

Arizona Mountain Mushers



www.azmm.org

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From the Newsletter Staff

Happy Howlidays!



Without being "mushy" can I please say to everyone - be thankful for what you have. Be thankful for the sunrise and sunset. Sit still long enough to feel the beauty in the small things. Take a breath before you answer a question...close your eyes for a second and feel a hug...breathe and imagine you are on the runners of your sled...your dogs are at their best ...you've never been so sure...so sure of one thing.....you were meant to a musher....you don't get involved in this sport for a part time hobby. This adventure has a heartbeat. And that's your dogs.

Well, as everyone knows, the sport of dog sledding can be as unpredictable as the weather. That's just what happened to our Fall Campout. Thanks to our eagle-eye members, it was cancelled for safety reasons. Safety is the upmost factor in any sport and we as mushers protect our dogs and ourselves. Thanks to Gery and Thomas for checking out the trail and reporting back.

Guess what I found on sleddogcentral.com? It's a dog race...WINTER GAMES... WHITE MOUNTAINS. Sign up, get involved...let's have fun. I'll call around and check and see if we (AZMM) can get a hotel discount or something. So keep watching for updates. Support is more important than competing. Just come and be part of those special moments we spend with our dogs and help other mushers.

If anyone needs equipment or is selling equipment and I'll cross post it for you.

Debra

2012 Sled Dog Races in AZ



Mormon Lake

See www.odegaards.com for info.



January 28-29, 2012 Sunrise Ski Resort - McNary, AZ

\$2,000 purse

Ron Miller 928-368-4515 wintergames10@yahoo.com

www.wintergames.hon-dah.com

3 Dog Novice (1 mile); 4 Dog (4 miles); 6 Dog (5 miles)

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Wolves On The Trail

By Teresa Bourassa

There is a significant wolf population in Alaska. It is estimated that the state supports up to 11,000 wolves (which is a little shy of 10% of the world population for those of you who were about to look it up). Get any Alaskan talking and a wolf story is bound to come up. True or not, their themes usually extol the friendliness or dangerousness of wolves. Whatever you believe (and it should be the latter) there are frequent enough reports in the *Anchorage Daily News* of wolves going into a musher's dog yard and taking one or two for an easy meal. Mushing out on the winter trail, we've occasionally found their tracks. A wolf pack's braided path rarely crosses over the main trails, as they prefer their own routes away from all the human traffic. In much of northwest Alaska where I lived, any wolf spotted would likely be shot, so they stay invisible. That said, what follows is one of my wolf stories, which takes only a little longer to tell than it did to happen.

Before I started mushing myself, I used to go out on dog sled rides with my mentor Pete. I was an enthusiastic student and Pete always had me help with the harnessing and hooking, even though sometimes I was so cold I could barely do one dog. When we would get ready to go, I had to pull the madly jerking main line back to help release the anchor rope, and then quickly jump on the sled before the snow hook was pulled out by delirious, ready-to-go huskies. Many times I took the first corner half in and half out. Pete used to kid me that one of my responsibilities would be stopping the sled in the event that he fell off and would comically pantomime the possibility behind me on the sled. That would always set me to thinking about how I would do just that. I doubted seriously if I had the physical agility necessary to perform an athletic jump from basket to runners to hit the brakes, or the physical strength to grab a hold of the main line and *whoa* the dogs. I would, however, hope to have the presence of mind to throw the snow hook sitting on my lap.

To me, riding together on a dog sled is the greatest of ways to spend time with a friend. I can't tell you how many stories have been told or born out on the trails. If the wind isn't too bad, it is weirdly quiet during a run. The only sound is the *shoosh* of the runners, so it is easy to talk to each other in normal conversational tones. I have read that some professional mushers prefer their riders to be quiet so as not to distract the dogs; fortunately for me, my rides have been fraught with lively and mostly hilarious discussion. My friends' dog teams (and my dogs today) just seem to ignore the extraneous

yabber. They know the nuance of command voice.

One particular evening, Pete decided to take his dogs out on a run and invited me to go along. He planned to leave two youngest dogs behind because they had been taking turns with a mystery illness; his wife Jen would, instead, take them for a walk so they wouldn't feel so bad about being left behind. The night was starry... no weather to speak of, and the temperature a crisp -20. The snow was good so we went the long loop, talking and laughing, going uphill and down. We were on our way back home when Pete mentioned that we were coming up on "Bullwinkle Alley", a narrow cut through a stand of woods that had the reputation for occasionally revealing antlered road blocks. We headed fearlessly into the woods, head-lamp beams bouncing up and down through the rough corridor. Just before we hit the exit, a silver flash of fur charged from the woods and jumped into the middle of the team. A split second later, another silver streak ran directly into the lead dog and her swings.

