

Iditarod 2008

Robert Bundtzen's trip to Nome as dictated enroute.

In memory of Marcy Clogg

I'm on the first dictation of the trip. It's about twenty degrees and I'm running down the Yentna River. Everything is going just great. We got off to a start at about 5:10. We had a long wait having to show up at the start at 11:30 in the morning but then we got to watch all the other teams take off. We got Clint off early and then Zack and then about two and a half hours later I was able to take off. However, we had a great time, we had a lot of help. Bonnie again brought lots of food. She really knows how to put on a party. We had champagne, we had keg beer, we had brats and a lot of other stuff. So anyway we got off number 97, the very last place in the Iditarod. I've passed about five teams already. It's going to be awhile before I pass anymore probably. The dogs themselves are looking good right now, of course we haven't gone anywhere yet. The weather's nice and hopefully things will keep going like this.

The trip up the Yentna River was pretty uneventful. The trail was good—a little soft. The dogs all ran well. I traded leaders around. They're all doing pretty well. Daisy and Mercury did most of the work. I started out with Gasket. I'm getting a whole bunch of dogs in heat I'm afraid so that's going to be a problem. I was heading up the river in the dark and all the snowmachiners that were out for the day watching the Iditarod were heading home. I didn't have any trouble with close calls or anything. I went past Yentna Station and then near Lake Creek I gave them all a cooler of food. I didn't rest any and went all the way into Skwentna. I got into Skwentna about 12:20AM so that was about a seven hour ten minute run which wasn't too bad. I fed the dogs there and watered them. The time I left was 5:20 so I was there about five hours. I got about an hour or hour and a half rest so I didn't really sleep there. There is always a lot of good food in Skwentna. Now I'm headed to Finger Lake. There is snow on the way, a lot of troughs, and there will be more. I'm afraid the trail over to Rainy Pass is going to be really difficult. I'll probably rest three or four hours at Finger Lake though I might leave a little early just to get ahead of some of these teams. I don't know where I am in the pack. I did pass a lot but I just don't know where I am right now.

The run into Finger Lake went relatively smooth—deep snow, a few ruts but nothing really too bad. There is a steady climb into the hill country with twisty trails through groves of trees between open areas of frozen swamp or meadow. It was pretty warm, twenty degrees and when I started to get in there it started to snow a little bit. There were about twenty or thirty teams at Finger Lake. After I took care of the dogs I went up and had lunch from Kirsten Dixon who gives lunch to all the mushers. Some of the females are going into heat so that's going to be a problem. Anyway I got in there about 10:30 and left at about 2:30, headed off toward the Steps that go down to the Happy River valley and back up again on the other side. The trail is amazingly good, I was sure it was going to be troughed up but it's not, the trail has been groomed very well. I am pleasantly surprised. It looks like it might blow tonight however.

I'm dictating this as I'm heading over Rainy Pass. The trail over from Finger Lake to Rainy Pass is as good as I've ever seen it. The troughing that I was fearing was not too bad, the Steps were a piece of cake, lots of snow and relatively easy downhills. Everything went well. It was snowing lightly, cloudy, too warm, about 20-25 degrees. I stopped in at Rainy Pass for about four and a

half hours. Clint Warnke was there resting his dogs. Joe Garnie was there. He was depressed; he had dropped four dogs and he had two or three more he was going to have to drop if they didn't improve so he was going to 24 hour there. Hopefully he can make the trip to Nome. He trains in cold weather and the temperature was in the 30's. It's lightly snowing, it's black, and I can't see much. I'm heading up towards Rainy Pass then Pass Creek and then the Dalzell Gorge. The snow up on top here is pretty deep. If you get off the trail you sink into your hip which is a sure difference from last year when there wasn't much snow. There is some minor troughing in the trail. The dogs are working well; unfortunately I have a whole lot of females in heat and it limits what I can do. Luckily I don't have any fighters amongst the males or we would be in trouble. So anyway, the females are not receptive yet, they're just starting their heat so this could get worse before it gets better.

