IDITAROD NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL

VISITOR GUIDE

Alaska Geographic

IDITAROD NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL

Table of Contents

Iditarod Historic Trail
VISITOR GUIDE

Celebrating Alaska's National Historic Trail!

In 1968, Congress passed the National Trails System Act. The Act established a nationwide system of trails to provide for outdoor recreation and the enjoyment and conservation of scenic, historic, natural, and cultural areas of national significance. In doing so, the Act also recognized the valuable role and contributions of the many volunteers and nonprofit trail groups that help to develop and maintain our nation's trails. Fifty years later, we continue to celebrate the amazing work of these groups and their continued efforts in preserving and promoting our National Trails System.

The Iditarod National Historic Trail consists of a network of nearly 2,400 miles of winter trails that wind between the communities of Seward and Nome. It was named a National Historic Trail by Congress on November 10, 1978. It is both a symbol of frontier travel during the last great American gold-rush (1910-1917), and a celebration of the role that mushers and their dog teams played in settling Alaska. Across America, only 19 trails have been honored as National Historic Trails. The Iditarod is the only National Historic Trail in Alaska, and the only winter trail in the entire National Historic Trail system.

No one entity manages the entire Iditarod National Historic Trail. The Bureau of Land Management was appointed to coordinate the efforts of public land managers and volunteers on behalf of the Trail, but the actual management, maintenance, and preservation of the Trail, including the natural and cultural sites located along it, is a group effort.

A variety of entities (federal, state, local government, nonprofit, and private) are actively involved in promoting the history, use, protection, and development of the Iditarod National Historic Trail.

There are many ways to enjoy the Iditarod National Historic Trail. From mushing to museums, hiking to historic gold mines, we hope you can join us in celebrating the spirit and place of America's last great gold rush trail. See you out on the Trail!

How to Hit the Trail

Southcentral Alaska:

- Check out the paved bike path along Resurrection Bay in Seward.

- Backpack over the Crow Pass Trail from Girdwood to the Eagle River Nature Center.

- Visit the Eagle River Nature Center in Chugach State Park and see spawning salmon during the late summer.

- Stroll on the Trail at Bird Point along the Seward Highway and check out interpretive panels along the way.

- Hike the Trail in Girdwood, stopping at Crow Creek Mine to pan for gold.

- Visit the replica Iditarod Trail public shelter cabin at the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race Headquarters in Wasilla.

- Ride the Alaska Railroad into the Kenai Mountains and explore Alaska's roadless backcountry at the Spencer Glacier Whistle Stop in the Chugach National Forest.

- View the waterfowl and the Knik River crossing of the Trail at Reflections Lake, at mile 30 of the Glenn Highway.

Interior/Rivers Region:

- Charter a small plane from the community of McGrath to visit the ghost town of Iditarod.

- Fly mountain bikes to Takotna and ride old mining roads to the Ophir goldfields.

- Fish for silver salmon on the Unalakleet River along the Kaltag Portage.

- Fly into the BLM Rohn Shelter Cabin and backpack 30 miles over Rainy Pass for a floatplane pick up near Puntilla Lake.
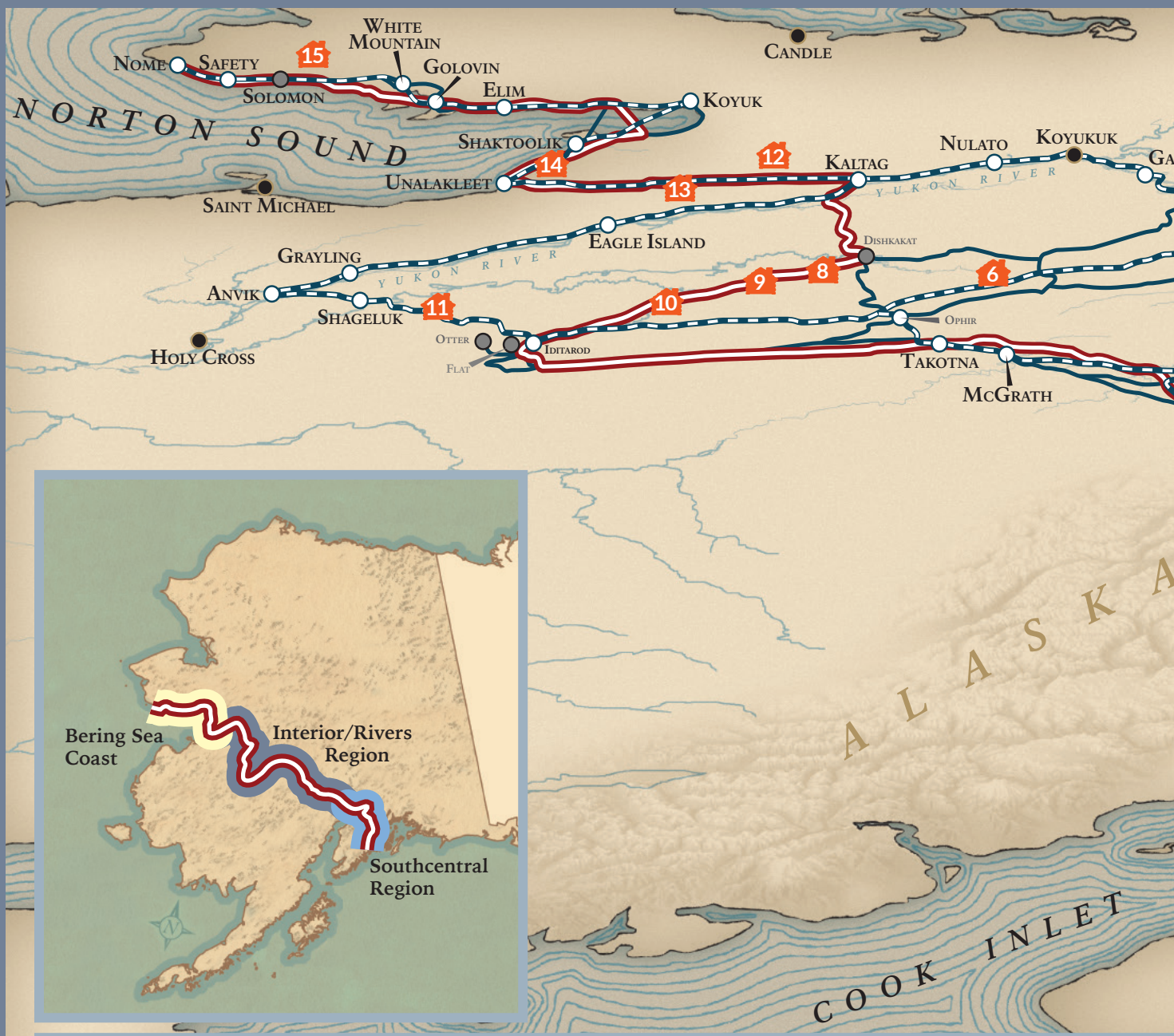
Bering Sea Coast:

- Visit the city of Nome and experience the beaches that were once filled with gold!

