

# DOG

2009

&

# Sled





# Talk & Bark

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Hello all! Much has changed since I last put together an edition of *Dog & Sled* and this issue is much later than I had planned. But as I have learned, reality is often nothing like what we plan! Initially I was going to do all of the missing *Dog & Sleds* - Fall 2008, Winter 2008/2009, Spring 2009 and Summer 2009. Then I decided I would put it all into one big magazine. And then I changed my mind again...It just killed me NOT to do 4 issues. However, the fact is that I can't. So *Dog & Sled* is now becoming a yearly journal instead of a quarterly one.

As you probably know, I spent most of the past year working as a handler for Blake and Jennifer Freking at Manitou Crossing Kennels in Finland, Minnesota. It has been a great experience and unlike anything I have ever done before. Every morning there I go outside and am greeted by approximately 80 furry friends (mainly Siberian huskies although there are a few Alaskans in the kennel too). It's not easy work but I love it! I have a new dog from MCK now. Her name is Susan.

I ran Blake and Jen's puppy team in the Beargrease Mid-Distance (150 miles) this year and in the Wolftrack Classic 60-miler. Both races, the Beargrease especially, were amazing experiences and I wouldn't take anything for them. I also gained a lot of puppy-care experience when I helped raise a litter of orphans. There were 8 puppies in the litter so my new nickname is "OctoMom2".

In this edition of *Dog & Sled* you will find an article about Northern Sky Lodge that I wrote a year ago, as well as several picture galleries. Picture galleries are easier to put together than written articles right now! You'll also read an interview with Junior musher Meredith Mapes. I have talked to Meredith quite a bit online and have found her to be a determined and interesting person.

In the meantime, you can continue to follow me online at my Wolf Moon Dogsledding blog. There I post updates and information on what is going on in my world. Check it out at <http://sleddoggin.com/blogs/wolfmoonsleddog/>

Until next year.

Alice White

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# Gallery: Northern Sky Lodge

March 2008



In March 2008, I spent a couple of weeks working at Northern Sky Lodge and Kennel near Fairbanks, Alaska. These pictures were taken during my time there.

**LEFT: GUEST ON SLED DOG TOUR**



**RIGHT: MOON RISING OVER THE TREES**



**LEFT: THE LODGE ITSELF**

**RIGHT: ME, DRIVING A  
4-DOG TEAM**



**LEFT: NORTHERN SKY  
KENNEL**

**RIGHT: SMOKEY, ONE OF  
THE NORTHERN SKY SLED  
DOGS**



# The GA Musher Does Alaska - Part 2

It was late August of 2007. My parents and I were on our Alaskan vacation and had driven up the Parks Highway from Eagle River. Already we had seen a lot: the Chugach mountains, Seward, the Alaska Range, Denali. I'd seen sled dogs at the Iditarod headquarters in Wasilla, at Husky Homestead kennels at Denali and I'd spotted a couple of sled dog kennels from the road.

After staying at Carlo Creek near Denali, we headed further North along the Parks Highway, stopping in Nenana for lunch. Tour buses come through the town but they never stay long so Nenana really belongs to the locals. We ate a relaxed meal there and wandered about. The town and the people really felt genuine.

The terrain near Nenana was relatively flat (especially compared to the jagged Alaska Range) but as we traveled along the road towards Fairbanks, we encountered rolling hills that would definitely be considered mountains were they in Georgia. It is in this area that Northern Sky Lodge is located.

I had discovered Northern Sky months earlier when we were searching for a place to stay in the Fairbanks area, preferably somewhere that had sled dogs. And then I happened upon the Northern Sky website. I don't even remember what I had been looking up but I ended up on the homepage of the website and saw an aerial photo of the lodge. Beside the lodge was what looked very much like a dog kennel. Intrigued, since I had never heard of the place, I looked at more of the website and discovered that the lodge did indeed have a sled dog kennel on-site. Right away, I knew this was the place I wanted to go.

We contacted Pascale, the lodge owner, a week or so later and heard back quickly. Not long afterwards we made reservations to stay there for a couple of days at the end of August.

When we pulled into the yard, we saw the lodge at the top of a green slope that ran to the edges of dark spruce forests.



**ABOVE: Northern Sky Lodge**

Beside the lodge, at the top of the slope, was the kennel of Alaskan huskies. Most of the dogs were out and about and one white one was jumping up and down excitedly on top of its house.

"I like this place, I like this place..." I said, wanting to hop out of the car right then and there. I wanted to be out in the woods or out in the dog kennel.

