



TOPICAL TIDBITS

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The Iditarod

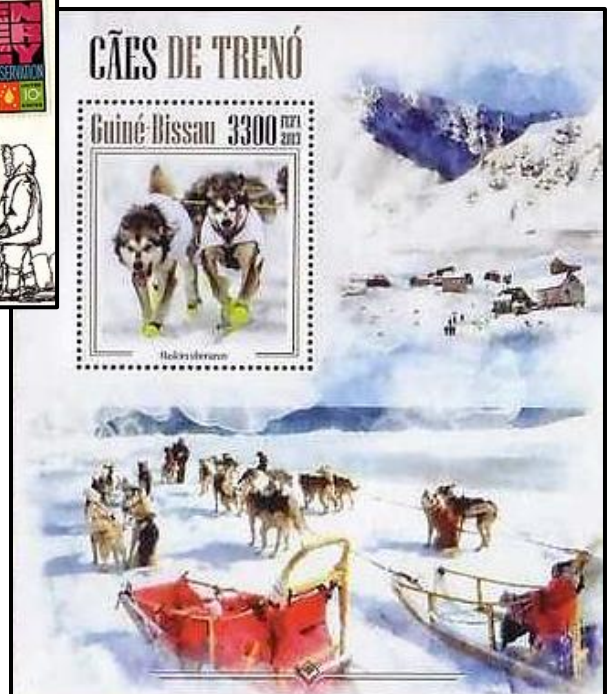
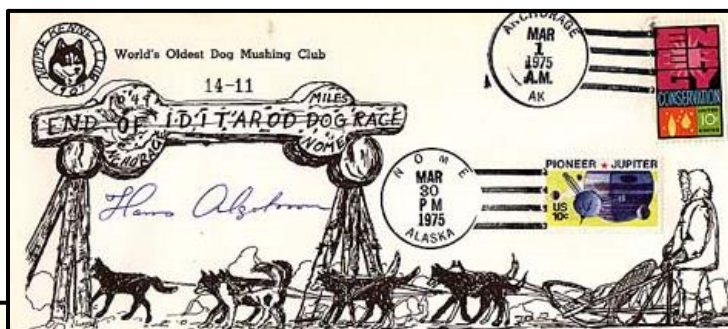
The Iditarod is a sled dog race that takes place every year during March in Alaska. It is often called *The Last Great Race*. The word Iditarod comes from an Athabaskan Indian word pronounced *Hi-dit-a-rod*, which means *a distant place*.

Teams of 10 to 16 dogs pull the sleds along a trail. Most sled dogs are Alaskan Huskies, a mixed breed known for their speed and endurance. These dogs were originally used by the native people for herding and pulling heavy loads.

A musher, the person guiding the sled, stands on the back of the sled and guides the team along the trail where they are responsible for feeding and caring for the dogs. Musher must be mentally and physically strong people. They are the leader of the pack and if they become tired or hesitant, the dogs will pick up on this and become confused and unresponsive. This can be especially dangerous on long stretches of the trail where help is far away. These amazing teams will cover more than 1,150 miles from Anchorage to Nome in 10 to 17 days.

The finish line is an arch made from a spruce log. The original arch, like the one pictured on the cover below, had to be replaced because it was rotting. The words on the new arch are slightly different— they say *End of Iditarod Sled Dog Race*. A cash prize is given to the winner and the musher who comes in last gets a special award for perseverance.

Today, the internet and television can bring this famous race right into our homes and make it easy for us to keep up with a favorite musher and team. For more information, visit www.iditarod.com.



The covers, above, were carried on the Iditarod trail and signed by the mushers. The top one, from 1975, shows the end of the race in Nome with the burled arch. The bottom cover, from 1983, has a map of the trail. The souvenir sheet on the right shows the dogs wearing booties to protect their paws from the ice and snow.

Sled Dog Facts

- While a normal dog might get by on 1,500 calories a day, sled dogs can easily consume up to 10,000 calories per day.
- In the 1960s, Yup'ik Eskimos of Nelson Island moved much of their town, including entire houses, to a new site two dozen miles away with hundred-dog teams.
- Dogs are faster than horses over the long haul. They are capable of maintaining average speeds of eight to twelve miles an hour for hundreds of miles.
- Alaskan Malamutes and Siberian Huskies are two of the most common types of sled dogs used.