- Drive out from Nome on the Council Highway to the Safety Sound Bridge, and walk the Trail on the beach of the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge.

- Snowmachine, skijor, or dog mush from village to village, stopping at public safety cabins along the way.

- Cheer on participants of the Iditarod Trail Dog Sled Race, Iron Dog Snowmobile Race, and human-powered Iditarod Trail Invitational and Iditasport Ultra Marathon as they travel along the coast towards Nome.

Why You Don't Want to Walk to Nome (in Summer)

Five hundred miles of swamp, ankle busting tussocks, clouds of mosquitoes, and enough creek and river crossings to make you want to grow webbed feet!

Much of the country crossed by the historic Iditarod Trail north of Knik consists of flat, boggy basins lined with permafrost and punctuated by black spruce. There's a reason the old-timers rode the steamers up and down the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers in the summer. There are good stretches of high country that will give you a taste of the Trail, but if you want to seek out the flats, know before you go and bring your bug spray!

WHITE MOUNTAIN
NOME **SAFETY** 15
SOLOMON
GOLOVIN
ELIM
CANDLE

N O R T O N   S O U N D

SHAKTOOLIK
KOYUK
14
KALTAG 12
NULATO **KOYUKUK**
UNALAKLEET 13
GA
SAINT MICHAEL
Y U K O N   R I V E R

EAGLE ISLAND
GRAYLING
DISHKAKAT
8
Y U K O N   R I V E R
9
6
ANVIK
10
SHAGELUK
11
OPHIR
OTTER
IDITAROD
HOLY CROSS
FLAT
TAKOTNA
McGRATH

A L A S K A

Bering Sea Coast
Interior/Rivers Region

Southcentral Region

C O O K   I N L E T

Legend

〰	Historic Trail (Seward to Nome)
▪▪▪	Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race Route
—	Connecting Trails
〰	Bering Sea Coast
〰	Interior/Rivers Region
〰	Southcentral Region
●	Town or Place Name
●	Abandoned Town
○	Race Checkpoint

🏠 **Public Safety Cabin**

1. Crow Pass (USFS)*
2. Eagle River Nature Center (ERNC)*
3. Historic ARC [Skwentna Crossing] (AK DNR)
4. Rohn (BLM)
5. Bear Creek (BLM)
6. Carlson Crossing (AK DNR)
7. N. Fork Innoko (AK DNR)
8. Tol
9. His
10. Mo
11. Big
12. Tri
13. Ol
14. Foc
15. Top

(All cabins are available for public use without res
For more information on these cabins se

Iditarod National Historic Trail

LENA

RUBY

1925 Serum Route

TANANA

Y U K O N   R I V E R

1925 Serum Route

7

CRIPPLE

NENANA

NIKOLAI

5

R A N G E

4

ROHN

RAINY PASS

PUNTILLA LAKE

FINGER LAKE

SKWENTNA

3

YENTNA

WILLOW

WASILLA

KNIK

EKLUTNA

SUSITNA STATION

2

EAGLE RIVER

ANCHORAGE

1

GIRDWOOD

HOPE

WHITTIER

N

MOOSE PASS

SEWARD

lstoi Headwaters (AK DNR)

storic ARC [Don's] (AK DNR)

oose Creek (AK DNR)

g Yentna Crossing (AK DNR)

pod Flat (BLM)

d Woman (BLM)

othills (BLM)

pkok Mushers (Nome Kennel Club)

ervation unless noted [*].

e pages 16–17).

Image courtesy of the Anchorage Museum.

Alaska's Enduring Trail

At the turn of the twentieth century in Alaska, transportation between boomtowns like Nome, Fairbanks, and Valdez relied on river and ocean steamers in summer, and horse and sled dog teams in the winter. In 1908, the Alaska Road Commission (ARC) sought a shorter winter overland route to Nome than the existing 1,300-mile route from Valdez through Fairbanks. The ARC dispatched Colonel Walter Goodwin and a crew of three men with their dog teams to scout a winter trail from Seward, over the Alaska Range, to Nome.

As surveyed, the new trail was 958 miles long—nearly 400 miles shorter than the existing overland route. Despite this, Goodwin concluded that the lack of population and low demand for mail service made its development unnecessary. That was until Christmas Day 1908 when gold was discovered on a tributary of the Iditarod River.

In fall 1908, prospectors Johnny Beaton and Bill Dikeman had driven a small steamboat up the Iditarod River, built a tiny cabin, and began melting the frozen ground and hand-digging small exploratory pits on streambeds. Beaton and Dikeman dug 26 pits without any luck before hitting pay dirt on Christmas Day. The gold they found was 12 feet beneath the ground surface.

The Iditarod goldfields became the fourth most productive district in all of Alaska. The Iditarod rush was the last great American gold rush. Over 65 tons of gold, or about $2.5 billion dollars at today's value, were taken out of the Iditarod district – and much of it by dogsled!

Goodwin expedition measuring the Seward to Nome route with cyclometer attached to a dogsled.

Boomtowns, Gold Trains, and Roadhouses

Even by Alaska standards, the Iditarod goldfields were so remote that it wasn't until summer 1910 that stampeders arrived. But within three months, gold-seekers had built two new towns: Iditarod and Flat. Each town was home to about 2,000 citizens. By winter 1910, "gold-train" sled dog teams packed with a half-ton of gold each made the three-week run from to Seward. Tons of gold came out, and tons of freight, food, and mail went in.

Roadhouses and trail-marking 'tripods' lined the 520-mile route to Seward from Iditarod. Located a day's journey by foot or dog team—about 20 miles— the roadhouses allowed travel without the need for overnight camping or carrying of three weeks of provisions. Thousands of fortune seekers, many on foot or snowshoe, traveled across Alaska on this trail system.

By 1918, however, the steady stream of travelers along the trail turned into a trickle. World War I drew young miners and workers away from the goldfields. At the same time, new winter mail contracts bypassed the fading town of Iditarod in favor of more direct routes to Nome.