We entered the lodge and found ourselves in a hallway surrounded by mushing pictures and Yukon Quest posters signed by competitors. Pascale greeted us and introduced her young son, Duncan, who was in the living room watching *Babe*. Also in the lodge was a beautiful Golden retriever named Sid, and two cats. We unloaded our luggage from the car and Pascale showed us to our room. The place had a wonderful, relaxed atmosphere and was perfect, in my opinion. We asked if it would be okay to go out to the dog kennel. Pascale said that would be fine, adding that "they [the dogs] will love it." She warned that they had no manners and that their claws were rather long.

As soon as possible, I ventured out. As I approached, the dog yard erupted in a cacophony of barks, yips and howls. Walking into the yard, the first dog I noticed was a small black and tan husky standing on top of the first house to the right. She was wagging her tail and looked very, very cute.

A bark to my left distracted me. I turned and saw a white dog trotting around. On the dog's house, the word MOON had been painted. I reached toward the dog. "Hello, Moon." Moon trotted just out of reach, obviously shy. I hoped all of the dogs wouldn't be like that.

I shouldn't have worried. The next dog - the white one I had noticed when we pulled up - leapt into my arms, wiggling around happily. What a goof! There was a name on this dog's house but it was harder to read: TECUMSEH



**ABOVE: View from the lodge**

I visited every dog in the kennel. Pascale had been right, they had absolutely no manners. There was a big yellow one in particular who was especially rambunctious. He was not happy unless he had something in his mouth and so he would try to grab my shirt with his teeth. I managed to disattach him from my sleeve and made a mental note to be careful of this dog. He obviously loved people but didn't know how to show it. His name was Popcorn.

I found only one other shy dog in the kennel - a beautiful brindle dog that, more than the others, resembled a Siberian. Her name was Helen. She darted into her house when I approached and stuck her head out of the door, barking harshly. "It's okay, pretty," I said in a soft voice. "It's alright."

The dog continued to bark and eye me suspiciously. I didn't push it and moved on to the other huskies, who greeted me with great glee and enthusiasm. A gorgeous, sleek black and white dog that I immediately liked leapt on his house and begged me to play.

Suddenly Sid shot through the yard, racing down the trail towards the trees. The sled dogs went nuts, they started carrying on and running around their circles faster than I would have thought possible. Their antics stirred up a cloud of dust which drifted off towards the woods. A couple of minutes later, Duncan came up and grabbed my hand, leading me to a big black, tan and white dog. Silently, he pulled my hand towards the dog and laughed excitedly when the dog leaped and played with me.

In the meantime, the black and tan dog near the entrance of the yard caught my eye. She stood on her house and reached out with her paw, as if she were gesturing for me to come. I walked over to her and she gently stuck her nose in my face. The name on her doghouse said PRINCESS. I stayed out in the dogyard for quite a while but eventually it was time to eat supper and I had to come back in. Pascale and another woman who was working at the lodge fixed a fantastic meal for us. We ate in a dining room/living room area at the back of the lodge. A door was open,

leading out onto the deck. I remember thinking that this was by far the most relaxed place we had stayed since arriving in Alaska. My parents and I talked to the other guests who were staying at the lodge. They were Japanese and had been up that night watching for the aurora. They had seen a small one and one man showed us some pictures he had taken of it.

We talked to Pascale for a while after supper. She told us her neighbors had a large kennel of around a hundred sled dogs but that most of them lived and trained farther south on a glacier during the Summer.

"What kind of racing do they do?" I asked.

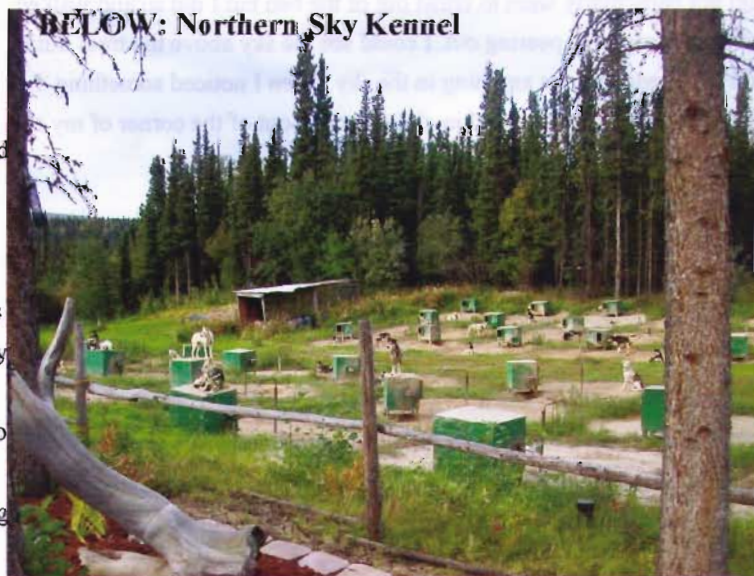
"Stage racing," Pascale said. "Their name is Philip."