I'm traveling now toward Bison Camp. Last night was quite eventful. I took off from Rainy Pass at eleven p.m. and headed up towards Rainy Pass. The trail was real soft, punchy, the dogs had to work hard. There was a lot of troughing. We came to a little creek we had to cross and the dogs with just a little bit of urging went across fine. We made a steady climb up through the pass itself. I have to take a break.

Well I'm back. For a short time I had to climb up the hill and help the dogs out. The Pass itself was a pleasant, steady climb; I have a very powerful dog team and I didn't have to work too hard. They just pulled me up—it was really nice. I was leading primarily Daisy and I put Mercury up there. She did a terrific job. Daisy's a little weak at times but a terrific gee-haw leader. In the background you hear wind. Over the top and down Pass Creek --heavy troughing. You have to put the nose of the sled right down into the trough or it turns sideways and you get knocked over. So I headed for each trough. The wheel dogs get pulled into them. They try to avoid them. All the way down it is often a twisty turny trail and it was the same and then after you're done with Pass Creek you have the Dalzell Gorge part. On the way down there was an open water creek about twenty or thirty feet wide and six inches deep. There were two teams all balled up there so I came down and got my team all balled up too because they didn't want to cross and it was confusing because of the other teams. I really wonder if my team would have gone ahead and crossed it because we did something like that on our training runs regularly. Anyway we had to haul the dogs across the creek by hand by dragging the leaders across. I anchored the team to a tree hoping the males wouldn't come back into the team to get at the females in heat while I went back to help haul the two other teams across. One belonged to Linton, the diabetic that the Discovery Channel was following along and Cindy Gallea. Linton had a fancy camera mounted on his handlebar and he was wired for 24 hour sound.

Then we headed for the Dalzell Gorge itself. The dogs were doing fine. I had Daisy and Mercury in lead. I went up the tall hill that leads out of the gorge and on to a sidehill for a short time. Then its down a steep hill and back on to the creek and then we begin criss-crossing down the creek on snowbridges. Daisy got mixed up a couple of times and missed the trail that crossed the ice bridges. There are about twelve of them. I nearly got dunked two or three times. It was close. She's a lousy trail leader. She gee-haws really well but she just couldn't follow that ice trail. She would make her decision about where to go before I could see the turns but after a 16 dog team has started to go the wrong way, it's too late. There was a lot of snow, a lot of ice ridges. It was actually pretty easy if she would just follow the trail. Clint came down after me and his dog did

the same thing. I think he probably followed Daisy's trail. Don't tell him that because he ended up going into the water and got all wet. Oh, well. After that it was an easy push down to Rohn, got in there about 4:30 in the morning. I then proceeded to feed the dogs, take care of them, rest a little bit and I got out of there at 8:45. Tuesday morning. We then headed out of Rohn. While there I did talk with DeeDee Jonrowe. She was not feeling very good and was held back a little on her run. Clint came in afterwards and had a good run. But then I headed out. The Kuskokwim River is nothing but sheer ice and rock. You never bootie out of Rohn. I put Sage and Colt in lead and they did pretty well—they did real well—in an hour and a quarter we got down to the Post River which is pure glaciation this year. You pass that and you go back up the hill and there's a little creek that comes down a little valley, a real small creek. The trail goes right up the valley and it was heavily glaciated this year. It goes down at a steep angle and it's actually quite dangerous. I hope nobody gets hurt there this year. Bill Hanes was there at the time, he was there right ahead of me and he took off and headed up over the ice and had no trouble and I told Colt to take off and he did and he followed the trail and I was able to get around the rocks that jut out and often block the sled. I tilted the sled on its edge and got around the corner and there was a spectator on the rock clapping his hands as I went by. I looked back and that glacier looked really nasty, sheer glaciation going downhill. It was quite shiny. I didn't have my camera out so I missed a good shot. And after that we got up on the hill and it was nothing but dirt, I mean nothing but dirt for a significant amount of time. Bouncy, bumpy, difficult heading up to the Farewell Burn and Farewell Lakes. The Farewell Lakes themselves were sheer ice, no snow just pure ice but there was a scratched trail across the surface and Colt and Sage did fine following the trail. So we got through there and now I'm in the Burn and I'm heading toward Bison Camp which is a hunting camp for bison run by the Rungel family and they open it up. They open up a couple of tents and they have a nice stove in them. I'm going to rest about two hours. I might rest longer because a Chinook wind is blowing and it's getting awful hot. It might be a bad idea to stay there any significant length of time but we shall see. Jessica Hendricks was resting there. She was having some trouble with some of her dogs but it wasn't clear to me what it really was. It wasn't orthopedic in nature. A number of mushers came through while I rested. I also discovered that one of my stanchions was busted and I had to hose clamp a piece of metal to it for a temporary repair.