Pre-Russo-Euro Contact	1843	1867	1900	1903	1908	1908	1910-1912
NATIVE PEOPLE FROM SEWARD PENINSULA TO PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND ESTABLISH TRAILS LATER USED AS THE IDITAROD TRAIL	RUSSIANS BEGIN USING THE KALTAG PORTAGE, A TRADITIONAL ALASKA NATIVE TRADING ROUTE THAT RUNS BETWEEN THE COMMUNITIES OF KALTAG AND UNALAKLEET	THE UNITED STATES PURCHASES ALASKA FROM RUSSIA	GOLD FLAKES ARE FOUND IN THE SANDS OF NOME'S BEACHES PROMPTING A RUSH OF MINERS TO THE REGION	THE CITY OF SEWARD FORMED AS START OF NEW RAILROAD LINKING COAST TO INTERIOR	SEWARD TO NOME ROUTE EXPLORED BY COLONEL WALTER GOODWIN	THE ALASKA ROAD COMMISSION SENDS COLONEL WALTER GOODWIN AND HIS CREW TO SCOUT A SEWARD-TO-NOME TRAIL	TEN THOUSAND STAMPEDERS RUSH TO MINING CAMPS BETWEEN IDITAROD AND RUBY

Nome Serum Run Marks the Beginning of the End

In the winter of 1925, a deadly outbreak of diphtheria threatened Nome's residents. Winter ice had closed the port city from the outside world without enough serum to vaccinate its residents. Serum from Anchorage was rushed by train to Nenana and then picked up by a sled dog relay. Twenty of Alaska's best mushers and their teams carried the serum 674 miles from Nenana to Nome in less than five and a half days!

This was to be one of the final great feats by sled dogs during this era. Within a decade, air transport replaced the sled dog team as the preferred way to ship mail. With downturns in gold mining, most of the roadhouses closed, boomtowns emptied, and the Iditarod Trail fell into disuse.

A Partnership Effort Reopens the Iditarod Trail

After the end of the Last Great Gold Rush, the Iditarod Trail system was reclaimed by forest and tundra for almost half a century until Alaskans, led by Joe Redington, Sr., reopened the routes. Joe and his friends created an epic sled dog race from Anchorage to Nome following the route of the historic Iditarod Trail. The Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race helped revive dog mushing in Alaska and around the world. Thanks to the efforts of Joe and the Alaska Congressional delegation, the Iditarod was established as a National Historic Trail in 1978.

Alaska Fire Service crew member puts the finishing touches on a tripod in the Farewell Burn, 1981.

Tripods Lead to Safety

For the past century, wooden tripods have been placed at close intervals along treeless sections of the Iditarod Trail to guide travelers safely through blizzards. A 1912 article in Alaska Yukon Magazine titled "Trail Making in Alaska" described how Colonel Goodwin, leader of the Alaska Road Commission expedition to mark the trail from Seward to Nome, constructed the tripods:

"… tripods… consisted of three sticks of timber each, two of which were eight feet long and the third ten or eleven feet long. They are so fastened together that the longest of the three sticks projects two or three feet over the others and directly above the trail."

Because the tripods sat on top of the ground rather than in it, they could more easily flex between cold, dry, warm, or wet seasons. This meant fewer broken trail markers.

The same tripod design is still in use today. Volunteer groups and public land managers work to provide these safety markers over hundreds of miles of the trail.

1910-1911	1912	1914	1918	1925	1968	1973	1978
AK ROAD COMMISSION SPENDS $10,000 TO CONSTRUCT SEWARD-TO-NOME TRAIL WITH A BRANCH TO THE IDITAROD GOLDFIELDS	ALASKA BECOMES A TERRITORY	U.S. MAIL CARRIED THE LENGTH OF THE 'IDITAROD TRAIL'; U.S. GOVERNMENT TAKES OVER CONSTRUCTION OF ALASKA RAILROAD, ESTABLISHING NEW HEADQUARTERS ON COOK INLET	WORLD WAR I DRAWS YOUNG MINERS AND WORKERS AWAY FROM THE GOLD FIELDS LEADING TO THE END OF THE STAMPEDE	DIPHTHERIA EPIDEMIC THREATENS NOME; SERUM IS DELIVERED VIA DOG TEAM FROM NENANA	THE NATIONAL TRAILS SYSTEM ACT IS PASSED BY CONGRESS ON OCTOBER 2	THE FIRST IDITAROD TRAIL SLED DOG RACE IS RUN TO NOME	IDITAROD NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL ESTABLISHED BY CONGRESS

# Attractions Along the Iditarod National Historic Trail in Southcentral Alaska

Map labels:

Dorothy E. Page Museum and Visitor Center

PALMER

WASILLA

Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race Headquarters

Reflections Lake & Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge

Knik Museum Alaska Sled Dog Mushers Hall of Fame

KNIK

EKLUTNA

Eklutna Historic Park

Chugach State Park

EAGLE RIVER

Eagle River Nature Center (ERNC)

ERNC Public Use Cabins and Yurts

Crow Pass Trail

ANCHORAGE

Anchorage Museum Alaska Public Lands Information Center

Ship Creek / Indian Pass Trail

Crow Pass Cabin (USFS)

Bird to Gird Bike Trail

Winner Creek Trails

Crow Creek Mine Site

Alyeska Roundhouse Museum US Forest Service Ranger Station

Turnagain Arm

GIRDWOOD

HOPE

Hope Historical Museum

Portage Whistle Stop

WHITTIER

Turnagain Pass

Trail of Blue Ice

Begich, Boggs Visitor Center

Johnson Pass Trail

Spencer Whistle Stop

MOOSE PASS

Chugach National Forest

Seward Community Library and Museum

SEWARD

Kenai Fjords National Park Visitor Center

Legend:

- Chugach State Park
- Chugach National Forest
- Iditarod National Historic Trail (INHT)
- Hiking Trails / Biking (part of INHT system)
- Roads
- Railroad
- Museum
- Hiking
- Whistle Stop/AKRR
- Visitor Center
- Historic Mine Site
- Bike Trail
- Wildlife Viewing
- Public Use Shelter

0 5 10 20 Miles

Southcentral Region

Kenai Mountains

Seward (Mile 0)

Look for the tripod and historic Iditarod Trail monument located along the shoreline of Resurrection Bay next to the Alaska SeaLife Center. This is the southernmost terminus for the historic Iditarod Trail. During the gold rush era, thousands of people set off from Seward trying to realize their dreams of fortune. A paved segment of the historic trail follows the bay for one mile to the small boat harbor. See statues of historic mushers, including one of the famous Japanese musher Jujiro Wada, along the waterfront trail.
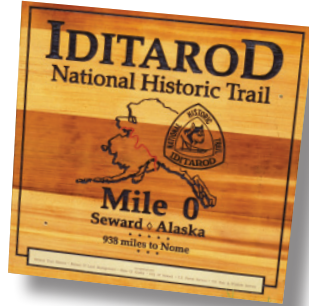
Seward Community Library and Museum

The Resurrection Bay Historical Society maintains a museum in downtown Seward that tells the history of the area and the Iditarod. If you visit during the summer, be sure to catch one of their evening programs on the history of the Iditarod Trail.

For more information on the mission and activities of the Resurrection Bay Historical Society visit www.resbayhistorical.org.

