

## 'Hike, you huskies'

# Alaskan dog sledders off and racing for pot of gold

By Sally Jones

Special to The Tribune

**ANCHORAGE, Alaska, March 2**—It was the cry of gold that led thousands of fortune seekers up a 1,000-mile trail to Nome thru Alaska's arctic wilderness in the early 1900s.

But today it was the cry of "Hike, you huskies!" as 44 dog mushers and their teams started up the Iditarod Trail on the longest, toughest, and richest dog sled race in the world.

The race will take approximately 20 days to complete. The trail is 1,009 miles long.

**AND ALTHO** they'll be traveling nearly the same route their predecessors did for gold, they'll be seeking not the precious metal, but \$27,500 in prizes. First place is worth \$12,000.

This is the second time the race has been run. It is the child of a long-time dog musher from Knik, Joe Redington, who campaigned for such a race for years.

Last year, 34 mushers from thruout Alaska entered. Only 22 finished. Redington and two of his sons, Joe Jr. and Raminie, have entered this year.

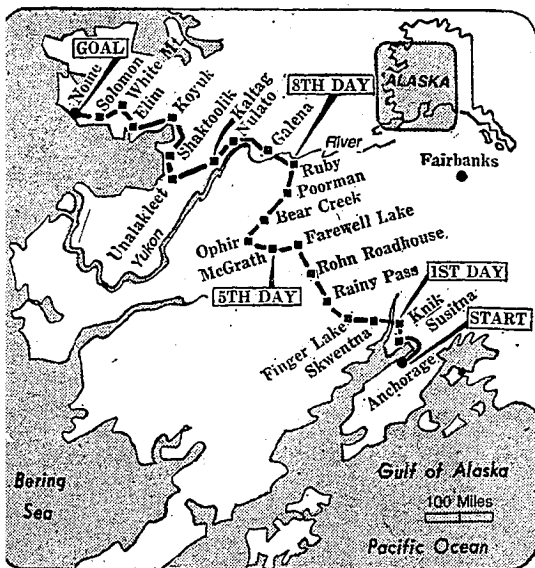
The race will cross the Arctic tundra, three mountain ranges, nearly impassable mud flats, frozen rivers, and washboard terrain blown barren of snow.

**TEMPERATURES** from Anchorage [the race's start] to Nome will range from 30 degrees above zero to 50 degrees below, and by the time the teams get to the Bering Sea and beyond, wind chill factors may plummet temperatures to 100 below zero.

Last year, the mushers faced snowstorms, 10 inches of ice water flowing on top of the frozen Yukon River, and lonely nights camping in the wilderness.

Each of the mushers has probably spent from \$1,500 to \$2,000 in 12 months preparation for the race.

Most of the expense is in dog food to feed a minimum of 10 dogs and transportation.



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Many of the racers bought heifers and had them slaughtered and ground into hamburger for their dogs. They've had to rent air taxi service to drop the food at 24 points along the trail.

**INJURED DOGS** must be dropped only at one of four check points and leaving a dog on the trail results in disqualification. If necessary, the injured dog must be carried on the sled or until the drop off point is reached.

Minimum survival gear includes an ax, sleeping bag, dark glasses, matches, and tether chains for dogs. Most mushers, however, will be carrying far more gear than that.

Many of the men—and two women who have entered—come from Alaska's interior villages where working trail dogs were the rule until the arrival of snowmobiles.

The working teams have diminished in recent years, but the dogs are still used by old-timers, racers, and men who live in the bush country.

**GEORGE ATTLA**, of Huslia on the Yukon River, is one of the favorites to win this year. The "Huslia Hustler" came in fourth last year after nearly scratching because he and his

dogs were exhausted halfway thru the race. Attila, 41, is one of Alaska's best known mushers and wins races consistently despite a bad leg and one blind eye.

One musher has an unusual handicap. Bernie Willis, 27, is a Seventh-Day Adventist minister from Gambell, St. Lawrence Island. His faith prohibits recreational or work activities of any kind from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday.

It was decided to let Willis start eight hours later. The race began at 10 a.m.

**WILLIS IS NO** stranger to dog mushing. Each week he travels 300 miles by dog team to reach his far-flung congregation.

Besides the mushers, there's one famous dog, Fat Albert.

Fat Albert is reputed to be mushing's most pampered lead dog. During last year's race, a borrowed team dog bit Fat Albert's knee on the trail. Rod Perry, of Anchorage, had to carry Fat Albert for three days in the sled. And each night the dog slept in a warm tent and was given knee massages regularly.

He recovered and led Perry to Nome.