



## The Yukon Quest

[www.yukonquest.com](http://www.yukonquest.com), Laura Johnston

### The Toughest Sled Dog Race in the World

The Yukon Quest began as a shared dream of musher Leroy Shank and non-musher and historian Roger Williams. They dedicated their vision to the gold seekers, mail carriers, trappers and the traders who settled the great North during the turn of the century.

This international sled dog race began in 1984 with 27 teams. It covers 1,000 miles of trail through some of the most spectacular geography on the American Continent. The trail route runs between Whitehorse, Yukon to Fairbanks, Alaska. The race takes place each year in mid-February. The starting point alternates between the two cities, even years from Fairbanks and odd years from Whitehorse.

There is no other race like the Yukon Quest. It is not a staged race, but a true distance race. Mushers cannot replace sleds during the race and cannot have stoves and equipment flown into any of the checkpoints. Some of the distances between checkpoints will be as long as 200 miles. So, the mushers must carry many of their supplies with them on the trail. In general, only 2/3 of the teams entering the race will reach the finish line.

The Yukon quest gets its name from the old "Highway of the North", the Yukon River. Mushers cross some of the meanest, least populated terrain in North America, following trails first used by fur traders, gold seekers, missionaries and the Canadian Mounties, who considered the successful completion of a winter "patrol" through this country one of their highest honors. Mushers battle fierce winds, temperatures that drop as low as 80 below without wind chill, icy open water and four summits higher than 3,000 feet.

The Yukon Quest, while equal in length to the better-known Iditarod, is considered more challenging by many mushers. The terrain is more varied and arguably more difficult. But the most significant difference is one of power -- dog power. Quest mushers are limited to 14 dogs, which is intended to allow smaller kennel owners to compete.

The Quest is deliberately less commercial than the Iditarod. Backed largely by local sponsors, the race's low profile has enabled organizers to avoid the kind of criticism that has dogged the Iditarod in recent years. According to mushers who have run both races, the Quest is what the Iditarod used to be, before large-money sponsors put pressure on race organizers to match more of the standards of the Lower 48. In fact, the Quest encourages values of the North, expecting mushers to look to each other for support on the trail. Indeed, mushers travel together, build campfires and tell stories as their dog teams bed down, nose to tail. That doesn't mean mushers aren't competitive. Former Iditarod champion Rick Mackey, who stopped running that race in favor of the Quest, sums it up: "I'm not here for the money. I'm here to win. The money is second."

Sleep deprivation is a major factor in long-distance races. Mushers tell tales of mirages seen under the Northern Lights -- log cabins with lit windows, or inviting warm, blue lakes. The Yukon Quest, a race for the strong of heart! Mushers and dogs who go beyond their limit and experience the victory of completion.

This is a true race of the north. This is the Yukon Quest!

#### Yukon Quest Winners:

1984 - Sonny Lindner	1992 - John Schandelmeier	2000 - Aliy Zirkle
1985 - Joe Runyan	1993 - Charlie Boulding	2001 - Tim Osmar
1986 - Bruce Johnson	1994 - Lavon Barve	2002 - Hans Gatt
1987 - Bill Cotter	1995 - Frank Turner	2003 - Hans Gatt
1988 - David Monson	1996 - John Schandelmeier	2004 - Hans Gatt
1989 - Jeff King	1997 - Rick Mackey	2005 - Lance Mackey
1990 - Vern Halter	1998 - Bruce Lee	2006 - Lance Mackey
1991 - Charlie Boulding	1999 - Ramy Brooks	

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