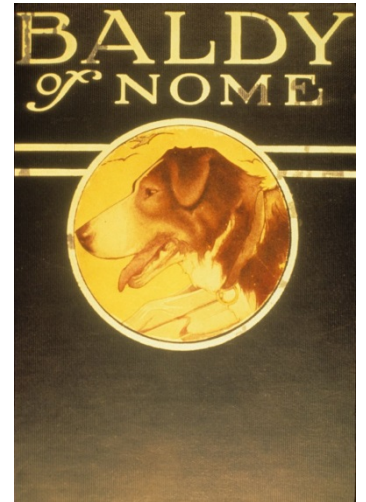




U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management

# 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. With lots of time and dogs on their hands between the snow-free seasons, it was only natural that Nomeites started some friendly competition. The first races were short distance affairs to nearby Ft. Davis or Cape Nome, but the races quickly lengthened as popularity with the sport grew.

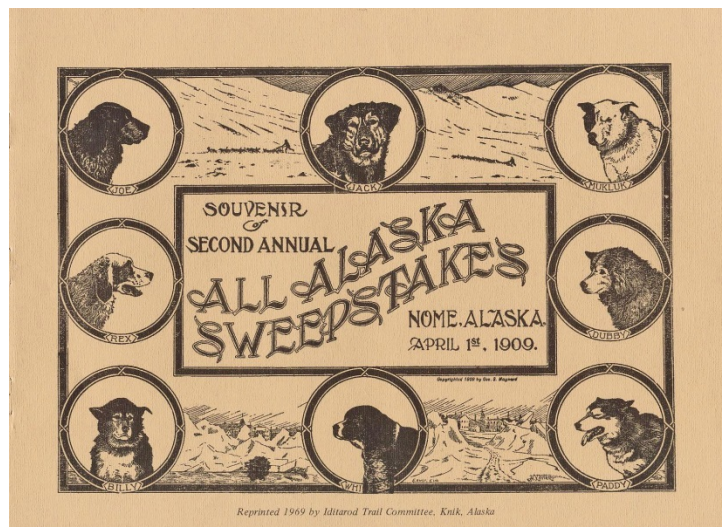


In 1907 the Nome Kennel Club was founded to improve the care and science of dogs and sled racing. The most effective diets, hitches, and sled materials were developed by kennels modeled after Kentucky horseracing stables, and the club prohibited dog cruelty and abandonment.

The biggest event of the year—held at the end of the racing season in April—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 pulled from the hills the previous summer.

Until the 1909 All Alaska Sweepstakes, dogs of all breeds, shapes, and sizes were entered into 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. Again the Siberian huskies excelled, with Iron Man Johnson running one of the teams to a record that stands to this day—74 hours and 14 minutes.





In the following years, arguably the greatest dog driver ever, honed his skill working and racing around Nome—Leonhard Seppala. Seppala won the Sweepstakes three years in a row with his unparalleled ability to handle and train Siberian sled dogs. Seppala and his dogs later became nationwide celebrities for the crucial role he and his dogs played in the delivery of diphtheria serum to epidemic stricken Nome.

In 2008, modern mushers challenged Iron Man Johnson's record. To celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of the All Alaska Sweepstakes, the Nome Kennel Club and others sponsored only the second running of the historic race since 1918. For incentive to enter the 408 mile historic route over the treeless tundra, the purse was \$100,000—winner take all!

For more information:

Nome Kennel Club - <http://www.nomekennelclub.com>

All Alaska Sweepstakes - <http://www.allalaskasweepstakes.org>