

# The Toughest Sled Dog Race in the World

The Yukon Quest is a 1,000-mile dog sled race that takes place every February. The race is run between the cities of Fairbanks, Alaska and Whitehorse in Canada's Yukon Territory. Sled dogs and their mushers, or drivers, race through extreme weather conditions. They also race over mountains and frozen rivers. The Yukon Quest is considered the toughest sled dog race in the world.

The first Yukon Quest took place in 1984. The race was established to highlight the hardships faced by gold prospectors and supply carriers during the late 19th century. The route follows parts of the Yukon River. It also takes racers over four mountains: King Solomon's Dome, American Summit, Eagle Summit, and Rosebud Summit. King Solomon's Dome is over 4,000 feet in elevation.

Sled dogs and their mushers face threats from both weather and wildlife.

The subarctic climate means temperatures can drop to -50 degrees Fahrenheit. Racers also face harsh and freezing wind conditions. Wild animals like moose and wolves also pose a danger to the sled dog teams.

Teams consist of a musher and up to 14 dogs. The musher guides and controls the sled. The dogs closest to the sled are called wheel dogs. These dogs must have a calm nature because they run close to a moving sled. Team dogs are next on the towline. They provide power to the dog sled team. Swing dogs are next in position after team dogs. They help guide the dogs around curves on a trail. Lead dogs are at the front of the team. They help steer the entire dog team and keep the pace. There can be a single lead dog or double lead dogs.

The health and safety of the sled dogs is extremely important. They face special challenges because of the difficulty and length of the race. The dogs wear booties to protect their paws from ice and snow. They also eat special diets to fuel them on the long race. Veterinarians carefully examine each sled dog before the race begins. There are also veterinarians at each of the checkpoints along the race route.

Race teams run during both the daytime and nighttime. They usually run for four hours and then rest for four hours. They continue this pattern throughout the race. There are also several mandatory stops where the teams must rest for a longer period of time. The fastest Yukon Quest was run in 2014. Musher Allen Moore and his team of sled dogs completed the race in eight days, 14 hours, and 21 minutes.

Different awards are presented at the end of each race. An award is given for sportsmanship. The Veterinarian's Choice Award is also given to the musher who takes the best care of their dogs during the race. Even the sled dogs can win awards. The Golden Harness Award is given to the champion lead dog or dogs.

This difficult race requires determination and strength. Both sled dogs and their mushers endure numerous challenges along the 1,000-mile route. Just finishing the Yukon Quest is a great

achievement.

**Questions**

1. Name two of the four mountains crossed by Yukon Quest racers.
2. Why do “wheel dogs” on a sled dog team need a calmer nature?
3. Why are veterinarians an important part of the Yukon Quest?
4. Would you like to be a musher in a sled dog race? Why or why not?