

# Mushing During the Klondike Gold Rush

Sled dogs were an important part of the Klondike Gold Rush. This historical event took place during the late 1890s in the Yukon Territory of northwestern Canada and later in Alaska. It is often called the “Last Great Gold Rush.”

Long before the Gold Rush though, both Native Americans and 17th century French explorers used sled dogs for travel in Canada and Alaska. European explorers used the French word “Marché!” to command the dogs to pull the sleds. “Marché!” means “run” or “go.” The French word “Marché!” eventually became “Mush!” in English.

Sled dogs were necessary because of the harsh northern winters. The area has a subarctic climate. The winters are long and very cold. The temperature can drop to -50 degrees Fahrenheit. This area is also very mountainous. Sled dogs were able to travel through snow and across icy, frozen rivers. They were also able to run for long distances.

Gold was discovered in the Klondike region of the Yukon Territory in August 1896. Many people decided to travel to the Klondike region to see if they could also find gold. They were called prospectors. Gold prospectors were required by authorities to bring enough food, clothing, and mining equipment to last for a year. Sled dogs were used to help carry these provisions through the snow and over ice. They were also used to help deliver mail to towns near the Klondike gold fields.

Sled dogs needed to be large and strong in order to pull heavy loads. The most common types of sled dogs during this time were Alaskan Malamutes and Canadian Eskimo Dogs. Alaskan Malamutes can weigh 100 pounds and have thick coats of fur to protect against cold. Canadian Eskimo Dogs are smaller than Alaskan Malamutes, but they are very powerful work dogs.

One of the most famous American novels of the 20th century is about sled dogs and the Klondike Gold Rush. The novel is *The Call of the Wild* by Jack London. It is an adventure story about a sled dog named Buck who is mistreated by many of his owners. Buck eventually joins a pack of wolves and returns to his wild animal roots.

Over time, snowmobiles and airplanes replaced dog sleds. But the sled dog tradition remains alive today through races such as the Yukon Quest 1,000 Mile International Sled Dog Race. This long-distance event celebrates the challenges of dog sledding. The race also recognizes the importance of sled dogs in the history of the Klondike region.

**Questions**

1. Where does the sled dog command “Mush!” come from?
2. What types of items did sled dogs help move during the Klondike Gold Rush?
3. What is a prospector?
4. The word *prospector* comes from the word *prospect*. What do you think *prospect* means?