



## **Iditarod Adventures: Tales from Musher's Along the Trail**

By Lew Freedman, with cover and illustrations by Jon Van Zyle  
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In IDITAROD ADVENTURES, mushers explain why they have chosen this rugged lifestyle, what has kept them in long-distance mushing, and the experiences they have endured along that unforgiving trail between Anchorage and Nome.

Renowned sports writer Lew Freedman profiles 23 mushers—men, women, Alaska Natives, seasoned veterans, and some relatively new to the demanding sport. The book also features interviews with administrators who organize the event, volunteers, and others icons of the Iditarod. Each was chosen for their interesting, unusual, and amazing stories related to the race.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Describe one type of hardship experienced during the Iditarod by the mushers and their teams. Is that hardship somehow unique to this race, to long-distance racing, or to Alaska?
2. In what ways was Martin Buser's journey to become an American citizen influenced by dog racing and the Iditarod?
3. Describe a quality or characteristic that is shared by famous mushers to make them well suited to the challenges of the Iditarod. Give examples from the book.
4. How do dog racers turn mushing into a yearlong business? How could these strategies be applied to other seasonal interests?
5. How did Jeff King change the way he trained his dogs? What benefits did this offer over traditional training methods?
6. The Iditarod is a sporting event that has been won by people of both genders and a range of ages. What are some of the factors that make this event so equalizing where other sports are not?
7. How did women winning the Iditarod change the event or affect how it is followed?
8. How has the Iditarod itself changed over the years? Which mushers do you think are the most responsible for those changes? Why?
9. According to Mitch Seavey, the musher in the front "is never the winner." Why is that? How do the mushers who make the bulk of the trip further back in the pack end up winning the race?
10. Dick Mackey compares competing in the Iditarod with running a marathon or climbing a mountain. How are those experiences similar to running the Iditarod? How are they different?
11. How have modern advancements (cars, Internet, GPS, high-tech fibers, etc.) affected mushers and their dog teams? What examples does the book present of both positive and negative impacts of the modern world on the sport of dog racing?
12. In what ways has Lance Mackey been an inspiration to others in the sport of dog racing and beyond? Which other mushers did you find particularly inspirational? Why?
13. What role does money play in the Iditarod? How do mushers benefit or suffer financially because of the race? Does it make a difference to be well funded? If so, how and why?
14. Joe May describes the Iditarod as a "gentleman's race." Give examples of the type of actions he meant by that.
15. How has Hobo Jim become a fixture in the Iditarod culture? What has he contributed to the state of Alaska and/or the dog racing community?

16. How do volunteers and support personnel help the Iditarod run smoothly? According to the book, how many volunteers are involved in the race effort?
17. Jake Berkowitz has sold his dog team and property, and he's turning away from the mushing life. Do you think that is a mistake for this up-and-coming young competitor? Why or why not? What would draw you to sled-dog racing and the Iditarod? What would make you walk away?
18. Aaron Burmeister reflects, "You're young and obviously you think you know it all. It takes years to realize that you don't." How does this statement relate to something you've learned in your own life? Do you think there's an age when you will "know it all" about an area of special interest to you?
19. The Yukon Quest and the Iditarod are both long-distance dogsled races. What are some differences the mushers see between the two races? Give examples from the book.
20. Pick two mushers and compare their experiences. How were they similar and how were they different?
21. Many mushers recall their first Iditarod as their favorite race. With all of the pitfalls and hardships that can befall rookies, why do you think that is? What reasons were given by the participants in the book?
22. What is the role of the race marshal in the Iditarod? What qualities make Mark Nordman well suited (or ill suited) for that job?
23. Several of the mushers in *Iditarod Adventures* have quit racing. What were some reasons given by various mushers for leaving the sport? Which of those racers do you think are most likely to return to the Iditarod, and why?
24. Several times throughout *Iditarod Adventures*, various people comment that they are not as well known *Outside*. What do they mean by that, and why has the author chosen to capitalize that word?
25. Sebastian Schnuelle describes losing \$40,000 racing despite doing well in both the Yukon Quest and the Iditarod. How do mushers balance the extreme financial demands of the sport with real life?
26. What were the biggest obstacles Newton Marshall had to overcome to race in the Yukon Quest and the Iditarod after being born and raised in Jamaica?
27. How have mushers changed the way they feed their dogs during long sled races? How have changes in dog nutrition and health care affected times in the Iditarod?
28. What role does mentoring play in competitive dog racing? Use at least two examples from the book to demonstrate the elder/newcomer relationship seen in the modern Iditarod.
29. How do the challenges of the Iditarod and its training help mushers rise to the other trials in their lives? DeeDee Jonrowe, in particular, has overcome intense obstacles while maintaining an active mushing career. What qualities do you feel contribute to her ability to overcome obstacles that might thwart some other competitors?
30. The author of *Iditarod Adventures* (Lew Freedman) presents each chapter in a different participant's own words. How does this conversational style of writing affect the messages conveyed by the book?

**Lew Freedman** is a veteran newspaper sportswriter and experienced author of more than seventy books. He spent seventeen years at the Anchorage Daily News in Alaska and wrote extensively about the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race. He has also written several books about the Iditarod and had stories appear in Alaska Magazine and Alaska Airlines magazine. Freedman has also worked for the Chicago Tribune and Philadelphia Inquirer. A frequent traveler to Alaska, Freedman believes the Iditarod is one of the world's great sporting events and only wishes the dogs could talk so he could better write their story. [www.LewFreedmanBooks.com](http://www.LewFreedmanBooks.com)



**Jon Van Zyle** has been the official artist of the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race for more than thirty years and has run the race twice. Jon's art has garnered him numerous honors, and his prints, posters, and lithographs are prized by collectors. Jon and his wife live in Alaska, where they maintain a dog team of Siberian huskies. [www.JonVanZyle.com](http://www.JonVanZyle.com)