to Nenana. The trail was pretty solid and all on the river so you could really just cruise along and enjoy the sunshine and the amazing views. Tears filled my eyes and I watched my team run and how proud I was of this team and how lucky I felt to be able to experience this magical trail once again with such a talented group of athletes.

Pulling in to Nenana, Ed, Josh, Spike and Doug were there to greet me. They had great parking set up on the river and my team settled in fairly quickly once I had their straw down and their meal made. I had Debbie, the vet check out Viper and gave him an extra massage and some arnica in case he had some stiff muscles.

Next stretch went through a fun trail towards Manley. I wanted to run to Tolvana Roadhouse before I took a break and with temperatures dropping I decided I would prefer to camp inside then sleep out on my sled. It was another great run but a very intense ride. There were so many teams moving quickly down the trail if you stopped for too long another team was right behind you and I had to really hustle to put booties on and snack so I wouldn't create a traffic jam. The snow was very deep on the sides of the trail so it was impossible to just go around the team through the fresh snow.

Tolvana Roadhouse was a busy spot! So many teams were there but the owners did a remarkable job parking everyone. What a great spot the old roadhouse was and they had a big barrel stove roaring, fresh water for mushers, river water for dogs and cozy bunks to nap in!

After a good break the dogs rolled out of the roadhouse. I spent the next few hours with my foot heavy on the drag keeping the dogs at a trot. Viper still concerned me a bit but he snacked at each stop and

was always barking to go! We reached Manley and just picked up some supplies from our food drops and headed back on to the river. The team wasn't thrilled at not stopping at the checkpoint and took a bit of time to get there steady trot back in to place. We travelled until lunchtime then I pulled over to the side of the trail and put the straw down so the dogs could enjoy their afternoon nap in the sunshine. I also pulled out my sleeping bag and had a great nap lying in the sun with the dogs.

The trail continued along the river until we reached the village of Tanana. It was a fairly short run to Tanana but with the temperatures dropping my toes were really cold and the boots I had purchased from Cabelas seemed to be different than my old pair and were freezing up very quickly!

The dogs were excited running through Tanana and again I had two feet on the drag trying to keep them at a trot through the village until we reached the checkpoint. It was another super busy checkpoint and it was a long walk to get the water and the gear. One good point about my spot was it was right on the outgoing trail so I could easily get back on to the river.

The next run saw temperatures dropping to 50 below. My team was just crazy though and were barking the entire run. It was like running a giant party down the trail. I had to constantly pump to keep my feet warm and kept moving around to keep the blood flowing. By mid morning the sun had risen in the sky and was heating things up. We parked on the side of the trail in the sun and enjoyed our afternoon nap after a nice warm meal.

The next run was one of those long slow runs. Viper was sore so I had to pack him in my sled and it was a very soft trail all the way to Ruby. It was super slow and really sugary snow. Finally after what seemed an eternity we arrived in Ruby. I decided my team needed their 8 hour layover and turned Viper over to the vets. I gave him a

big hug and told him he would be in good hands and have a good adventure.

After our 8 hour break we went back on the Yukon River to Galena. Tacoma after Viper left seemed very down. He kept looking for Viper and once I arrived in Galena I decided I shouldn't risk it and I would also drop Tacoma. Tacoma is Viper's brother and best friend. I found out later that Tacoma had a fever so perhaps he was catching the bug that was travelling around.

The team did great stopping for a few short moments in Galena picking up more supplies then heading on to our next destination of Huslia. I followed Jessie Royer's team out of the checkpoint and they all seemed very upbeat. After awhile we pulled over on the trail and took a break.

I enjoyed the beautiful trail to Huslia. It travels through some rugged remote country and I was really struggling to stay awake the last couple of hours in to Huslia. I kept closing my eyes then had a few knee buckling moments. Eventually I saw the signs welcoming us in to Huslia and the dog's smelled the smoke from the village and we rolled on into the town of Huslia.

I declared my 24 hour layover as I signed in to Huslia and hustled to get all my chores done and my dogs resting so they could make the most out of this big break. It took me a couple of hours to get the team all settled, coats on, bellies full and a solid massage. I had the vet team go through the team and let me know any issues I might have. Dojo wasn't eating too well and had some diarrhea. They had cots in the church for us to lie down on and a big feast in the community hall. I enjoyed a big meal then went to sleep for a few hours then pulled myself out of my sleeping bag and went out to feed my dogs again. I followed this schedule for the rest of the layover, eat, sleep then wake up, feed my dogs, massage them and walk them. I enjoyed some great rest in Huslia and loved the energy

of this amazing little mushing village that had produced so many incredible mushers and sled dogs.