One other thought—I was heading into Finger Lake and Jeff Schultz asked me if it was OK if he paced the team and took some pictures and I said OK so he got on a sled hauled by a snowmachine and he took his camera out and he was taking pictures like crazy of Colt and Mercury. Who knows, maybe Colt will end up on the front page of a calendar. And then while crossing Farewell Lake and lo and behold, who do I see? Jeff Schultz was standing on an island as I came past taking pictures like crazy as we are coming across sheer ice.

I'm mushing towards McGrath. I got into Nickolai about 9:15 to 9:30. I fed and watered the dogs there. I was able to get a drill and fix my stanchion so now it's in working condition again. I overslept about two hours. And then I got out of there at about 4:30 a.m. I'm heading down the Kuskokwim River to McGrath. It's cloudy, temperature's about 25 degrees, no snow, a little too warm for the dogs. They're eating moderate, I'm starting to see a few foot sores on the animals. I ran them yesterday about five hours without booties across the Burn where there's a lot of dirt and mud and that may be where that happened or it could have been that the booties just came off and you get snow in between the toes and it irritates the tissue and sometimes it actually

causes splits. So we're heading towards McGrath. The dogs have been working well, I've been using Blitz and Mercury in lead, they're both real steady leaders. They're both yearlings. I use Sage and Colt for most of the leading when I need somebody who can gee-haw. Daisy I was using and now she's in heat and she doesn't pull hard. Gasket same thing. I have a few other leaders in here but those are the main ones right now. I did try Brie but she didn't lead at all. All sixteen dogs are pulling, still looking ok. We'll see how far we can go before we see some orthopedic injuries crop up.

I am recording from Takotna. I'm nearing the end of my 24 hours. The run into McGrath on the River was slow; temperature got really warm, in the upper twenties. No snowing but it was cloudy. The dogs moved on at a steady pace. They were relatively slow but they were steady. I stopped several times and snacked them. There wasn't too much else to say about the trip. River running is often monotonous. The trail was pretty good but soft and punchy. I went right through McGrath, I didn't stop long, in fact I didn't stop at all. A lot of the folks that were with me, around me, did stop at McGrath because of the heat. I went right through McGrath and again it got even warmer, almost to the point where it was raining. It started to snow a little bit. The trail was through the upper Taiga into the hills and into the mining town of Tokotna. It's only about twenty miles, that's the reason I went through McGrath, otherwise I would have stopped. The run was the longest run we'd made, about ten hours straight, seven hours to McGrath and two and a half over to Takotna. I did feed a cooler full of food along the way [airplane noise] Anyway when we got here they were all in pretty good shape, they ate fair, looking pretty good, I still have sixteen dogs. One dog I am concerned about is Mercury because she's not eating very well though she's leading fine and looks OK but she's not eating very well. She's a key dog as far as I'm concerned. The other dogs I've led have been Blitz, who is excellent and intermittently I've used Colt and Sage along with those two. After I got here I had a big meal, fed the dogs, ate another big meal, and then went up to the sleeping area which is a local chapel. I slept for four or five hours and fed them again about ten p.m. I went to sleep and I overslept, got up about 6:30 which threw my feeding schedule off. I came out and fed them and they all ate fairly well. They look fairly good. I'm almost out of food so I can't feed them much more. I'll be leaving here at 2:30. It's a sunny day, it's going to be warm again. But everything looks like it's hanging together. I understand Zack's up front and doing well; Clint's behind me right now. He has a better dogteam but he overslept a couple of times I think.

