

Copper Basin 300 January 2002

The trail was one of the most interesting that I have ever run. A very nice mix of open country, lakes, hills, forests, super highway type stuff, old narrow trap line trails, and even some time in the barrow ditch along side the highway. Snow conditions ran from glare ice (I was amazed - my dogs did great!), to ice with soft snow, to hard packed snow, to sugar snow, to grass and rocks. From my vast experience (my first race off the home track and over 40 miles) there was nothing there that couldn't be done - I just did it very slowly.

Between Glennallen and Gakona I lost the team twice. The first time I lost the team I rolled the sled on a steep curving downhill, went into soft snow on the side and just couldn't hang on. I jumped up and ran after the team - they wrapped the sled around some brush about 50 ft down the trail. There were a lot of folks watching - we were right along side the road. It was funny to come into the next checkpoint and have friends tell me this great story about how somebody lost their team along the road - and I tell them it was me. ;-)

The second time I lost the team we had been running a tight trail through the trees - somebody caught me but didn't want to pass on the tight trail. Anyway the trail opened up next to the road and when he went to pass he didn't use a neckline on his leaders and they split on either side of my sled. When I tried to guide the leader on my right to the left where I had left room to pass I lost my grip on the sled (should have set a snow hook, but typical rookie didn't think that fast) and the team took off. Turned out it was Martin following me - he said if he could catch the team he'd try to tie them off. Bib #25 (don't remember the name) was right behind Martin and gave me a ride. We found the team at the bottom of a drainage ditch by a culvert going under the road about 0.1 miles later. The sled was on it's side and the roll over hook had set. The dogs sure were glad to see me and we went on to Gulkana.

Either one could have been bad news, but both turned out to be just adventurous.

We had another adventure where a dog got loose - we were trying to cross a small stream of open water and the poor girl just panicked. Luckily she was one I'd raised from a pup and her idea of running away was to run off 15 feet and dance around until I coaxed her back. It happened a second time at another water crossing - this time she hid under a pine tree and started to make a nest to take a nap - I explained to her that that wasn't a good idea. I would miss her and she would miss dinner, so she came with me and I carried her across the nasty, scary water. Now who can guess what my number one task is for next summer????

Other than rolling the sled and dealing with more tangles (leaders suddenly stopping to eliminate) than I have had in my previous 7 years we did great. The dogs ran longer, pulled harder, rested better, ate better, etc than I had ever seen. And in Water's Edge after that long run (I didn't rest on the trail except to undo tangles and give them a 20 min break and snack every 3 hours) the vet said I still had lots of dog left. 8 hours later when we left the dogs told me he was right!

I could continue to tell stories - like running from Meier's Lake to Sourdough through the woods, kind of high up the hills - really pretty country - surprised the heck out of me to see road signs up there! I wear glasses and couldn't read them from the distance without the glasses (they kept fogging up). When I got close the signs all turned into trees so I never did find out what they said ;-).

I do regret not finishing - but it warmed up and the wind blew the trail in - we hit a lake just before the Sourdough checkpoint and couldn't find the markers and the leaders could find the trail. I was running dead last at this point about 12 hours behind the next to last team and loosing ground with every run. With the trail becoming slower I would only drop further behind. I've been a checkpoint volunteer, and asking them to stay around what could be an extra day just to accommodate me isn't fair. So we scratched at Sourdough. Someday I'll come back and finish this race!

Eric

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