

AN INTRODUCTION TO SLED DOGS AND SLED DOG SPORTS

Whether this is your first introduction to sled dogs or you have visited a sled dog kennel or attended a sled dog sporting event, you may be interested in some of the facts about sled dogs that mushers (dog team trainers & racers) don't seem to have the time to explain because of their preoccupation with their dogs. This is especially true at sled dog races where the driver's entire attention is on his dogs . . . prior to, during and following the race. They come first, last and always.

Although many sled dogs make good pets, they are not exactly like other domesticated breeds. They come from a long tradition of running in harness. Being a part of a team fulfills their "pack" instinct, and to the sled dog's way of thinking, this is the most important, most exhilarating part of his life.

Other sled dogs are the sled dog's "best friends," and he enjoys nothing better than to run with his friends. He and his teammates naturally accept the leadership of the dog which has proved its capability at the front of the team. Unlike old tales that would have you believe that lead dogs fight for their superior position . . . they don't. They earn it in training runs by exhibiting their enthusiasm and intelligence.

The "ultimate" leader of the dog team is the human being on the runners of the sled . . . the one who cares for the dogs, protects them, houses them, feeds them and best of all, takes them out as a team for training and racing runs. A team of dogs is much stronger than any single person can control physically, but by being fair, consistent and considerate, the driver earns the respect of his dogs which willingly respond to his every command.

In order to earn a dog team's trust, the driver must truly love and appreciate his dogs and share in their joy as "partners" on a running sled dog team. Otherwise, the responsibility of maintaining and training a team of dogs can be pure drudgery. Even for the most conscientious dog driver and kennel owner, there are no guarantees of glory and awards awaiting him at the end of the trail.

There are sled dog teams all over the world, some composed of as little as one dog. Others number in the tens and twenties, and whether it is a one-dog team or a twenty-two dog team, each animal demands individual attention and care. Only the person who loves and respects dogs can provide that kind of time and dedication.

Everything that the driver does for his dogs will determine what they will do for him. If he does not earn their trust as their leader, the dogs will elect "their own" leader . . . one of their own kind. When that happens, the dogs become a "pack" instead of a "team," so it is the wise trainer who does all that he can to maintain a healthy kennel of happy dogs that can place their confidence in him.

Competitive sled dogs are among the best housed, trained, fed and conditioned canine athletes in the world. They receive veterinary care that compares with the medical care offered to Olympic athletes. Each dog on the team plays an important individual role, so every effort is made to keep each one in top physical and mental condition in order to keep the team together.

All rules governing sled dog competition—whether it is team racing, skijoring, weight pulling or cross-country trekking—are designed to maintain the well-being of the dogs as a top priority and secondarily, to provide a fair contest. All competitors belong to one sled dog organization or another, and all of them were created to promote humane contests where "the best team wins," but actually, none of them are losers.

As you look at all the sled dogs in kennels and at sports arenas, you are looking at some of the best, most cared-for athletes in the world. And unlike many other dogs who don't have a choice, they can do what they like to do most under the safe supervision of a "good master."

It may be a dog's life . . . but sled dogs wouldn't have it any other way.

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Krabloonik

In the Spring of 1974, Stuart Mace gave me 55 of his world famous Toklat sled dogs. I named the kennel Krabloonik after the first lead dog that I raised while I was at Toklat. Krabloonik means "big eyebrows," which is the Eskimo term for "white man." The dogs were a gift of one man's love and it was not something given lightly. I had to prove that I could handle the business and carry on the traditions.

The Mace family had the dogs at Toklat in Ashcroft since 1947 and prior to that in the 10th Mountain Division during WWII. Ashcroft, 11 miles south of Aspen, CO, was a bustling mining community in the late 1880s to the early 1890s. "The transition was neither an act of desperation on my part nor a casual undertaking on his part," explained Stuart Mace. Mace knew that his health and age would not permit him to continue the strenuous routine that the kennel at Toklat demanded and so the gift was offered. But I had to go through a rigorous 4 1/2 year European-type apprenticeship to prove my ability and improve my skills.

The dogs are hybrids of three original sled dog types—Malamute, Eskimo, and Siberian (commonly grouped together under the name of Husky). The combination of breeds results in broad chests and shoulders, long legs, and wide paws which I consider ideal for pulling in our mountains and powder snow. The dogs are bred only to fill a space on the sled teams, not for sale or show.

Not only are the dogs good workers, but they make excellent pets, and as they are very even tempered and affectionate. They are also intelligent, loving, sensitive, big-hearted, amazingly strong, with stamina beyond compare. They have a tremendous desire to please. On the other hand, they can also be independent, strong-willed, stubborn, preponderant, and feisty.

Teams of 13 dogs pull handcrafted sleds every day in winter. The sleds were adapted from original bone and rawhide Eskimo sleds by Mace. They carry people and provisions on the tour of the Snowmass-Maroon Bells Wilderness area. The dogs are worked so hard during the sledding season that they rest all during the summer heat, as is customary to the Eskimo way of life.

RESTAURANT

(303) 923-3953

The Setting

The log building which houses the restaurant is rustic and homespun. Large picture windows in the dining room allow luncheon guests to enjoy the magnificent views of Mt. Daly and Capitol Peak. Also, you will be able to see sled teams coming and going. At night, the focal point is the sunken fire pit where guests can relax and enjoy the ambience of the restaurant.

The Fare

Our house specialties are Krabloonik Wild Mushroom Soup, freshly baked breads, homemade preserves, smoked meats from our smoke house. Caribou, Elk, Pheasant, Wild Boar, Salmon & Trout (upon availability, of course). Desserts are also prepared daily in our kitchen. Our Wild Mushroom Soup and homemade preserves are now available to purchase. You can take them with you or arrange for us to ship to any address.

Times

Winter Season—lunch is served 11:00 a.m.—2:00 p.m.; dinner is served starting at 5:30 p.m.

Summer Season—Dinner is served starting at 6:00 p.m. (NO LUNCH DURING SUMMER)

Reservations

Call ahead for your reservation.

For those of you skiing, our restaurant is accessible by Dawdler Catwalk through Campground parking lot from chairlifts two, three and five. By car, you can use the Campground/Divide Parking Lot road. (See inside map)

Krabloonik

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P.O. Box 5517

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Restaurant & Kennel Tours (303) 923-3953

Dog Sled Rides (303) 923-4342