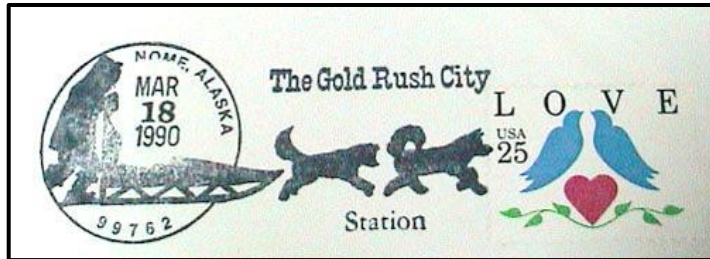


At left:
An Alaskan Malamute.

Below: A Siberian Huskie.



Right: A slogan cancel showing a musher with his team, postmarked in Nome, Alaska. Below: A cover commemorating the 75th anniversary of Rotary International.



Rotary International
75th Anniversary
Commemorative
Dog Sled Mail Run
Yellowknife - Hay River
Northwest Territories

Wheel Dogs:
Wheel dogs are placed directly in front of the sled and tend to be the strongest dogs on the team.

Team Dogs:
Team dogs provide the "horse power" of the team and help turn the sled.

Musher:
The musher relays commands to the dog team.

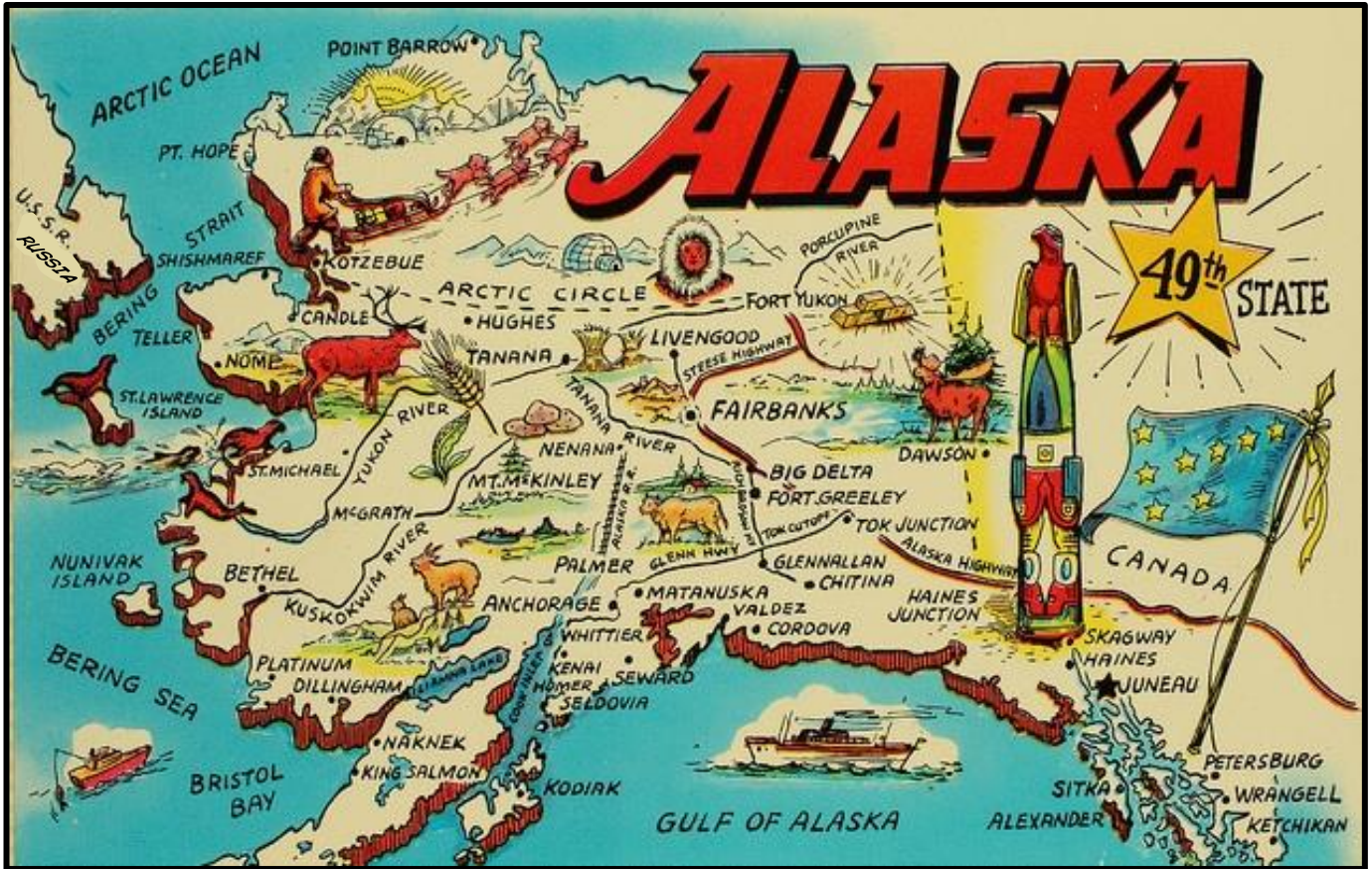
Sled:
While older sleds are made of wood, newer ones are made of materials like Kevlar and titanium.