I'm heading out from Takotna and on to Ophir and then to Cripple. The day was hot, over 30 degrees, 35 maybe and I was a little nervous about leaving at 2:30. The dogs ran really smoothly and well over to Ophir. At Ophir I spent about 50 minutes probably getting gear and food together to take as I will be camping out. Then over to Cripple; it's a long run, over twelve hours and I'm not going to run these young dogs without stopping. They're not in that sort of mental condition I don't believe since I have 6 yearlings. They're doing well and they're looking good and I've still got 16 dogs. Running through taiga country, mountains around us but the trail is relatively flat. Lots of scrub spruce and various creeks to cross. I went across an overflowed creek and it went really well. The leaders went right across it. I jumped my feet up into the air and away we went. It went really well. I expect to travel twelve hours running time over to Cripple and I'll stop midway for about five hours. Otherwise Takotna was the usual nice place to be, as much as you can eat, a lot of friendly people. A lot of mushers stay there so you can talk with them. It was a fun trip.

The rest of the trip into Cripple after my four hour rest and feeding of the dogs was fraught with difficulty with leaders. I could get them to lead but they were going really slow. I ended up using Colt and Sage into Cripple. Colt was very slow but he does go and I don't know why these dogs are slowing down all of a sudden. When I got to Cripple it was 10:00 a.m., still a little bit cool. It got real warm, up to 44. It looks like there's a real warm front coming in. It's going to be tough on the dogs. It stayed warm all day long so I did stay about eight hours at Cripple. I was going to stay less but it was so warm I decided not to go. Clint showed up and I had a good time visiting with him. I had a couple hours of sleep also. The dogs are having some difficulty with eating, or at least just a couple of dogs, a couple key dogs—Mercury, one of my main leaders and Sage, another main leader. It's going to be more difficult if I don't get those two to eat. I'll have to send Mercury home pretty quick if she doesn't start eating. She runs good and looks OK but she's just not eating enough. At about 6:00 p.m., I headed off from Cripple toward Ruby, another twelve hour run time. The dogs started out slow and then they sped up and did a little better. I had Colt and Sage in lead and after awhile I put Sage in back and put Acci and Gasket in lead and they've been doing pretty well. Both are in heat. I'm sitting here at midnight, right now heating water for the dogs, half way to Ruby. I did feed them a cooler full of food on the way over from Cripple. I'm about half way to Ruby at this time. It's warmed up again and I'm afraid it's real warm even though it's in the middle of the night. The temperature is 22 degrees, but it feels warmer.

We'll make the run into Ruby after a couple of hours. I won't stay here very long. The dogs in general look pretty good and are doing pretty good. But I am having some leader trouble.

The run in from my rest (midnight til 2 a.m.) into Ruby was relatively smooth, good trail. I continued to lead Gasket and Acci and had a little trouble with them toward the end of the run getting them to keep the line straight out and pulling hard as leaders—but I did make it and I got into Ruby at 8:23 in the morning. The rest of the team has been pulling hard and looking good. The trail itself was actually quite good: I went through some rolling hills and birch forest, spruce forest, saw lots of animal tracks, lynx, martin especially. It was kind of a fun run. At Ruby I fed the dogs and everybody was in good condition. Mercury still wasn't eating. I snacked them six times between Cripple and Ruby and she didn't eat at all, so I dropped her at Ruby. She's still pulling, she's a valuable leader for me, but she can't make it very far. I suspect she has a virus or something like that. No way to know for sure—she doesn't have diarrhea, no vomiting, not coughing, just not eating. Sage is the other problem. However, I gave him some salmon and he wolfed a bunch of it down. And on the trail I gave him a lamb snack and I gave him everything I had and he wolfed it down. He tends to eat in spurts but when he isn't eating, you always worry. Now he is eating some—hopefully he'll be able to get to Nome. I'm now on the river, I left at 4:23PM. I was going to leave earlier but the sun came out, the temperature went up, and it would have been foolish to go out in that hot weather. When I first started on the river it was pretty warm, but it started to cool and there's a little breeze. My thermometer said 32 degrees at Ruby. I plan to run into Galena in about seven hours or so. I have relatively slow times because the dogs are slow. The trail itself is pretty good. The frontrunners are in Galena on the way to Nulato so I don't think I have too much hope of catching them. However, there may be some teams drop out—I may get into the top thirty yet.