Johnson Pass Trail

This 23-mile trail is part of the historic Iditarod Trail system. It is one of many commemorative Iditarod Trail segments in the Chugach National Forest. Popular with mountain bikers and hikers, this trail offers spectacular scenery with hemlock forests, wildflowers, and sweeping vistas. This is an excellent trail for a multi-day family outings. Wildlife viewing, hunting, and fishing opportunities also exist. Trailheads at mile 64 of the Seward Highway (north end) and mile 32.5 of the Seward Highway (south end).

Alaska Railroad & Spencer Glacier Whistle Stop

Hop on board the Alaska Railroad and follow the main route of the historic Iditarod Trail deep into the roadless backcountry of the Chugach National Forest. The Spencer Glacier Whistle Stop is the first in a series of whistle stops that offers hiking, glacier viewing, and amazing scenery. Trips can be arranged through the Alaska Railroad at www.akrr.com.

Seward of Yesteryear

"Seward Route to the Iditarod the Only Way"

Headline from Seward Weekly Gateway Paper, Nov. 1909

Although officially founded in 1903, the town of Seward bustled with prospectors for at least a decade prior to its incorporation. The year-round ice-free waters of Resurrection Bay made Seward an ideal port and supply point for booming Interior Alaska mining communities.

The first wave of commerce came to Seward in the late 1890s with the discovery of gold on the north side of the Kenai Peninsula at Hope and Sunrise. As new gold strikes were made in other places around Alaska, community boosters worked hard to make sure that Seward stayed on the map. They pressed for the development of a government trail leading from Seward to the new Iditarod goldfields in the Upper Innoko Basin. In December 1909, the town hired a Japanese businessman and adventurer named Jujiro Wada to help survey a route from Seward to Iditarod. Despite several setbacks along the way—including prolonged temperatures of minus 60 degrees Fahrenheit—Wada and his team were successful.

Newspapers touted the advantages of the Seward route over the Richardson Trail from Valdez to Fairbanks. In 1910, the Alaska Road Commission decided to spend $10,000 to construct a trail connecting Seward to Nome.

Turnagain Arm

Portage Valley-Trail of Blue Ice

The Trail of Blue Ice is a segment of the Southern Trek section of the historic Iditarod Trail system. Located in the Chugach National Forest, in the glacially carved Portage Valley, the trail starts at the Moose Flats Day Use Site. This wide and well-surfaced trail runs five miles to the Begich, Boggs Visitor Center. All sections are accessible and great for a family outing.

Begich, Boggs Visitor Center

Built on the terminal moraine left behind by Portage Glacier, the visitor center offers interactive displays, videos, and educational programs about the natural history of the Chugach National Forest. The visitor center is open seven days a week during the summer and closed through the winter season.

Seward Highway All-American Road

Considered to be one of the best scenic byways in the United States, the Seward Highway extends 125 miles from Seward to Anchorage along the Kenai Peninsula and Turnagain Arm. When following the Seward Highway, you are actually following much of the historic Iditarod Trail. Road signs direct drivers to numerous trailheads and campsites located just off the highway.

Hope Historic District

The small, quiet communities of Hope and nearby Sunrise were once booming gold rush cities in the late 1890s. Many of the old buildings and charm of the gold rush days still remain in Hope. In fact, the downtown store opened in 1896 and is still serving customers today. Be sure to check out the Hope-Sunrise Historical and Mining Museum.

Girdwood

The town of Girdwood was established in 1906 as a place to rest and gather supplies before crossing the Iditarod Trail over the Chugach Mountains. Today, the town hosts some of the most easily accessed and historically intact segments of the Iditarod Trail. Wide, paved bike paths parallel the Alyeska Highway in the lower valley, while moss-shrouded rainforest sections start at trailheads from mile 1.6 of Crow Creek Road. For more information, visit the U.S. Forest Service Glacier Ranger District office just off the Alyeska Highway, or look for maps at nearby trailheads.

Roundhouse Museum at Alyeska Resort

The Roundhouse Museum is located in a historic chairlift terminal high above the Girdwood Valley. The museum exhibits focus on outdoor recreation and skiing but include some information about the history of gold mining activities in the area as well. Accessed via the Alyeska Resort tram, the museum provides a grand view of the Iditarod route across the Chugach Mountains. Open summer and winter.

Winner Creek Trails

Long a favorite with local residents, the Winner Creek segment of the historic Iditarod Trail provides access to the spectacular Four Corners Gorge and an exciting hand-operated tram over the chasm. The Winner Creek Trail is accessible from both Crow Creek Road and the Alyeska Hotel. The Upper Winner Creek Trail to Berry Pass provides a nine-mile route to a spectacular alpine pass. There are multiple water crossings along this primitive trail.

Crow Creek Mine

Visitors can pan for gold, camp, and get a feel for life in a historic gold camp at one of the largest intact historic mines in Southcentral Alaska (summer only). Established in 1896, the Crow Creek Mine was the most productive placer mining camp in the Turnagain-Knik region, and a heavy user of the Iditarod Trail to Seward.

Crow Pass Trail

At the end of Crow Creek Road, a 3.5-mile segment of the historic Iditarod Trail route leads to Crow Pass—the highest point on the entire Seward to Nome trail. This is one of the most scenic hikes in all of Southcentral Alaska and a great way to experience the Trail. Adventurous backpackers can continue over the pass on a 24-mile traverse of Chugach State Park, finishing at the Eagle River Nature Center. The Forest Service rents a public use cabin in the Crow Pass area. Summer use only is recommended due to avalanche hazards. Tips for traveling on the trail can be found on pages 16 and 17.

Bird to Gird National Recreation Trail (Girdwood to Indian Pathway)

First cut by trail builders in 1908 seeking to avoid the avalanche prone Crow Pass Trail, today's route is a wide 13-mile, bike-friendly asphalt trail. There are frequent turnouts, numerous information displays, and great opportunities for wildlife viewing along this portion of the trail. Trailheads are located at the Bird Point rest stop at mile 96.1 on the Seward Highway and behind the Chugach National Forest Ranger Station on the Alyeska Highway in Girdwood.

NOV 10 1978

Iditarod National Historic Trail

Mile 118

Alaska Public Lands Information Center

Anchorage of Yesteryear

Anchorage was a blank spot on the map when the Seward-to-Nome government trail opened in 1910. All of this changed in 1915, when the federal government established the townsite of Anchorage as the headquarters of the soon-to-be-built Alaska Railroad. The main route of the Iditarod Trail soon included the new boomtown, and dog teams loaded with hundreds of thousands of dollars of Iditarod gold became a regular sight on Anchorage's main streets.

Every winter until 1919 when the railroad segment to the ice-free port of Seward was completed, Anchorage received its winter mail and supplies by dog teams traveling the Indian Valley/Ship Creek Trail. The main hotel in town even included dog kennels in the basement for visiting mushers.

Image Courtesy of the Anchorage Museum Archives: Alaska Railroad Collection.