"Wolves!" I thought, cold fear shooting through me. I grabbed the sides of the sled, knees shooting up in anticipation of bailing out of the basket; the snow hook disappearing into the sled bag, unattended and forgotten. At the same moment, Pete yelped a bad word, jumped on the brake, and reached for his shotgun. But, the crazy dogs kept pulling against the brake, like the interruption was merely annoying, snapping with irritation at their attackers as they tried to continue down the trail. We watched in amazement as the wolves rolled and tumbled in seemingly slow motion through the moving dog team, miraculously escaping entanglement in the many lines and falling ungraciously to either side of the trail without getting hit by the sled. It was the team's fearless reaction that finally triggered the realization that we knew these wolves. Sure enough, there was Jen coming into view. We laughed in relief as we resumed our ride, and shouted out to Jen an incomprehensible explanation of what had happened. The two "wolves", now looking more like sled dogs named Lucy and Linus, trotted behind the sled, somewhat dazed and confused from the self-inflicted collision. They didn't argue too much with Jen about staying there with her. Pete and I definitely had a lot to talk about on the way back, and we continued to embellish the story with remembered details during the dog yard chores. Not quite the adventure it might have been, we concluded on the walk home, but still a tale worth telling.

Teresa Bourassa an AZMM and a transplant from Alaska



2011 Weight Pull Photos



Bits and Pieces



Setting His Own Dinner Table: Spontaneous Tool Use by a Dingo

I'm not really sure what the excitement is about. I don't think this comes as a surprise to any of us who have sled dogs.

All right, I know this is not really related but take a look and listen.

<http://youtu.be/UGz8jcbJjRw>

The Other Night Before Christmas

Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the woods,
Eight lean wolves were hunting for warm, meaty goods.
They searched far and wide, and they gave it their best,
But came up with nothing, and lay down to rest.

They slept on snowdrifts, noses tucked into tails,
White frost on their muzzles, backs turned to the gales.
When, up in the sky, there appeared a weird vision:
An old man, a sleigh, and a banquet of venison.

Past dancing northern lights, they dropped from the sky,
Touched down on the snow - they were going to come by!

The wolves lay in wait, not daring to breathe,
"Here comes a great gift and hooves for our wreath"

"Now Dasher! Now Dancer! Now Prancer and Vixen!...
The wolves crouched prepared, for the feast they were fixin'
As the sleigh drew along side, wolves burst from the trees.
It was all said and done 'fore the old man could sneeze.

The wolves acted on instinct - now bellies distended.
With no thoughts of Christmas their actions had ended.
Then they heard a strange sound and looked at the sled.
Old Santa was crying "My reindeer are dead!"
How will I deliver all my beautiful toys
To needy, deserving, hopeful, good girls and boys?"



Santa's helpers

then dawned on the wolves they had done something bad,
And, amidst some loud burping, all felt very sad.
So they huddled together, and discussed as a pack.
How to help Santa deliver the gifts in his sack.

Alpha brightened a bit and started to howl
"I've got it", as reindeer hair fell from his jowl.
"We will fit in the harness, we will pull that old sleigh.
Yes Christmas will happen! Let's get Santa on his way!"

Now Santa was hesitant to work with deer slayers,
But, accepting the offer, he hitched up the players.
They loped, ran, and flew around the world that whole night.
The wolves really dug it, Santa beamed with delight.

"You wolves really know how to cover the miles."
And Santa envisioned, come morning, kids' smiles.
"Your soft feet are so quiet, no clatter of hooves
Like those noisy old reindeer on hard, frozen roofs."
Near the end of the route Santa had a strange thought.
"This is better than those flighty reindeer I fought."

He said to himself, "Who the heck needs to know?"
So he turned to the wolves, their gold eyes aglow,
And asked them quite frankly "What'cha doing next year?"
The wolves slyly replied "We will pull for more deer."

Now my friend, you be watching for Santa next year
To see if he has teamed up with wolves or with deer.

Thanks to the North Georgia SHO for a great notion of how Santa got started with sled dogs!