I left Ruby at about 4:23 and went down the river—it's the classic Yukon River, white, various hills on each side, spruce and birch. It got dark however and the whole sky, I mean the whole sky turned into northern lights. They were of all types, they were undulating curtains and they were moving fast. They were all over the place. There were purple ones and red ones and of course the usual green ones, with curtains and various other shapes and sizes, moving really fast across the sky. It was one of the most fantastic displays I had ever seen. And now...they're all gone. Now I'm coming up near Galena, Colt's been a little slow, the team's running over him on a frequent basis. Everything's going OK. I got passed by Jerry Sousa, he went by me like I was standing still.

I got into Galena OK, at about 11:30PM or so. The dogs looked pretty good. They take care of you well there. I stayed there about seven hours and then I took off at 5:45 a.m. I went back out on the river, I had Sage in lead. He's getting awful skinny but he's leading pretty well. I had him as a solo lead. We moved up the river on a steady but slow pace. I just couldn't get any of these lead dogs to really speed up at all. I got passed by a couple of teams. The day itself was cool to begin with, about 10 degrees. The dogs were pulling pretty well but as the day went on the sun came out and started blazing down on us, and it got pretty darn warm at that point and then of course the dogs slowed way down. Toward the end of the run toward Nulato, Neptune's tugline went slack and she kind of necklined a little bit and didn't look happy. We finally got to Nulato. The vets looked at her—she had a temperature of a hundred and four and they were concerned about overheating, but I don't believe that's the problem. A dog's normal temperature is 102 and they tend to rise a couple degrees while running like any runner. She at no time looked like she was overheating and even though it was hot she didn't behave like that and I think she's got a virus. She's pretty listless, just not the same Neptune of the day before when she was eating well and performing well. I thought I'd give her a few hours and I gave her five hours and I thought I'd try her and see how she did on the way out of town but she still wasn't pulling so I turned the team around and went back and dropped her. I turned the team around again to go back out and things went fine and lo and behold there's a team coming back into town that had left about an hour before me—or maybe thirty minutes. It was the team of Molly Yazwinski and evidently she's running Butcher dogs and her leader just wouldn't go and so when I got out there we tried to get them to follow my team but they just wouldn't do it. So she ended up going back to the checkpoint. I hope that she gets those leaders going. It's clear again, there's no northern lights tonight. I have Gasket in lead now. She's doing a real good job—she's steady, a little slow but the team moves along with her and she's doing better than I thought she would as a single lead. The dogs are all pulling pretty well and we're moving up the trail to Kaltag. Not too much else to say, we did have wind but nothing too bad though we did have fresh snow blowing onto the trail so we've had a soft trail.