She went on to say that one of them had run the Iditarod but was not going to do that this year.

That night I fell into my cozy bed and slept hard. This place, I decided, was fantastic. My parents set their alarm for midnight and peeked out the window to look for the aurora. They didn't see it and I happily turned over and went back to sleep. I was so warm and comfy that I did not want to get up anyway.

The next morning, Mom, Dad and I rode into Fairbanks to go on a tour of Creamer's Field, a former Dairy turned wildlife refuge. The fields attract cranes, geese and other fowl and the location is a mecca for birders. Seeing as how my Dad is big into birding, Creamer's Field was number one on our list of things to do in Fairbanks.

Our guide led us and some other people on a walking tour. A few leaves were starting to turn and they seemed to glow in the morning light. It was relatively cool, temperature wise, but not at all uncomfortable. Entering the boreal forest, our guide showed us the difference between black spruce and white spruce and pointed out how permafrost heaving had set the trees at odd angles. I heard this was sometimes called "drunken forest". I LOVED the boreal forest. Much of it was made up of aspens or poplars and their white trunks contrasted starkly with the soft green horsetails carpeting the forest floor.



**BELOW: Northern Sky Kennel**

Then we went to the city. I enjoyed visiting Cold Spot Feeds (a major mushing supply store) and the Mushing Museum, which had a lot of interesting exhibits.

When we did pull into the yard that evening, I walked around outside the lodge with Sid and realized just how tired I was. We'd had such a full past few days and now I could finally relax. Back inside I found a chair and the next thing I knew, I was asleep in it. That nap did wonders for my outlook that evening. After I woke up, I went out and visited the dogs yet again, while Mom and Dad talked to Pascale inside.

The dogs were as excited as they had been the night before. Next door I could hear barking from the racing kennel. I visited all the Northern Sky dogs once again, watching out for the rambunctious yellow one. They were all such fun. In the end, I found myself sitting beside Princess on top of her house. She had presence, I decided - one of those almost regal dogs that you notice immediately when you visit a kennel.

The Summer light faded and the dogs stood in the quiet dusk. Some of them settled on their houses, others curled up on the ground. A few remained standing, keeping watch. And I sat there with my arm around Princess, also watching.

I looked behind us at the clear sky above the trees. "Can you call the Lights?" I whispered mischievously to Princess.

Princess wagged her tail and looked at me with deep almond eyes. She was such a sweetie and was my favorite dog in the kennel. I would miss her, I knew. But not yet. Right now I was still with her in the twilight of a late Summer evening. My parents were still talking to Pascale when I walked back into the lodge. Pascale was explaining that, when she first started the lodge, there was no electricity - just a generator.

We talked dogs for a little while then. I asked her about Princess and she told me the dog was a leader.

We all sat there for a good while, talking. And then it was time for bed. I took a quick shower and then crawled under my covers, dropping off to sleep almost immediately.

At around two in the morning I was awakened by my Dad, who was standing at the window. "Alice, come here and see if you think this is it," he whispered.

I did not particularly want to crawl out of the bed but I did so and walked over to the window, peering out. I could see the sky above the trees but I didn't immediately see anything in the sky. Then I noticed something. I might have thought it was a thin cloud except, out of the corner of my eye, I could have sworn I saw it move.

"Yeah," I said. "That's it."

Mom was waking up by this point. "What?" she asked sleepily.

"The Lights," I said. "Very, very faint."

She peered out the window too and we pointed to what we were talking about.

"Oh yeah," she said. "I see it..."

The window wasn't big enough for all of us to stand there so we walked outside and stood on the gravel beside our car. Just above the trees, the faint, smoky arc stretched across the horizon. It seemed to disappear if I



ABOVE: Pascale (left), me and Sid

looked directly at it but, when I looked just below, it took shape, moving slowly. When I looked at it that way, I could tell it was a faint greenish-white color.

From the forests there came a long, low howl. I imagined it might be a wolf but, more likely, it was one of the sled dogs from next door. Whatever the case, it reminded us where we were - in the Northwoods, the Alaskan interior.