Anchorage Area

Ship Creek / Indian Pass Trail

A largely unimproved, 20-mile traverse through rainforest, alpine and sub-boreal forest, this excursion is best done on skis in winter. Improved segments at either end provide enjoyable 'out-and-back' day trips, but to travel the full length requires a bit more planning and fortitude. It is accessible year-round on the Ship Creek side via scenic Arctic Valley Road just north of Anchorage, off the Glenn Highway at Arctic Valley exit. The trailhead at Indian Valley is located just off the Seward Highway by the community of Indian at mile 23 of the Seward Highway.

Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race Ceremonial Start

Every year on the first Saturday of March, dozens of mushers and dog teams start their journey to Nome with a warm-up trip over the trails of Anchorage. From Fourth Avenue, teams fly down the Cordova Street hill to the paved Chester Creek bike path, and head east to finish their run at the Bureau of Land Management's Campbell Tract Facility. Good opportunities for wildlife viewing can be had on the trails year round.

Alaska Public Lands Information Center

This interagency visitor center on Fourth Avenue can provide details on Iditarod Trail-related recreation described in this guide, as well as other opportunities throughout Alaska. Open year-round; more information available at https://www.alaskacenters.gov/.

Eagle River Nature Center

The upper Eagle River Valley was once described by U.S. Army explorers on the Iditarod a century ago as a "miniature Yosemite." The nonprofit Eagle River Nature Center provides nature studies for adults and children, nine miles of hiking trails—including a portion of the historic Iditarod Trail—and overnight camping (by reservation) at a public use cabin and three yurts. Located at mile 10 on Eagle River Road, the site is open year round.

Eklutna Historic Park

This Dena'ina Athabaskan village site, established in 1650, was a winter Knik River crossing site for the historic Iditarod Trail. A museum, historic Russian Orthodox church from the 1840s, and colorfully decorated graveyard 'spirit houses' provide a window into the past. Open to the public from May 15 through September 15. Guided tours are available during the summer season. On Eklutna Village Road in Chugiak.

Wasilla Area

Reflections Lake at Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge

Excellent waterfowl viewing and stunning Chugach mountain scenery can be found at the over-the-Knik River ice crossing site of the old Iditarod Trail. A flat, one-mile gravel trail winds around Reflections Lake leading to a 35-foot tall viewing tower on the northwest side of the lake that offers hidden views into this unique intertidal wetland. Access at the Reflections Lake exit at mile 30 on the Glenn Highway.

Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race Headquarters

A large log building houses a museum with memorabilia, displays, and photographs dating back to the first runs of the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race in 1973. A public shelter cabin replica is located on site with artifacts and information associated with the historic uses of the Iditarod Trail. The site is open year round and dog sled rides are offered May to September. Mile 2.2 Knik-Goose Bay Road.

Knik Museum—Alaska Sled Dog Mushers Hall of Fame

Located on the main route of the historic Iditarod Trail where it passed through the gold rush era town of Knik, the museum building was previously used as a pool hall and roadhouse. The first floor contains artifacts and photographs from the historic Knik townsite, while the second floor is home to the Sled Dog Mushers Hall of Fame. Visitors can take short walks along a portion of the historic trail that passes near the museum. At mile 13.9 Knik-Goose Bay Road.

Dorothy E. Page Museum and Visitor Center

Owned and operated by the City of Wasilla, this museum consists of eleven historic structures in downtown Wasilla, including two listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Experience interactive dog mushing and gold mining exhibits, as well as a temporary, rotating exhibit space. Open year round, although summer and winter hours may vary.


Iditarod National Historic Trail

NOV 10 1978

Mile 147

Knik Museum and Mushers Hall of Fame

Knik of Yesteryear

During the Iditarod gold rush, Knik was the last major outfitting center before stampeders struck out for gold mines 375 miles to the northwest. Stampeders would travel to Knik either by trail over the Chugach Mountains, or by steamship up the Cook Inlet from Seward. At its peak population, Knik was home to 1,500 people, a variety of businesses, and was the hub for a number of trails to goldfields and coalfields. The founding of Anchorage and the Alaska Railroad's bypassing of Knik caused the town's rapid decline—by 1920 the majority of its population had moved on.

"Normally a small and quiet village, Knik was in the throes of a boom. The hotel was a new, two-story frame building, but construction-wise a mere shell. From the small downstairs lobby one could hear a man change his mind in the farthest room upstairs"

Harold Peckenpaugh, 1912, from Nuggets and Beans
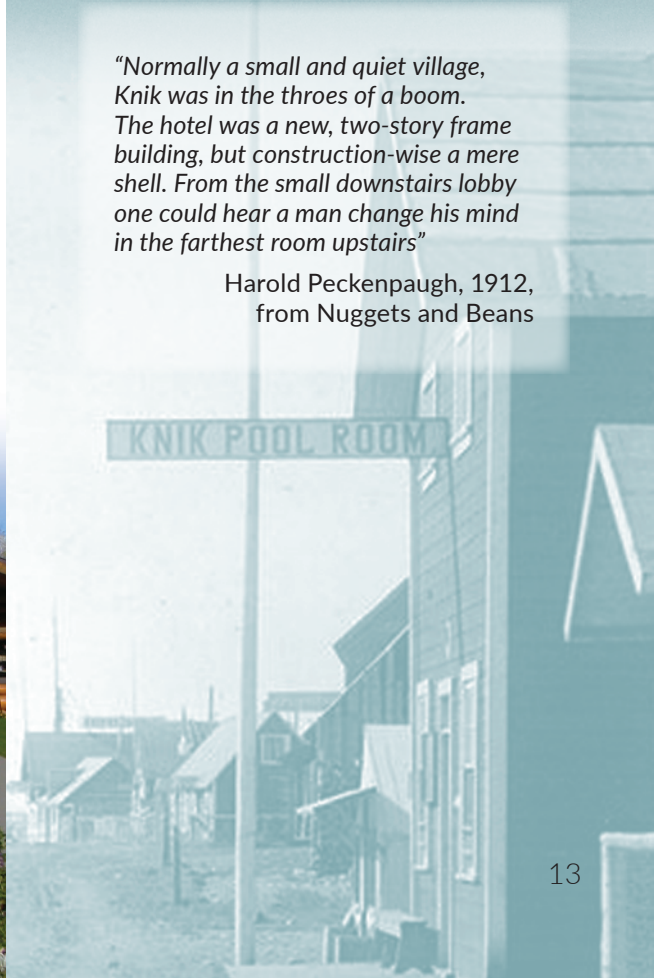
Mail on the Trail

One of the most important uses of the Iditarod trail system was as a mail delivery route. The postcards, newspapers, catalogs, and letters that mail carriers hauled on their sleds provided the residents of rural communities with an essential connection to the world outside. On average, between two and three mail trips were made along the trail each week. Each mail carrier, or "musher," was expected to carry between 100 and 250 pounds of mail on their sleds!

POST CARD

POST CARD

A Packer on the Trail, Alaska.