We're traveling down toward Unalakleet. The ride on the river into Kaltag was relatively uneventful. It was dark of course, I was using my headlamp, I couldn't see very much, the trail was soft. The dogs pulled just fine but slow. I used Gasket in lead and initially she needed some coaxing when I first left Nulato but after that she did OK. In Kaltag I stayed seven and a half hours, an hour and a half because my watch had not changed due to the Daylight Savings thing. So I lost a little time there. I headed out at 8:30 in the morning with Colt in lead and I still have him in lead seven hours later. He's a go slow leader but he does keep going. The dogs are all following. Through the pass there was lots of snow, nice trail, pretty clear sky. It was a pretty trip. Initially you travel through spruce and then head above timberline. The trail is twisty turny

and fun. After about four hours you come to a BLM cabin. There was nobody there. A couple of hours later you come across the New Old Woman's Cabin, the old Old Woman's Cabin being down on the river floodplain (the Unalakleet River) and the new one up above, built of nice three sided log. Robert Monson and his 2 daughters and Molly's mother were there looking for Molly who was running some of his dogs in the Iditarod. Molly was the person having trouble with some of her leaders on the river at Nulato and I hope she got out of it. Anyway, they were there along with a couple of BLM rangers. We stayed a couple of hours, the dogs ate moderately well. I have two dogs with diarrhea (Wolf and Mars). I'll probably drop Mars since her tug line has been slack the whole time since Kaltag. She's just not contributing. She's probably just tired more than anything. The other three yearlings Blitz, Acci and Saturn are still pulling and contributing and doing OK. The other dogs are all looking pretty good. I just have trouble with slow leaders. Right now there's light snow in my face, temperature about 24 degrees which is better than I thought it was going to be, I thought it was going to be really hot and it's acceptable.

I'm traveling from Shaktoolik to Koyuk. It's cloudy, about ten degrees, nice breeze right into our face makes it cold. It's all white as we're on the ice. There's mountains rimming us. The trip from Old Woman Cabin to Unalakleet was slow but no major difficulties. I led Colt and Sage intermittently and then finished with Gasket in lead. And then I had to go back to Sage. Over at Unalakeet things were about the same; we were on the ice where they usually put the dogs. There weren't many mushers there; all the front of the pack had passed through and the back of the pack were not there yet. I'm kind of in the middle. There were a number of pretty good mushers still there, Rick Kasilo, Rohn Buser and Matt Hayashida. They all had lost a fair number of their dogs to various injuries and were slowing way down. Whether I can catch them or not, I'm not sure. They left several hours after I got there. I've been traveling intermittently with Gary Sousa, he's got a faster team and he's been taking a little more rest and he's been doing pretty well, he's going to try and race and move up in the standings. I pulled into Unalakleet [Go ahead, hike!] I forget the time, I'll have to tell you later. But I left there at 4:30 in the morning for an expected seven hour trip over to Shaktoolik. Run times have all been pretty slow. It was cloudy, snowing very lightly, the trail itself was actually quite good with lots of snow but it was soft and punchy and slow. I led Sage out of Unalakleet and he did pretty well but he slowed down. We went over the Blueberry Hills which are a series of hill climbs and the dogs did relatively well. I did neglect to mention that while in Unalakleet I did drop Mars. Mars for most of the trip over from Kaltag just wasn't pulling and her tug line was slack and she looked like she wasn't enjoying herself and she didn't eat well. Either she was ill with a virus or she was just played out. So I dropped her there. That left me with thirteen dogs. I ended up coming into Shaktoolik at 11:30 in the morning. It wasn't quite warm yet. There had been a pretty stiff breeze with some light snow on the way in and it was actually kind of chilly. While at Shaktoolik on the latter part of the trip I noticed Gasket had a little bob to her gate, not quite right. When we got there she had either a torn biceps or a triceps. It wasn't very tender initially but later on it was relatively tender. The vets recommended I drop her and I did as we were going to have to make a long run over to Koyuk. However, that left me with lots of problems with leadership because I have three dogs still in big time heat and I don't have any female leaders so that could be a problem. I stayed about six hours at Shaktoolik. The crew at Shaktoolik is always nice and helpful and I enjoy staying at Shaktoolik even though it's one of the coldest most godforsaken places along the trail. I pulled out of Shaktoolik at 5:30 p.m., a little longer than I had planned, and I led Sage out of Shaktoolik and he didn't want to go and then I tried Colt and that didn't work and I ended up

going up and down the line picking all the possible leaders to get the team moving and I was thinking oh am I in trouble now. The males of course have trouble because of all the females in heat. I don't have any good female leaders. I tried Daisy who is supposed to be a good female leader but she wanted nothing to do with leading at this point in the race. Anyway I finally went back to putting Sage and Colt together. We took off and they've actually been doing quite well. I think those are the two that are going to be the leaders all the way to Nome if their little mental heads can handle it. Right now we're moving pretty good over to Koyuk. It's going to be a long run over there. Cold, windy, icy....