It was sad to bid good bye to the town of Huslia and head back out on the trail. The whole team looked solid but Dojo was still sick and not eating well. At the next checkpoint of Koyukuk I decided it would better to drop Dojo. A cold started creeping up on me in the next section and I was so thankful that when I went through Nulato I saw Dr. Debbie again and she ran and gave me a great cold remedy which really helped keep it at bay for a couple days. The run from Nulato to Kaltag was a great run, with the moon high in the sky and the team really trotting at a solid pace.

Kaltag often is a hard spot for me, mentally so I decided to take 5 ½ hours there. The sun was high in the sky it was very warm and this can be a tough overland run to the coast. It was tough to get the team going in the sunshine but once the sun started falling in the sky their tempo increased. I ran to just 20 miles outside of Unalakleet. I pulled over on the side of the trail and the temperatures sure dropped. Shivering I lay in my bag for a couple of hours trying to sleep. I was half frozen as I went about booting the dogs for our next section.

My next run reached the beautiful town of Unalakleet and our first view of the coast. Unalakleet sure must be a tough place to live but it is such a welcoming place and the villagers are so wonderful! I was sad to just go straight through but it was in my plan so I hustled to get my sled packed then headed out after about 20 minutes.

The dogs did really well leaving Unalakleet. It is often glare ice with little snow and my leaders did a fabulous job steering us around the obstacles and listening well. We travelled up through the Blueberry Hills and enjoyed the majestic views of the coast from up in the mountains. We dropped back on to the ice and ran down to

Shaktoolik and I think this might have been the first time in the last 8 years I wasn't blown off the trail.

Sunshine greeted us in Shaktoolik and it was remarkably calm! The dogs nestled in on their straw beds and enjoyed the afternoon sunshine. I took a good break there then headed across the Bering Sea to Koyuk. The run over on the sea ice is often slow and there was a head wind as usual during this crossing. Once we were about 10 miles outside of Koyuk the wind really started blowing and by the time we reached Koyuk it was blowing at about 40 mph.

It was another 5 hour break in Koyuk before we headed to Elim. The winds had increased and we knew it could be a challenging run to Elim. The dogs did a great job leaving Koyuk and we kept a steady pace all the way to Elim. Once in Elim I wanted to stay only a short while and this is where the dogs were not happy leaving. Leaving Elim we travelled through the mountains and the dogs struggled up the hills in the warm sunshine. Just before the last couple of climbs I pulled over and decided to give the dogs an afternoon nap in the sunshine. This revived their spirits and once we got rolling again they blasted through Golovin. This made me so happy after the problems I had had in Golovin last year and the dog's didn't even glance at the container we had camped so long by last year!



Once on Golovin Bay the winds really starting picking up and it howled all the way in to the checkpoint. I was happy to have another warm meal in the dogs and their coats on so they could really rest for their mandatory 8 hour break.

That 8 hour break flew by quickly and I was excited to booty the dogs for our last leg of our race! The winds had started howling and it was tough to stay upright on the side hills through the Topkok Hills. Dropping down in to the blowhole I was lucky the winds had calmed a bit and it wasn't too bad through that stretch.

I quickly signed in and out of Safety then headed towards our last big obstacle of Cape Nome. The dogs once again struggled up this big climb and I ended up walking in front of the team once again. Once they saw the lights of Nome the dogs were super excited. We had a great run down Cape Nome and in to Nome! The sun was shining it was an incredible beautiful day.

Ed and Spike were there to greet me at the finish line! I was so proud of my team! I had finally reached one of my goals and learned so much about myself and my team along the way. Right away I knew I had to come back for the 2018 Iditarod. Our young team was starting to gel and I had learned so much plus had learned some new training techniques that I would work on the following year to make our team even stronger.

After a couple of days Ed flew to Anchorage with the dogs so they could recover in a warmer climate. I stayed in Nome until the finish banquet. My heart filled with pride when I was called again to be the recipient of the Herbie Nayoypuk award! I was thrilled to be awarded this incredible award!

Thank you so much to all of our sponsors that get us to the races and support us financially and emotionally! We cannot make it without you! You rock and I hope you will carry on our journey with us!

If you have time and are in the area please come visit us either here at Tagish Lake Kennels or on the South Klondike Highway at Tutshi Sled dog tours!

Happy Trails!!!!!!

Michelle, Ed and crew!!!!

