

## **Information courtesy of Stephen H Peters, Olson Library, NMU**

Since it is Iditarod time again, I thought it might be nice to relive those exciting days in 1994 when Malamutes ran the trail and proved that the breed could still do what it originally had been bred to do.

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### **MALAMUTES IN THE 1994 IDITAROD**

Nancy Russell, owner of Storm Kloud Kennel in Sussex, Wisconsin, dreamed of having an Iditarod team ever since the race started in 1973. Nancy met musher Jamie Nelson of Togo, Minnesota, at a freight race in Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin, in 1987. Shortly after, she sent two dogs to Jamie to be trained as lead dogs. In 1989, Nancy took a litter of six puppies to Jamie to develop into a team for promotional purposes. Jamie was impressed with the working ability of the Malamutes and the idea of an Iditarod team became a real possibility.

By the fall of 1993, Jamie had 20 Malamutes in training and finally decided to enter the race. Because of the lateness of this decision, it was not possible to obtain commercial sponsors, so money was raised through mile sponsorships, the Alaskan Malamute Club of America, and several all-breed dog clubs. The remainder was paid by Storm Kloud Kennel.

### **THE DOGS**

(All ages and weights are those at the time of the Iditarod.)

#### **Those who made the team:**

- Jacob (Ch Storm Kloud's Hhere I Am WLDX) - 4.5 years, male, born May 9, 1989, 65 pounds - lead dog and the brains of the team.
- Joshua (Ch Storm Kloud's Hhailstone WTDX) - 4.5 years, male, born May 9, 1989, 62 pounds - lead dog. Joshua completed his conformation championship on July 15, 1994.
- Kruzer (Storm Kloud's Kkruzin' Along WTD) - 4 years, male, born November 4, 1989, 63 pounds - ran point and lead, had parvovirus as a 9-week old puppy. Owned by Jan Richards.
- Icess (Ch Storm Kloud's liness WTD) - 4.5 years, female, born July 2, 1989, 68 pounds - steady worker who joined the team after having a litter in 1992, and a real charmer in the show ring.
- Missy (Winhaven's Missy Magoo WWP, WTD) - 6 years, female, born September 29, 1987, 68 pounds - ran point, has one eye that never developed. Owned by Mark

## Scepanski.

- Drum (Ch Storm Kloud's Hhear the Drum WTDX) - 4.5 years, male, born May 9, 1989, 82 pounds - finished his championship just before leaving for the race.
- Jerico (Storm Kloud's Hhanibal WTDX) - 4.5 years, male, born May 9, 1989, 86 pounds - biggest and most powerful dog on the team. He had surgery for bloat in December 1993 and again for a muscle tear (250 stainless steel stitches) six days before the race. He ran with the stitches in. One tough dog.
- Justin (Storm Kloud's Yyes Just Say Yes WTD) - 2 years, male, born November 4, 1991, 75 pounds - Casey's son. Most photographed member of the team, usually because he had a dirty face.
- Andy (Storm Kloud's At It Again) - 2 years, female, born February 26, 1992, 56 pounds - Tab's daughter and a natural leader.
- Miz (Am/Can Ch Storm Kloud's Mmy Last One WTD) - 4 years, female, born January 27, 1990, 60 pounds - team cheerleader who would rather let the boys do the work.
- Sprite (Ch Storm Kloud's Wwon in Great Taste) - 2.5 years, male, born August 2, 1991, 86 pounds - tallest dog on the team. He earned his WTDX on the team and started his show career in July 1994. He finished his championship on October 1, 1994.
- Tab (Ch Storm Kloud's Tabetha) - 6.5 years, female, born April 19, 1987, 60 pounds - oldest member of the team and Andy's mother. Backup leader who did not join the team until June 1993 because she had a litter of 9 in March 1993.
- Mark (Ch Storm Kloud's Eez Remarkable WTDX) - 5 years, male, born November 28, 1988, 72 pounds - had a difficult time adjusting to the life of a racing dog, but will now run with any dog on the team.
- Casey (Ch Storm Kloud's Ggrandslam WTD) - 5 years, male, born February 22, 1989, 80 pounds - wheel dog who has a desire to dominate. Justin's father.
- Barney (Barnstormer by Storm Kloud WTD) - 2 years, male, born March 1, 1992, 82 pounds - wheel dog and youngest member of the team.

## Dogs who did not make the team:

- Ace (Storm Kloud's Assiniboine) - 2 years, male, born February 26, 1992 - Tab's son and Andy's brother. Refused to work.
- Pepsi (Ch Storm Kloud's Wwright Won Baby WTD, WWPDX) - 2.5 years, male, born August 2, 1991, Sprite's brother. Had a personality clash with Jamie Nelson. Successful weight puller and has completed his championship.
- Becka - female, awkward adolescent who needed to grow up.
- Winnie - female, too young to be stressed like the team would be.
- Kelly - male, not accepted by the other dogs.
- Trumpet (Ch Storm Kloud's Hhuckleberry) - 4.5 years, male, born May 9, 1989 - brother to Jacob, Joshua, Jerico, Drum, and Harmony. Rejected by the pack after he broke his toe in October 1993. Does not get along with other dogs.
- Vicky - laid down and wouldn't move when staked out in the dog yard.
- Moka - does well on a small team, but cannot handle the power of a large team.