POST CARD

POST CARD
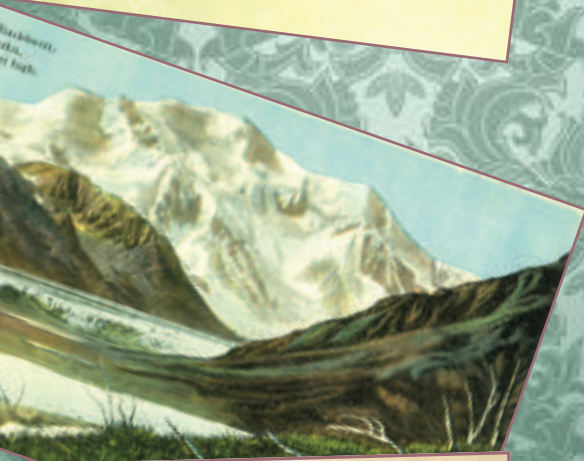
Iditarod National Historic Trail Passport Stamp Program

The Iditarod National Historic Trail is a proud participant in the Passport to Your National Parks Program. This program was created to help visitors explore their National Parks and has become a popular way for people to document their travels to all of America's Public Lands! More information, including how to purchase a Passport, can be found at www.eparks.com, or from Alaska Geographic.

Many of the historical sites, museums, and visitor centers mentioned in the previous pages are participants in the Passport Program (see full list below). You can go to these sites to get your Iditarod National Historic Trail stamps! These pages, filled with historical postcard images of locations and activities along the Iditarod Trail are a place for you to collect INHT stamps.

Iditarod NHT Passport Stamp Participants

Seward:	Kenai Fjords National Park Information Center
Hope:	Hope and Sunrise Historical and Mining Museum
Portage:	Begich, Boggs Visitor Center
Girdwood:	The Roundhouse Museum
Anchorage:	BLM Anchorage Field Office (Campbell Tract)
	Alaska Public Lands Information Center (Downtown Anchorage)
	Alaska Railroad, Anchorage-to-Seward Route (Aboard the Train)
Knik:	Knik Museum and Mushers Hall of Fame
Wasilla:	Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race Headquarters
McGrath:	McGrath Museum
Nome:	Nome Visitors Center

Why November 10, 1978?

The example passport stamps shown in this Visitor Guide include the date November 10, 1978. On this day, Congress designated the Iditarod National Historic Trail.

Tips for Trail Travel

There are many different ways to get outside and enjoy the Iditarod National Historic Trail. In the summer season, popular trail activities include hiking, biking, packrafting, and camping. During the winter months, skiing, dog sledding, fat biking, and snowmachining are just some of the ways you can experience all that the trail has to offer. Regardless of when you go, here are a few things that you can do before and during you trip to take care of the trail and help ensure its use for future visitors!

Leave No Trace Seven Principles:

1. **Plan Ahead and Prepare**
   Prepare for extreme weather, potential hazards, and emergencies. Know where you are going; the Iditarod NHT crosses lands managed by a number of different entities (BLM, State of Alaska, USFS, and private). Be sure to read up on the regulations and rules for each area you'll be visiting.

2. **Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces**
   Stick to the existing trail. Walking or riding single file in the middle of the trail helps reduce impacts to the trail and the surrounding environment.

3. **Dispose of Waste Properly**
   If you pack it in, pack it out! Uneaten food, personal hygiene products and even toilet paper should never be left on the trail or at a campsite.

4. **Leave What You Find**
   You can look at, but do not touch or take any cultural or historic structures and artifacts you might encounter on the trail. The removal of artifacts or destruction of historic sites on public lands is prohibited by law.

5. **Minimize Campfire Impacts**
   Where fires are permitted, use only established fire rings or fire pans. In the summer, keep an eye on fire restrictions and wildfire threats. If stopping at cabins, make sure to clean out the woodstoves of any extra ash or trash. Be mindful of the type and size of burnable materials that you are putting into the stove and contribute to the wood piles before you leave.

6. **Respect Wildlife**
   If you come across an animal on the trail keep your distance and be aware of how your presence might be affecting that animal's behavior. Never feed any wildlife you come across.

7. **Be Considerate of Other Visitors**
   Respect other visitors on the trail by limiting loud noises when possible and yielding to others as they pass. Keep in mind, when visiting rural communities on the trail, this is their home and you are a guest.

Heading to the "Bush"

Beyond the reaches of the road system in Alaska lies the "Bush." Communities in the Bush are only accessible by plane or boat. If you choose to visit either the middle or northern portions of the Iditarod, it is likely that one of these small communities will become a gateway to your experience.

You may find that life here moves at a different rhythm than you are accustomed to. Things may seem to move slower, but that perception may result from not being present to see the intense bursts of seasonal activity in which much is accomplished.

Natural cycles such as weather, tides, the seasons, and wildlife migration are more dominant in Bush Alaska than in urban centers. Expect delays in transportation. Know that all food and fuel in rural Alaska, except locally harvested foods, have arrived by air or water. Expect higher prices on everything, and limited choices and quantities. If you know in advance that you'll be enjoying someone's hospitality, try to bring a gift such as fresh fruit or coffee.

Much of the lands adjacent to the Trail around small towns and villages are privately owned. Cabins, camps, and mining equipment along the Trail should be respected as private property and not used, unless marked as public. Historic artifacts should not be removed, as they are protected by law in order to help tell the story of past people, places, and events.

Public Shelter Cabins

During the height of the gold rush era, roadhouses and shelter cabins provided travelers with a safe place to warm up and dry off during their journey along the Iditarod Trail. These cabins were spaced about twenty-miles apart, or roughly the distance of one day's journey. Today, in the tradition of these places past, a number of public shelter cabins have been built along the historic Trail for visitors to enjoy.

Southcentral Alaska

The Chugach National Forest rents public use cabins on both the Johnson Pass and Crow Pass-Iditarod Trails. Reservations are required. Visit www.recreation.gov for more information.

Just north of Anchorage, on the Eagle River side of the Crow Pass-Iditarod Trail, one cabin and three public use yurts are available for rent year-round on the portion of the Trail managed by the Eagle River Nature Center. Reservations are required. Learn more at www.ernc.org.

Interior/Rivers Region

Between Knik and the community of Kaltag, there are nine public shelter cabins along the historic Iditarod Trail. Accessible in winter only, the cabins do not require a reservation, although users are expected to share the cabins with other parties. Two of the cabins are maintained by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and seven are maintained by local trail partners under permit from the State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources (AK DNR).

Bering Sea Coast

There are four public use cabins (three managed by the BLM, one managed by AK DNR) along the northern portion of the historic Iditarod Trail. These cabins are open year round for use and do not require a reservation. Don't forget to write your name in the log books stashed at each cabin site!