The following morning, I wandered around outside the lodge, videocamera in hand. I was delighted to see boreal chickadees at the feeder! Boreal chickadees have brown coloration rather than the more common black cap. I did not get any videos of them but I did record some footage of a red squirrel in the spruce forest. The squirrel did not like my intrusion into the woods and fussed loudly at me.

And, of course, I went to see the dogs. Pascale had finished feeding them and was doing something out in front of the lodge.

"You saw aurora last night?" she asked.

"Very faintly," I replied. I told her I was going to go play with the dogs.

"Good," she said. "They will love it."

And of course they did. The dogs bounced around happily. Moon and the brown dog still would not let me touch them but the others were glad to have attention. Some of them became very upset when I dared pet another dog and barked loudly until I returned to them.



# Gallery: Crazy Dog Kennels

## The GA Musher Does Alaska, Part 3



ABOVE: From left to right: Me, Zoya and John



ABOVE: Sign at Crazy Dog  
BELOW: Zoya and puppies

BELOW:



In late Summer 2007, I visited Zoya DeNure and John Schandelmeier at their Crazy Dog Kennels in McClaren, Alaska (along the gravel Denali Highway). This gallery shows photos from that visit.



LEFT: John feeds out fresh moose meat to the dogs.

RIGHT: Zoya and I take a 6-dog team out for a short training run on the ATV



LEFT: A racing sled and equipment

# FUN ON THE RUN

## An interview with Meredith Mapes

PHOTOS COURTESY OF FUN ON THE RUN KENNEL

Meredith Mapes is a Junior Musher from Knik, Alaska, where she operates Fun On The Run Racing Kennels. In Summer 2008, Meredith talked to *Dog & Sled* about her dogs, her kennel and racing:

**Dog & Sled:** I always start every interview the same way with the obvious question: how did you get interested in mushing?

**Meredith Mapes:** I got started in mushing when my mom was at a girl scout meeting, and a lady stood up and asked if anyone would be interested in learning how to mush. Mom talked to her after the meeting, and I started training with Bev, and I won the first race I ever entered (Willow Winter Carnival 1 dog), and I have been hooked ever since!

**D&S:** So you started out with just one dog?

**MM:** I started out running Bev Greer's Malamute Tundra (who passed away in May from cancer).

**D&S:** I understand you have your own kennel now. How many dogs do you have?

**MM:** I have 18 sled dogs, and two Mackenzie River Husky crosses that are just pets.

**D&S:** Did you get all of your dogs as adults or did you raise some of them from pups?

**MM:** I have raised General from a 2 month old, but everybody else has been at least 1 or more before I got them.



**D&S:** You ran the 2008 Junior Iditarod with your dogs. Could you tell us a little bit about that?

**MM:** It is kind of all a blur now...I remember the amazing feeling when I left the start line, and the rush when I crossed the finish line realizing that I had done something very few people even have a chance to do.

It was a great experience getting to sit around the big bonfire at Yetna with all the other racers and listen to their stories about dogs, among other things. I think I made some lifelong friends in that few hours that we spent together.

**D&S:** Yes, it's great to hang out with mushing friends. That's part of the fun of the sport!

You signed up for the 2009 Junior Iditarod. What do you hope to do this year? Are you just running for the experience or do you plan to run competitively too?

**MM:** This year I plan on placing top 10 in the Junior Iditarod, and I have been dreaming about winning the Junior Cantwell Classic.

**D&S:** Have you run the Junior Cantwell before?

**MM:** I ran in 2007 placing 8th, and 2008 placing 5th.

**D&S:** How do you think the Junior Cantwell compares to the Junior Iditarod?

**MM:** Junior Cantwell is a MUCH easier race, mainly because there is one trail, that is 6 feet wide, and has no major hills and navigational problems. It is also only 60 miles and one day, so you don't spend nearly as much time with your dogs in Cantwell. Cantwell is also a lot less competitive, so I, personally, have way more fun in Cantwell because we are not all trying to be the best.

**D&S:** Sounds fun! I've heard that this year's Cantwell was pretty cold and windy. What were the conditions like for the Junior?

**MM:** The Junior was interesting. The weather was fine until partway back from the turnaround, when it got really windy. I wound up turning around on my runners and letting the team pick the trail, because the wind was bad, and my hood would not stay up.

**D&S:** Sounds cold! Were those the toughest conditions you have mushed in or have you seen worse?

**MM:** I saw much worse at the Junior Yukon Quest. I think it



was around 40 below, maybe even colder on the river. I had to scratch from it because I got really cold on the second day, I was not prepared for the conditions...Mainly because I forgot my snowpants at the hotel before the start, so I wore my carharrts to the halfway, and my dads thrift store pants on the way back. I also didn't have good enough gloves, and I lost my fur hat, when I nearly lost my team...