- Harmony (Ch Storm Kloud's Hharmony) - 4.5 years, female, born May 9, 1989 - sister to Trumpet, Jacob, Joshua, Jerico, and Drum. Went along happily and looked at the scenery, but let her brothers do all the work.

### **Assisting with the training:**

- Kipp (Am/Can Storm Kloud's Keep the Win WLD, WTD, WWPD, CGC, ROM) - 7 years, male, born March 2, 1986 - lead and wheel dog, has more group firsts and best in shows than any other Malamute. While the others went to Alaska, Kipp went to Milan, Italy, and won the Golden Collar Invitational Tournament. Returned in 1995 to present the trophy to the next winner and pose with anyone who wanted their picture taken with him. Friskies, tournament sponsor who paid the expenses for all invitees, had t-shirts printed with Kipp's photo on them.

### **The humans on the team:**

- Nancy Russell, Sussex, Wisconsin - team owner, fund raiser, and travel planner. Nancy owns Storm Kloud Kennel and has been in Malamutes for over 25 years. She has served in a number of positions with the AMCA, including president.
- Jamie Nelson, Togo, Minnesota - driver and trainer of the team. A noted musher, Jamie has won the Beargrease Sled Dog Race (Duluth, Minn., 500 miles) and the UP 200 Sled Dog Championship (Marquette, Mich., 240 miles) twice each, and had previously raced in the Iditarod.
- Mark Scepaniski, Sussex, Wisconsin - assistant trainer, welder by occupation, meat butcher, general handyman.
- Jan Richards, Mankato, Minnesota - office manager, record keeper, photographer, and supply manager. Also edited the S.K.I.R.T. Scoop Newsletter, the newsletter of the Storm Kloud Iditarod Racing Team.

### **The Race**

Because of a lack of snow, the ceremonial start in Anchorage on Saturday, March 5 was limited to teams of 6 dogs. The real start was the following morning in Willow, Alaska. Jamie drew starting position 47 and left Willow at 11:41 a.m. with Jacob and Joshua on the lead. It took 6 men to hold the Malamutes while they were in the starting chute. Some spectators at the start predicted that the team would scratch after about 35 miles. They sure didn't know much about Malamutes.

The first 115 miles to Finger Lake were uneventful. When Jamie arrived at Finger Lake on the evening of March 7, she went into a tent to sleep. After a while she noticed that some of the other mushers in the tent were breathing oddly. She decided that she needed her sleeping bag, and when she stepped outside, she realized that the tent was filling with carbon monoxide

and raised the alarm. Another musher, Beth Baker, a pulmonary medical specialist (how's that for having the right specialist in the right place at the right time) treated the 5 mushers, 2 of whom had to be dragged unconscious from the tent. All 5 took their mandatory 24-hour layover at Finger Lake. Beth and Jamie received the Sportsmanship Award for their efforts.

Jamie and the 15 Malamutes left Finger Lake on the evening of March 8, and worked their way uphill and downhill through the Alaska Range. Going into the Rohn checkpoint, the Tatina River had a foot of overflow (water on top of ice) on it. The Mals led two teams of reluctant huskies through this part of the trail.

The team arrived in Rohn, 193 miles into the race, at 2:34 p.m. on March 9, and departed at 2:27 a.m. on March 10. Beyond Rohn, the trail is mostly ice and gravel with a number of obstacles. The most notable is the Farewell Burn, 360,000 acres of burned out forest covered with sedge-tussock tundra that had little or no snow. The Mals handled this part of the trail in fine style.

Four miles outside of Nikolai, the first of the native villages, Barney pulled a muscle in his leg. Jamie dropped him at the checkpoint there and on the flight out (his first airplane ride), he willingly served as a pillow for a couple of huskies. It was in the Nikolai area that Jamie first noticed that the Mals were having foot problems.

Leaving Nikolai the trail follows the south fork of the Kuskokwim River, and the team arrived at the McGrath checkpoint at 8:43 p.m. on March 11. As the team came into McGrath, people ran down the streets shouting, "The Malamutes are here! The Malamutes are here!"

Jamie and the Mals left McGrath at 1:19 a.m. on Saturday, March 12, and travelled through an area of hills, valleys, and ghost towns. The team arrived in Cripple, the halfway point of the race, at 8:45 a.m. on March 13, and departed at 11:43 p.m. the same day.

Jamie arrived in Ruby at 1:40 a.m. on March 15, with 14 of the 15 Malamutes. This was an achievement in itself as most teams have dropped up to half their dogs by this point in the race. It was apparent at Ruby that the dogs were having serious problems with their feet, and nothing that had been tried had worked. Jamie left Ruby at 1:37 p.m., but the situation did not improve. She said, "They had developed a trust in me, a trust that I would always do what's right for them.... I went back and took another look at their feet, then I looked into their eyes, and the decision was made." The team scratched at Ruby and was flown to Nome for the awards banquet.