Iditarod of Yesteryear

Following the news of gold strikes at Otter and Flat Creeks, stampeders boarded steamboats at Fairbanks and followed the outgoing Yukon River ice to the Iditarod River. On June 1, 1910, the first steamer navigated up the Iditarod River to within eight miles of the Christmas Day gold strike where it dropped off passengers and freight. Other steamboats soon followed and two new towns quickly sprang up. By August, 2,000 people inhabited the boomtown now named Iditarod, and another 2,000 lived just over the ridge at the site of the gold discovery in a town named Flat.

No gold mining actually took place in Iditarod. Instead, it was the financial, commercial, and transportation hub for people working in the nearby goldfields. Because it was established in the twentieth century, Iditarod enjoyed amenities not available in the nineteenth century, like telephone service and wireless communication with the outside world.

Image courtesy of the Anchorage Museum Archival Collection

Interior/Rivers Region

McGrath

McGrath is the largest community on the Iditarod Trail between the Alaska Range and Unalakleet on Norton Sound. Served by regular commercial air service from Anchorage, the town is a gateway to public shelter cabins on some of the wildest sections of the historic trail, as well as to the ghost town of Iditarod. In the summer, it hosts a wildland firefighting base.

McGrath Museum

A gem of a museum in McGrath with one-of-a-kind artifacts and insightful displays that chronicle the challenging lives of the local Alaska Natives and the miners who came to the area in search of gold. The museum is operated by the Tochak Historical Society.

Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race Checkpoint

Hard-core race fans can get an up-close look at race activities as dog teams pull in to McGrath on the first March Tuesday and Wednesday after the Sunday start of the race. Mushers have completed one-third of the race route at this point.

Iditarod Ghost Town

The remains of the now abandoned town of Iditarod are accessible year-round via small floatplane or ski-plane charters operating out of McGrath. The entire townsite sits on state public lands. The removal of any artifacts or items from the site is prohibited by law.

Bering Sea Coast

Unalakleet

A tightly packed, beachfront community inhabited for almost 2,000 years, the residents of Unalakleet still rely heavily on the bounty of Norton Sound, the Unalakleet River, and nearby uplands for their livelihood. The largest community on the Iditarod Trail between Wasilla and Nome, Unalakleet is served by daily commercial air service from Anchorage, and is a transportation hub for villages in eastern and southern Norton Sound.

Unalakleet National Wild and Scenic River

Residents and visitors alike enjoy a rich run of king, silver, chum, and pink salmon on this wild Alaska river. A fishing lodge and guide services are available, along with remote camping on upper reaches of the river.

Nome

"Nome knows how to welcome the wanderer from the wilderness and make him altogether at home." – Hudson Stuck, 1914

The last stop along the historic Iditarod Trail, Nome was once a booming gold town. Today, it is home to about 4,000 residents and is accessible by plane. There are several hotels and restaurants located in the downtown area. Each year in March, the entire community comes together to cheer on the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race mushers as the dog teams run the last few miles to the finish line. Visitors to Nome can explore this historic boom town for themselves all year round.

Last Train to Nowhere—Council City and Solomon Railroad

A rich gold strike 50 miles inland from the town of Solomon (on the Iditarod Trail) encouraged entrepreneurs to build a railroad over the tundra in 1903. A huge Norton Sound storm in 1913 washed out the tracks, stranding the engines where they can still be seen today. Road accessible, 35 miles east of Nome on the Council Highway.

Nome-Council Highway

Drive or bike a scenic 35-mile section of the historic Iditarod Trail starting in Nome and heading east along the coast of Norton Sound. The gravel road passes Cape Nome and parallels Safety Sound to the Solomon River. In the winter, the road is unplowed and becomes the Iditarod Trail; look for trail marking tripods. Great birdwatching in summer.

Carrie M. McLain Museum

Nome's museum is located in the sprawling Richard Foster Building. Its exhibits showcase the history of the gold rush, the century old sport of sled dog racing, and the historic life ways of local Native people with artifacts and an extensive collection of photographs found nowhere else in the world.

Recreational Gold Panning

Recreational panning is allowed on the beaches east of town to the Fort Davis Roadhouse. Dress to get wet!

Swanberg Dredge

Located within easy walking distance of downtown Nome (one mile east), this dredge operated in the 1940s and 1950s, seeking gold in the relic beach ridges only a few hundred yards inland from today's beach.

St. Joseph Church

Built in 1902, St. Joseph's Church steeple was electrically lit at the expense of the city to serve as a beacon for miners and mushers during the darkness of winter and blizzards. The church survived a disastrous fire in 1934, and has since been relocated and restored as a community hall.

Iditarod National Historic Trail
NOV 10 1978
958
Nome Visitors Center

Nome of Yesteryear

Nome sprang into existence almost overnight with the discovery of gold by the "three lucky Swedes" in 1898. Tens of thousands of down-on-their-luck miners migrated from the played-out Yukon goldfields at Dawson. They arrived to find miners on their hands and knees digging along the beach where gold flakes had been found in abundance. By 1900, Nome was the largest community in the far north.

With steamship service cut-off by sea ice for six months of the year, the town quickly came to rely on the "Seward Trail" (later known as the Iditarod Trail) for mail and transportation "Outside"—to the Lower 48. In 1925, Nome became the center of national attention, as teams of mushers and dogs raced serum across Alaska to prevent the outbreak of a diphtheria epidemic in the town.

Images courtesy of the Anchorage Museum Archival Collection

The Birth of Sled Dog Racing

With the same fervor that brought gold-seekers north, ice-bound Nome residents a century ago pioneered sled dog racing as we know it today. During the winter season when the ground froze and mining activity slowed down, the residents of Nome looked for other activities to keep them busy. Competitive sled dog races were a popular way to spend some free time. The first races were short-distance affairs to nearby Fort Davis or Cape Nome, but the races quickly lengthened as the popularity of the sport grew.

In 1908, the Nome Kennel Club was founded to improve the care and science of dogs and sled racing. Kennels, modeled after Kentucky horse racing stables, provided the most effective diets, hitches, and sled materials to mushers. They also prohibited dog cruelty and abandonment.

The biggest event of the year—held at the end of the racing season in April before the spring thaw—was the 408-mile All Alaska Sweepstakes from Nome to Candle and back. Race events featured all the pomp and ceremony of the Kentucky Derby with starting bugles, a race queen and court, and lots of betting with the gold taken out of the hills the previous summer.

Leonhard Seppala
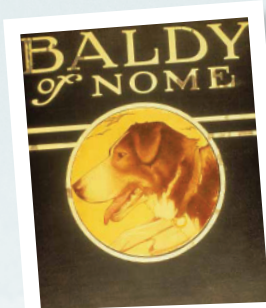
Until the 1909 All Alaska Sweepstakes Race, dogs of all breeds, shapes, and sizes were entered in the race. Then, a Russian trader named William Goosak entered a team of Siberian huskies. Skeptical locals initially referred to Goosak's relatively small dogs as "Siberian Rats," but after they nearly won, opinion began to change.