Swing Dogs:
Swing dogs follow the lead dogs and help set the pace. They also turn the sled around corners.

Lead Dogs:
One or two lead dogs at the head of the team respond to the musher's commands, find and follow the trail, and set the pace of the team.

Alaska

Alaska, the largest state in the union, was purchased from Russia in 1867 for \$7.2 million. That may sound like a lot, but it is really under 2¢ an acre! It wasn't until 1959 that Alaska became a state—the 49th. Alaska is two times the size of Texas and has 33,000 miles of coastline. The state flower is the forget-me-not and the state sport is dog mushing. The state mineral is gold because it played a major role in shaping the history of Alaska, from the discovery of gold in Juneau in 1880, to the great gold rush at Nome in 1899. Nearly one-third of Alaska lies within the Arctic Circle. To find out more about Alaska look at the map on the vintage postcard below. Use it to answer the questions underneath. Answers can be found on page 6.



1. The capital of Alaska, _____, is the only U.S. state capital which has no road access and can be reached only by air or water.
2. What countries are on either side of Alaska? _____ and _____.
3. Alaska's flag was designed by a 13 year old and has _____ gold stars that form the Big Dipper and the North Star.
4. What strait separates Alaska from Russia? _____
5. This mountain, called "Denali" by natives, is the highest mountain peak in North America.

6. Alaska is the only state to have coastlines on three different seas: the Pacific Ocean, the _____ Ocean, and the _____ Sea.
7. Alaska was the _____ state to enter the Union, on January 3, 1959.

Iditarod Fun Page

JOKES:

Q: Where are sled dogs trained?

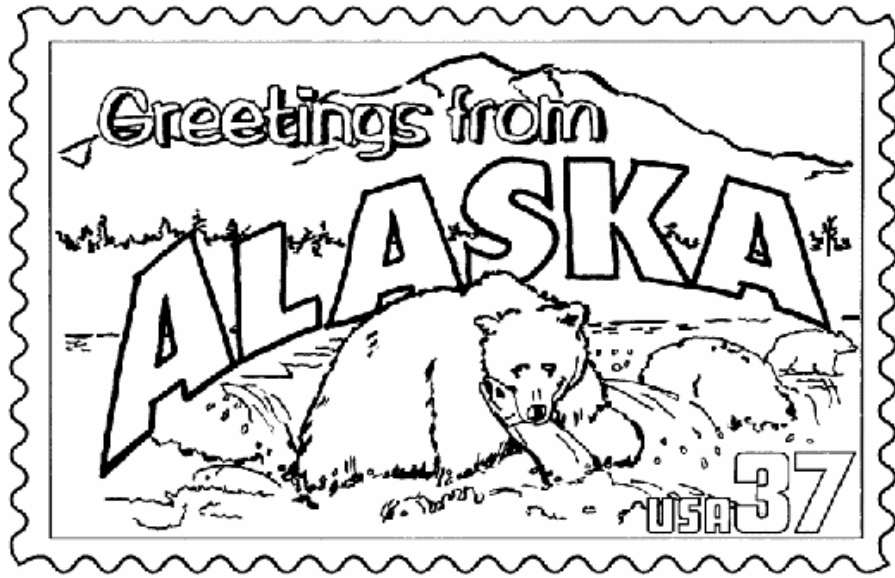
A: In the mush-room!

Q: Where should you leave your dog team and sled?

A: At the barking lot!

Q: What do sled dogs say before telling you a joke?

A: "This one will sleigh you!"



DESIGN A COVER:

Using the information you learned about Alaska, dog sleds, and the Iditarod, design a cachet for the 1986 cover, below. It features two dog sled stamps from the Transportation Series.



Dog Sledding



Answer Page

1. The capital of Alaska, **Juneau**, is the only U.S. state capital which has no road access and can be reached only by air or water.
2. What countries are on either side of Alaska? **Russia** and **Canada**.
3. Alaska's flag was designed by a 13 year old and has **8** gold stars that form the Big Dipper and the North Star.
4. What strait separates Alaska from Russia? **The Bering Strait**
5. This mountain, called "Denali" by natives, is the highest mountain peak in North America. **Mt. McKinley**
6. Alaska is the only state to have coastlines on three different seas: the Pacific Ocean, the **Arctic** Ocean, and the **Bering** Sea.
7. Alaska was the **49th** state to enter the Union, on January 3, 1959.