I also lost my team at a spot of overflow, but they buried the sled in a snowbank, so I had time to catch up to them(I was severely hypothermic at this time, too so it wasn't very easy) and right the sled.

**D&S:** Sorry to hear about that. Do you think you will try the Junior Quest again?

**MM:** I am planning on running it this year, and I would love to place top three, but I would be happy just finishing it.

**D&S:** I understand you eventually hope to run the full Iditarod too.

**MM:** I plan on running the big Iditarod in 2012, then going off to college in Fairbanks.

**D&S:** Do you have any idea what you might be interested in studying?

**MM:** I am going to try to get into the pre-vet program at UAF, then going on to vet school in Colorado.

**D&S:** That sounds great! Do you plan to continue mushing and racing after you graduate from vet school?

**MM:** I am planning on continuing mushing, but I am not sure whether it will be distance or sprint. I know that I will always have sled dogs, and I will always volunteer for races near me.

**D&S:** Are many of your friends into sled dogs?

**MM:** Not really, it's usually just me...though I am meeting more people that are into dogs so the number is going up!



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## *The GA Musher Does Alaska: Part 2 continued from page 8*

Princess was excavating a crater under her house and only her rear end was visible. When she did come up, her face was covered in dirt. "How old is Princess?" I asked Pascale, who had walked over to where I was.

"Twelve," she said. "No, older than twelve..." her voice trailed off. "I am not sure how she will do this Winter..."

"She looks in pretty good shape to me," I said.

"She is coughing more..."

Princess, oblivious to this discussion of her future, sniffed the mound of dirt she had excavated and proceeded to mark it. Then she disappeared under the doghouse again.

I was sorry to leave Northern Sky but the next part of our Alaska trip was waiting for us. We told Pascale goodbye and then drove out of the yard and down the spruce-lined road. As the lodge and kennel faded from view, I remember thinking *I want to come back here in the Winter and go on the sled dog tours.*

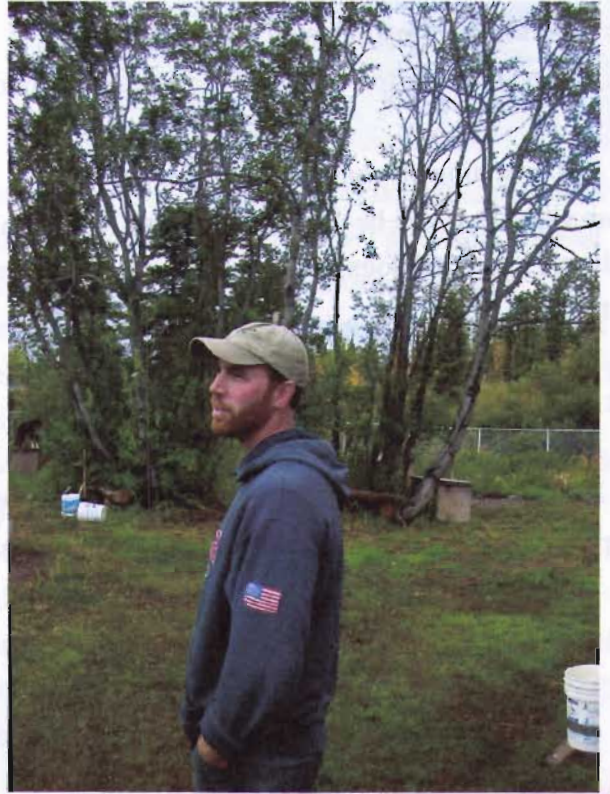
# Gallery: Sheep Mountain Lodge

## The GA Musher Does Alaska: Part 4



ABOVE: Cabins at Sheep Mountain Lodge

BELOW: The kennel



ABOVE: Zack Steer in his fenced-in kennel area.

In late Summer 2007, I stayed at Sheep Mountain Lodge, run by Iditarod musher Zack Steer. This edition of *Dog & Sled's* gallery includes pictures from that stay.

RIGHT: Zack and me



RIGHT: I helped Zack do morning kennel chores.

BELOW: View from Sheep Mountain



# Meet Susan



Scout



Inga



SUSAN

Susan is the newest member of my team. She is a yearling Siberian husky from Manitou Crossing Kennels. Her father is Scout and her mother is Inga. Susan is a real sweetheart of a husky, although she is shy around strangers. I would very much like to thank Blake and Jen Freking for Susan. She is a wonderful dog and I look forward to many years of working with her.