The next year a rich young Scotsman, Fox Maule Ramsay, went to Siberia and purchased 70 Siberian huskies. He entered three teams of the imported Huskies in the 1910 All Alaska Sweepstakes Race. Again, the Siberian huskies excelled, with Iron Man Johnson running one of the teams to a record that stood until 2008.

Perhaps the greatest dog driver ever was Leonhard Seppala. He honed his skill working and racing around Nome. Seppala won the Sweepstakes three years in a row with his unparalleled ability to handle and train Siberian sled dogs. Seppala and his team later became nationwide celebrities for the crucial role they played in the delivery of diphtheria serum to Nome in 1925.

More Than a Race Trail for Dogs

Every February and March, professional and recreational racers put their minds, muscles, and machines to work on epic long-distance races on the historic Iditarod Trail.

Harkening back to the All Alaska Sweepstakes of yesteryear, the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race was established in 1973. On the first weekend of every March, up to 80 sled dog teams line up to recreate the rush to Iditarod and beyond. With the frontrunners covering up to 100 miles a day, the winners arrive in Nome between nine and ten days after the start.

Before the running of the dogs, events start every weekend in February that help "break the trail" to Nome. The second weekend of February sees the start of the world's longest and toughest snowmobile race – the Iron Dog. Traveling at speeds approaching 100 mph, racers travel from Wasilla to Nome in about three days, and then race back another three days to the finish line in Fairbanks.

The last half of February sees the starts of multiple human-powered marathons along the trail. The racers begin in the Knik and Big Lake area and ski, fat bike, or run out to either McGrath (350 miles) or, for extremely hardy competitors, all the way to Nome (1,100 miles). Competitors in these races use modes of transportation not unknown during the heyday of the gold rush. With a minimum of support, racers are expected to be self-sufficient and overnight on the trail as much as necessary.

Typically these events are run by nonprofit organizations and volunteers who support people getting out on the Iditarod Trail. Working to provide food, shelter or an open trail, these spirited folks help recreate the camaraderie of yesteryear on the historic Iditarod Trail.

Volunteers Keep the Trail Open

Every year local groups and individuals contribute personal time, equipment, and money to improve or maintain the historic Iditarod Trail. The Iditarod Historic Trail Alliance (IHTA) is a nonprofit organization that supports local volunteers and communities with publications like this one. It also provides grants and assistance for trail improvements and educational programs. Here are some of the great things that the IHTA and other collaborating groups have helped with so far:

Iditarod Trail to Every Classroom! (iTREC!)

iTREC! is a year-long program for Alaska teachers interested in developing place-based, service-learning lesson plans using a variety of educational opportunities associated with the historic Iditarod Trail.

Sharing the Story

The Iditarod Historic Trail Alliance, working together with another nonprofit, the Seward Iditarod Trail Blazers, supported the production of the film "Iditarod National Historic Trail: A History." The film tells the tale of the trail's history and development. It can be seen at the Seward Community Library and Museum during the summer. It can also be purchased online at the IHTA website (www.iditarod100.org), along with "The Frozen Trail" and the "The Reports of Walter L. Goodwin: Trail Blazer," two short books on the history of the Iditarod Trail.

Trail Stewardship

Since the group was established in 1998, the Iditarod Historic Trail Alliance has leveraged resources and funding needed to improve and maintain several segments of the historic trail. They have worked with groups like the Student Conservation Association (SCA) to provide land managers capacity to do critical trail repairs and improvements.

You can support these efforts and the hard work of trail volunteers by becoming a member of the Iditarod Historic Trail Alliance.

To join or to learn more, visit www.iditarod100.org

To learn more about the Seward Iditarod Trail Blazers, check out their Facebook page. And for the SCA https://www.thesca.org/

Stay connected

As a nonprofit education partner of the Iditarod Historic Trail, Alaska Geographic connects people with Alaska's magnificent wildlands through youth leadership programs, experiential education, volunteer stewardship programs, award-winning books and maps, and through direct financial aid to Alaska's parks, forests, and refuges.

Alaska Geographic operates more than 20 bookstores on public lands throughout the state. A portion of every purchase made at an Alaska Geographic store supports Alaska's public lands by funding educational, stewardship and interpretive programs and projects. Since 1959, Alaska Geographic has donated more than $20 million to Alaska's public lands.

Please consider supporting Alaska's lands by becoming a member of Alaska Geographic. To learn more about our work and the benefits of membership, or to browse our selection of Alaska books, maps, and films, visit one of our stores or point your web browser to www.akgeo.org

Alaska Geographic

Planning Your Trip

Visit Alaska Geographic bookstores along the historic Iditarod Trail to find books, maps, films, and gifts related to the natural and cultural history of this famous Trail.
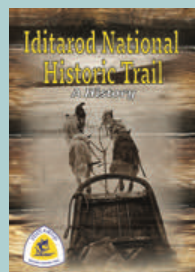
Iditarod National Historic Trail: A History - DVD

Our 24 minute long movie provides an enlightening overview of the Iditarod Trail's history, starting from the early days of the Gold Rush to present day. Perfect for the classroom, history buff, or race enthusiast!
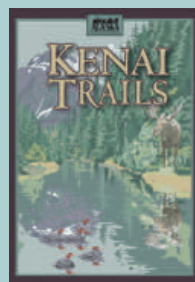
Shipping by USPS included.

$20.00

Iditarod Fact Book

By Tricia Brown
This is the complete guide to the Last Great Race, including facts and figures about the mushers, dogs, sleds, volunteers, race rules, and more.

#10898 **$14.95**

Kenai Trails

Alaska Geographic

Grab your pack and head to the Kenai Peninsula to explore the rich variety of trails with this full-color, comprehensive trail guide that includes historic trails of the Iditarod.

#10826 **$7.95**

For More Information

**Iditarod National
Historic Trail Program**
Bureau of Land Management
Anchorage Field Office
907-267-1246
www.blm.gov/alaska/iditarod

Alaska Museums
More up-to-date information
about all the museums mentioned
in this visitor guide at Museums
Alaska www.museumsalaska.org

Visitor Centers

**Begich, Boggs Visitor center
Portage Lake Loop**
Girdwood, AK
907-783-2326 (May – September)
907-783-3242 (October – April)
www.fs.usda.gov/chugach

Eagle River Nature Center
32750 Eagle River Rd.
Eagle River, AK
907-694-2108
www.enrc.org

Iditarod Race Headquarters
2100 S. Knik-Goose Bay Rd.
Wasilla, AK
907-376-5155
www.iditarod.com

Nome Visitor Center
102 Division Street
Nome, AK
907-443-6663
www.nomealaska.org

**Alaska Public Lands
Information Center**
605 W. Fourth Ave.
Anchorage, AK
907-644-3661
www.alaskacenters.gov