The trip over to Koyuk from Shaktoolik was relatively uneventful. At first I had a lot of difficulty getting the dogs going because I had only male leaders, all the females were in heat. I tried all sorts of combinations and eventually went back to Colt. Sage may work. They took off and completed the run. It was cold with wind in your face and a little snow, 5 or 10 degrees. The trail was good however though the sled didn't slide very easy on the snow. It was sixty miles or so over to Koyuk and we got there at 1:30 in the morning, about an eight hour trip. It would have been shorter except for that trouble with leaders. The people at Koyuk are always helpful. I stayed about four to five hours, got everything ready to go and I looked at the dogs and they looked pretty tired, especially the yearlings, so I decided to stay an extra hour and ended up staying an extra two hours because I overslept. I left there at nine in the morning and headed out toward Elim. The trip to Elim was across the edge of the ice and over a little peninsula and back down on forelands and over into Elim. It's all white, the temperature is about five to ten degrees, with wind coming from the left, coming from the southwest. The dogs are running pretty well, I have Colt and Sage in lead and they'll lead all the way to Nome because I don't think I can get any other combination to work. It's those females in heat. I've been chased all day by—I'm not sure who it is, I think it's Cindy Gallea. Because I overslept she was able to catch up to me. She has a faster team I think and she'll probably beat me to Nome. I've got about an hour before I get to Elim, I'll stay there between four and six hours, I'm not sure which. Then I'll head over to White Mountain and then Nome.

I'm heading towards Nome from White Mountain. The trip over from Koyuk to Elim was relatively quiet on the sea ice and over a ridge of low mountains or hills and then back on the sea ice and the shore to Elim. Elim's a town on the coast. They have a uranium mine being developed in the region and there's all sorts of misinformation pasted on the walls of the civic center and the firehouse. Anyway I stayed four and a half hours there and headed off towards White Mountain. The trip from there is over the sea ice for the first quarter and then you go up and over what they call little McKinley, the biggest mountain rise in one shot on the Iditarod. We did that without too much trouble. The wind is blowing a little bit, it's cloudy, light snow. It's about five degrees and chilly with that wind. Headed down onto Golovin Bay—you can see Golovin for about twenty miles. I headed through Golovin and had no trouble this year. I went through Golovin and the leaders kept right on going. After that you could see the lights of White Mountain at the end of Golovin Bay, .another twenty miles;--it's a long way. It's in the middle of the dark night. Everything went just fine, minimal trouble with the dogs. I still have Colt and Sage in lead. I don't have much choice in regards to leaders. I got to White Mtn about 3 a.m and stayed my eight hours, got ready to go and Clint just showed up. He's doing well, Sarah just flew in to see him. I sailed right out of there and it looks like the dogs are doing pretty well. They didn't eat very well in White Mountain, however they snacked a lot. Right now I'm headed over

the Topkok hills, overcast, zero degrees, wind in the face, feels cold, our dogs are mushing just fine, I'll be in Nome in ten to twelve hours.

I just passed Safety and I'm on top of Cape Nome. The trip over the Topkok mountains was relatively smooth and easy, pure white, sometimes hard to tell the sky from the land it blended in so well. Mild wind, not bad, temperature about five degrees. The dogs performed well, and I snacked them, a wet meal out of the cooler. They gobbled it up. That was good to see. After the Topkok Mountains you head down to the coast, follow along the ocean, along the banks of the ocean, following the tripods and so forth with their reflectors. And I passed Lou Nelson not too far from Safety; it looked like his team was moving pretty slow. At Safety I checked in, put my bib on; the dogs did well, didn't try to ball up or head off to the Safety checkpoint against my wishes. From Safety it's 22 miles into Nome. And that's what we're doing right now. We'll soon drop down onto the sea ice in front of Nome and then we'll be done. I expect to be done in about two hours.

