

VT MUSHES

NEWSLETTER

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cover photo by: iSkiVermont.net

A TRIP TO ALASKA

Last September I had the unique privilege and opportunity, thanks to the kindness, generosity and hospitality of Gwenn Bogart and her husband Dave, to make an inaugural pilgrimage to the great state of Alaska. Let's begin with what a long trip it is just to get there. I left the house at 3:30 am to catch a 6:00 flight out of Albany, NY. The plan was Albany - Detroit - Seattle - Anchorage, and arriving at about 3:30 PM Anchorage time, which is 4 hours behind EST. I got into Detroit on time, but the connecting flight to Seattle had been overbooked by 85 or so passengers so guess who got bumped? A close to 5 hour layover in Detroit, then connecting flights through Minneapolis / St. Paul, then on to Anchorage put me in the last great frontier at 8:30 local time. Now remember, that is 4 hours different than home time, so the day of travel essentially was from 3:30 am to 12:30 am, or about 19 hours total. And the

adventure was just beginning. Jeremy Bedortha of Husky Works arrived several days ahead of me, and he and Gwenn met me at the Airport. The hour or so trip back to Wasilla was dominated with laughter and joking and talk about plans for



Skijoring!

Second Annual Skijoring Races in Fort Kent, Maine. The races this year will cover two days with the Sprint Races on Saturday night under the lights.

Races are March 5th and March 6th.



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*view of the dog yard*

the next ten days.

The intent of the trip was to help out at one of the kennels burned out by the Sock Eye fire that ripped through Willow in June. There was a local relief effort in place, and it relied heavily on volunteer labor and donated materials. We stayed at Dave and Gwenn's in Wasilla and they let us use a vehicle to get back and forth to Willow each day. A good night's sleep and we were up and ready for the 30 mile commute to the mushing community of Willow and the rebuilding of the kennel of Bob Chlupach and Jan Steves.

I was excited on several levels - first was that our very first Siberian, Nina is a direct descendant of Bob's Kennel - in fact her father came from there. Secondly, we had purchased a dog - Libby - from Bob, and had some great discussions with him. I was looking forward to meeting him, seeing his kennel, but most of all was looking forward to being some help at a time of need.

Observations from being “on the ground” in Alaska

Often when one vacations somewhere, what you witness are the highlights of the area, the tourists spots or the like. I really appreciated the fact that we were

able to work with and alongside Bob and Jan, and really get as close a feel as we could to what it might be like to work, live and train in Willow, AK. It was a difficult time for those who lost so much in the fire, and Bob commented to us he wished he could be having more fun and act as more of a host, but it was challenging and daunting for him the work he had ahead of him. We assured him that we were there to be as much help to him as we could - and we did get to hook up and run dogs with him a few times.

The community is so tolerant and welcoming of the dogs and the lifestyle - there was always the background noise of a kennel hooking up to train or feeding.

The road crossing have signs that caution you to be on the lookout for sled dogs and the access to vast mileage is right out your back door. The main roads are paralleled with trails for sled or ATV training. It seemed that each member of the community had a section of trail they helped to maintain or groom - and ironically after a large snow storm the push was on to get your dogs out and experienced on un-groomed trail ! There is an abundance of opportunity to train on groomed trail, but once several (or many) teams have broken trail, that opportunity fades quickly.

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normal sign in Alaska

We did get out and clear some of the downed trees in the area that Bob and Jan begin their training.

We visited some pretty large kennels while there, including that of JP Norris and Peter Duncan - both 100+ dog kennels. It was reassuring to us that they are not doing anything significantly different as far as their care or training of dogs - they just have a lot more of them, and a much greater opportunity in trail and land access to train than would ever be here in the North East.

It almost seems like Alaska is on its own "Island Time". Interesting we observed that there was not a goal or deadline orientation to tasks that we would identify as such - there was definitely a refreshing cultural difference to the existence in Alaska. In contemplating the "culture" we experienced, it seems that folks were more intent on living and experiencing, and less on what time the clock said or when a particular task had to be accomplished. Bob would comment about the choice to be a musher, and a lifestyle they embrace and enjoy - and when you can make that choice to do what you love, in a place where it is so accepted - a place that is dark most all day half the year and light most all day the other half - I guess what time the face of the clock has to say is truly irrelevant.

It was truly a pleasure to be of help to folks and an experience to be treasured for a long time to come. Words cannot quantify or express the gratitude we have for Dave and Gwenn Bogart, who without their kindness and hospitality the adventure surely would not have launched.

It is funny in an ironical kind of way what seems to stay with you or a lasting impression that unexpectedly pops up. To that end, I would like to share with you a recipe - "Soup ala Bogart" - and it is so simple anyone can easily adapt. Of course there is a story: One night we were having tomato soup and grilled cheese with Dave and Gwenn - and as Dave served up the soup, he, in a passing kind of way, hinted there may be some lumps in the bottom of the bowl. Sure enough, there was. A pretty good sized one at that. My first inclination was that it must have just been some thickened soup Dave scraped off the bottom of the pan. But Jeremy had a pretty good sized lump in his bowl too. And so did Dave. And Gwenn. That's a lot of burnt soup I thought - and proceeded with eating. Hmmm.... the lump is kind of crunchy, too. As it turned out that lump was a soup spoon sized serving of crunchy peanut butter ! When the realization of what it was came to me, I gave a one eyed glance at Jeremy, who in case you don't know - is not a huge fan of the

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Alaska mountain

butter - and even he gave the addition a thumbs up. Later in the fall we were having some folks around to press some apples into cider, and I made a generous pot of roasted butternut squash soup. My memories of Alaska shot to the forefront of my consciousness, and a generous soup spoon portion of crunchy peanut butter found its way into all the portions - with a tip of the bowl and a toast - to Dave and Gwenn.

~Photos and story by Allan Tschorn

burned out tree on trail



Dog Licenses Due April 1st!

Bill Watch

The House Bill H.512 for Crimes and Criminal Procedure; Humane Treatment of Animals; Shelter of Dogs and Cats is presently in committee. One of our members has been asked to testify before the Agricultural Committee.

We are continuing to watch this bill and are honored to have the privilege of having one of our members providing input on the bill. If you are curious on the progress, you can track it here:

<http://legislature.vermont.gov/bill/status/2016/H.512> and you can find a copy of the bill here:

<http://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Documents/2016/Docs/BILLS/H-0512/H-0512%20As%20Introduced.pdf>

What is your most important sled bag item and why? Join the discussion on the VTMA FaceBook page!

If you, as a member, have articles and/or pictures you'd like to submit for future use, please send them to Judy Gilmore at ainnirbard@gmail.com.

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A photograph of a grey t-shirt with a circular logo on the chest, pinned to a corkboard. A large paper tag with 'FOR SALE' in red is attached to the top left. Below the photo is a white card with text. A smaller tag with 'INCLUDES SHIPPING \$20*' is pinned to the bottom right of the photo.

FOR SALE

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www.vtmushers.org