

## The Yukon Quest and the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race™

written by Martha Dobson, 2011 Iditarod Teacher on the Trail

This article is intended to generally share information about each race in a way which allows students to practice comparing and contrasting the information. It is not intended to be an exhaustive comparison of the races. Thanks go to JJay Levy and Ev Vykin, the Yukon Quest web site and the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race™ for providing information or sources.

Block organization in a comparison and contrast article chunks the information about one of the subjects in one section. Then, the next chunk (block) of information is about another subject.

Point by point organization gives a detail about each subject, and then gives another detail about each subject.

Author's purposes-- (1) to entertain; (2) to inform; (3) to persuade; (4) to share an experience or a viewpoint.

***Read this article. Compare and contrast these two races.***

Two different long distance, about a thousand miles each, sled dog races run in February and March each year. The Yukon Quest runs in February, and the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race begins the first weekend of March.

The Quest, as it's called for short, first ran in 1984, and mushers race between Whitehorse, Canada and Fairbanks, Alaska. A unique aspect of this race is that it alternates the starting and ending points. The start is in Fairbanks in even numbered years and in Whitehorse, Canada in odd numbered years. The first Iditarod race to Nome was 1973. The trail crosses the interior of Alaska to its western coast. The Quest is an international race, and changes time zones when the trail crosses American Summit, the place where Pacific Standard Time changes to Alaska Standard Time. In odd numbered years, the Iditarod takes the southern route through the ghost town of Iditarod and in even numbered years the trail heads north at Ophir to take the northern route.

Four mushers dreamed up the Yukon Quest, meeting in 1983 in Fairbanks and musing about a race that would follow the Yukon River, the historical highway of the north. Joe Redington, Sr initiated the dream of the Iditarod, a race which would follow the Iditarod Trail, a supply trail for villages and gold miners during the Alaska gold rush in the early 1920s. The Yukon River is commemorated by the Quest and the race follows the routes prospectors used during the 1898 Gold Rush to reach the Klondike and the interior of Alaska. The Iditarod honors the history of the sled dog in Alaska's history and the trail itself, which is now a National Historic Trail.

The four mushers, Roger Williams, Leroy Shank, Ron Rosser, and William "Willy" Lipps, in conversation at the Bull's Eye Saloon in 1983, started "what- ifing" about a new race. The four what-ifs? What if it were an international race, a race that ran on the Yukon, a race that followed a historical trail, and a race that was a little bit longer? From these four "what-ifs", the Yukon Quest was born.

Joe Redington, Sr, determined to start a long distance race in Alaska, was the spark for the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race. Convincing others to help--whether by re-establishing the old, overgrown trail, by fundraising, by volunteering, or by running in the race--was Joe's forte.

While both races are long-distance events, there are differences. For example, the Quest is an international race running between Whitehorse, Canada and Fairbanks, Alaska. The Iditarod runs its course entirely in Alaska from Anchorage to Nome. Another difference is that the Quest has road access to all except one of its checkpoints. The Iditarod, once it leaves its starting point, is entirely off the road system. It is not possible to drive along this race's route from checkpoint to checkpoint.

The Yukon Quest has nine checkpoints and three hospitality stops. The checkpoints are either in small villages or a cluster of cabins; Two Rivers checkpoint is a tent establishment. The hospitality stops do not have musher drop bags delivered there, while there is usually access to water, a dog drop location, an indoor area for rest area for the musher which is usually very cramped, and perhaps food prepared for the musher. There are some open cabins which are privately owned, including one which is a Canadian Ranger cabin. Teams can rest at these cabins, which are not official checkpoints or hospitality stops, and teams can also camp along the trail.

The Iditarod has 21 checkpoints on the Southern Route, not including Willow or Nome. The Northern Route goes through twenty checkpoints. While the race runs through the village of Golovin, no checkpoint is set up there. Most of the checkpoints are in villages; Rainy Pass, Yentna, Finger Lake, Rohn, Ophir, Iditarod, Cripple and Eagle Island are not villages. There are a few shelter cabins on the trail, Don's Cabin and Old Woman Cabin, to name a couple. These shelter cabins are strictly for shelter; no drop bags, no prepared food for mushers, only a place to rest. As in the Quest, teams can also rest along the trail. Food and gear drop bags may not be sent to Yentna or Finger Lake checkpoints.

In 2015, the race route begins in Fairbanks, where the Quest ended this year. New checkpoints for this route include Nenana, Manley, and Tanana before the route joins the Iditarod Trail in Ruby. Running on to Galena, the route turns northward to the village of Huslia, the first time this village has hosted the race. From Huslia it runs to Koyukyuk and then rejoins the trail in Nulato. From Nulato, the route follows the trail to Kaltag and on to Nome.

In the Iditarod, mushers may not accept outside assistance. Race rules state that accepting outside assistance (aid from someone not in the race) is cause for being withdrawn from the race. There are no handlers to help the mushers, nor may race personnel assist them. What is offered at a checkpoint to one musher must be offered to all. Some villages provide warm water by heating it throughout the entire time the checkpoint is open, which can range from a 24 hour period to several days. Takotna provides meals for the mushers, clean towels and quarters to use for showers at the washeteria. Other villages get involved, like Unalakleet, to cook for volunteers and mushers; many villages provide food like a cover dish meal to the checkpoint while it's open. In Nome, once a team's race is finished, handlers can help care for the dogs in the dog lot until they are flown home. This includes feeding them, cleaning up, and generally keeping an eye on the athletes.

In the Quest, mushers also may not accept outside assistance without the penalty of being withdrawn from the race. However, in the Quest, mushers' handlers, people who assist them with their teams, meet teams at the checkpoints, driving the dog truck along the road between checkpoints. Mushers are responsible for caring for their teams in the checkpoints while handlers can keep an eye on the dogs while they and the musher rest. When a musher prepares to leave a checkpoint, he or she must clean up and bag all the trash and gear. If this is not done, a penalty can be assessed to the musher. The handlers usually wait about 30 minutes or longer after a musher leaves, in case the team returns to the checkpoint for some reason. Once the musher's remaining supplies have been touched by handlers, those supplies aren't available to the musher to use. Handlers rake and bag the used straw. Handlers also take the dogs who have been dropped from teams and carry them in the dog trucks. Two especially challenging parts of the handlers' jobs are in Dawson City, setting up the teams' rest areas and caring for the dogs during the 24 hour layover, and the 18 hour drive between Dawson and Circle City to meet the teams at those respective checkpoints.

The mighty Yukon River is the one physical feature that both races share. Both races contend with mountains and summits--American Summit, Eagle Summit, Rosebud, King Salmon's Dome in the Quest, Rainy Pass and crossing the Alaska Range in the Iditarod. Twisty, turny Dalzell Gorge is a special challenge in the Iditarod. Crossing creeks with overflow is to be expected in both races.

Both races depend on volunteers to staff it. The veterinarians and other volunteers are flown to their checkpoints. Both races find technology a challenge, internet being spotty due to the remoteness of the race routes. Fans can follow each race via tracking systems, but the Quest and the Iditarod determine official times and official information as it's received from checkpoints. Extreme temperatures also affect photographing and filming the races; batteries and equipment get zapped quickly by cold of -20, -30, -40 and more.

While the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race™ and the Yukon Quest have their differences, one similarity in these races is the challenge to mushers and teams to prove themselves in an environment that determines toughness of body, mind, and spirit.