At this time I have Colt in lead, Colt has been doing about what I expected—he leads, runs up front, turns right and left when I ask him to but he doesn't pull much. Next to him is Sage, Sage is a rather smallish dog, a good leader but slow, he cannot lope, he cannot run fast. He has one steady trot that never changes. In this part of the race, though, that's probably an asset. Two dogs in swing, one is Brie, a very strong dog, five years old, black, sister to Feta. She's a go-getter, she pulls at all times, the only thing bad about her is she can't pee or poop on the run so she stops the team when she has to do that. I usually don't have her in swing because of that. I usually have her in the back of the team. However, with all the females in heat I had to put her up there because there's nobody else to put up there. Next to her is a neutered dog, Donald—Donald's been doing fine, he's got a funny-looking gate but his tugline is always tight—he eats pretty well and Donald has been good on this trip. The next dog back is Acci, she's a yearling, she's in heat. Behind her is Rosebud, the dog that I leased for this trip from John Little. Rosebud has been quite good, eats well, pulls hard. Next to her is Daisy who is a leader for me. In training she leads well though she's not a hard puller. I led her earlier in this trip but after the midpoint she no longer wanted to lead and then she went into heat and has been a problem ever since. Behind those two is Saturn. Saturn is a yearling. She's been pulling hard, she looks good. Initially she didn't eat well but she's eating better now. She's probably wondering what all this is all about. She's a pretty good dog. She came out of heat during this trip. Behind her are two hardworking animals: one is Axle—he always pulls, he's as solid a team dog as you can find, he eats well. You can't go wrong with him. He just doesn't lead. Next to him is Dublin, who is also a John Little Dog. He is a very hard worker, very good eater. He's much smaller than Axle but he's got Axle buffaloed. Axle though is neutered. Behind them in wheel position I have Blitz who is a yearling out of Feta and Curry. He is a fantastic animal, he pulls really hard, eats really well. He leads and leads similar to Sage, at a steady trot but not fast but a really good solid trot. I would lead him but with these females in heat he just couldn't handle it, he just kept doubling back into the team. He's going to be a terrific dog—he behaves more like an experienced dog than a yearling. And then next to him another John Little dog called Wolf. He's also a hard working dog. He's said to lead but when I tried to lead him he didn't which is often what you see on the Iditarod. That's the crew right now. The three that I sent home: Mercury, a yearling, a smallish black dog, a terrific leader, has a fast trot, never runs but boy can she lead hard. I really felt bad sending her back. I had to send Neptune back also: a yearling, she just wasn't pulling or eating

and I think she had a virus. The third dog that I sent back was Mars. Mars also is a yearling. Same kind of deal, she stopped pulling, stopped eating and I think she has a virus. The last dog I sent home was Gasket. She was going to be an important dog for me because she leads well. She also is in heat and I needed her but I'm going to get to Nome without her. She had a pulled biceps or triceps.

The trip into Nome was uneventful. The crew was waiting (Zack, Anjanette, Bryan, Kevin and the locals) and grateful that there was daylight and not the usual middle of the night finish. Nome is Nome, what else can I say. We were able to get the dogs out the next day so I am sure that they were grateful for that. Curry (Zack's main leader) stayed in Nome because he has been leased to Lance Mackey for the All Alaska Sweepstakes that will be starting in about 2 weeks. Clint came in several hours after me but I was sleeping. Kevin and his wife again provided us with wonderful accommodations, while we wait to head for home after the usual banquet. The banquet was started early, the mushers were brief and it ended at about 9PM. That was an astounding feat. Thinking about next year already.