In talking with Martin Buser, Charlie Boulding, and other mushers after the race, Nancy learned that too little fat in the dog's diet and booties of the wrong shape were the most likely reasons for the blisters on the dogs' feet.

Although Nancy did not realize her dream of seeing a Storm Kloud team come down Front Street in Nome, the team had averaged 80 miles a day (covering 600 miles total) through the roughest part of the trail with no injuries, no weight loss, no dehydration, no lactic acid build-up, and they were still willing to go on in spite of sore feet. They had not lost their heart, and they had proved that today's Alaskan Malamute could still do the work it was bred to do.

After the team was in Nome, Martin Buser, winner of the 1994 Iditarod, visited the team to pay homage to them. Martin began his racing career in Switzerland with a team of Samoyeds.

The Malamutes were the media darlings of the race. The Anchorage Times featured a front-page story on the team on Sunday, March 13. At every checkpoint, photographers and TV cameramen swarmed around the team. Schools were dismissed so that teachers could take their classes to see and pet the Mals. More importantly, the natives had a piece of their heritage returned to them. One elderly native took his grandchildren to see the Mals. "Here," the old man told them, "I want you to see these dogs. These were the kind of dogs we used to have."

The Malamutes were also favorites of the veterinarians. At checkpoints, they would obligingly roll over on their backs and wave their paws in the air for the foot check. A team of 3 vets from Ohio State University took ECGs of 200 race dogs, including the Mals, as part of a research project. The Mals were most cooperative, and it only took the vets 5 minutes per Mal to do the ECG compared with 7-10 minutes per dog for the other teams. Jacob was so cooperative that they were able to get lots of readings of his QRS spike over 3 mv, a sign of a particularly good athlete. So he is now a "textbook" case.

Although the race was over, the Malamutes were not yet finished with their Alaska activities. They took off their harnesses, had baths, and went to the dog show. Justin, Joshua, Kruzer, Barney, and Drum were entered in the Cook Inlet Kennel Club show in Anchorage on Saturday, March 26, and the Alaska Kennel Club show on Sunday, March 27. Drum placed third in the Working Group at the Alaska Kennel Club show and Joshua got two 4-point majors towards his conformation championship.

## What It All Cost

### Pre-race expenses:

Entry fee		\$1,249.00
Medical:		
	Dew claw removal - 19 dogs	\$400.00
	Vaccinations and Jerico's Surgery	\$445.47

	Medications	\$704.58	
	<b>Sub-Total</b>		\$1,550.05
Equipment:			
Dogs:			
	Booties 100 @ \$.57	\$570.00	
	Chains,connectors for drop chains,tie outs	\$141.03	
	Snaps for drop chains	\$58.07	
	Harnesses, collars, and ropes	\$262.00	
	<b>Sub-Total</b>		\$1,031.10
Truck:			
	Dog box for 16 dogs	\$2,896.24	
	Preparation	\$2,385.07	
	<b>Sub-Total</b>		\$5,281.31
Sled:			
	New sled	\$850.00	
	Cooke sled bag	\$250.00	
	Runners and sled parts	\$368.49	
	<b>Sub-Total</b>		\$1,468.49
Clothing:			
	Windbloc vest	\$83.85	
	Work & surgical gloves	\$63.90	
	Silk pointelle pants - 6 @ \$27	\$162.00	
	Silk pointelle t-tops - 11 @ \$28	\$291.00	
	Thermaskin zipper tops - 9 @ \$30	\$270.00	
	Wigwam Canada socks - 30 pair @ \$8	\$240.00	
	Thermax glove liners - 24 pair @ \$7	\$168.00	
	Thermaskin pants - 1 pair	\$27.00	
	Neck gaiter - 1	\$9.00	
	<b>Sub-Total</b>		\$1,314.75
Miscellaneous:			
	Bus driver for musher	\$2,550.00	

Gas, food, odd supplies \$486.44

**Sub-Total** \$3,036.44**TOTAL PRE-RACE EXPENSES** **\$14,931.14**

These pre-race expenses do not include dog food, Arctic Outerwear, or lost wages and donated time of Jamie Nelson (a school bus driver), Mark Scepaniski, or Jan Richards.

**Race expenses (February 5-April 15, 1994):**

Dogs: food, supplies, etc.	\$964.51
Repairs and maintenance	\$328.23
Postage	\$819.66
Airlines: dogs and people	\$3,730.88
Food	\$2,623.39
Lodging	\$1,793.98
Gas	\$1,481.72
Telephone	\$334.05
Promotions	\$1,514.36
Miscellaneous - register gun	\$105.00
- hardware	\$1.89
<b>TOTAL RACE EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$13,697.67</b>
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES AS OF APRIL 15, 1994</b>	<b>\$28,628.81</b>

**Merchandise and Professional Sponsors**

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Waukesha Kennel Club

More than 300 mile sponsors came from 42 U.S. states, 5 Canadian provinces, Spain, Italy, Australia, Israel, and South Africa.

### **Sources**

S.K.I.R.T. Scoop  
Waukesha Journal, April 5, 1994, Waukesha County edition of the Milwaukee Journal  
AMCA Newsletter, May, June, July, August 1994  
Conversations with Nancy Russell