

VT MUSHERS

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cover photo by: iSkiVermont.net

TRADE SHOW ROUND UP

The bar has been raised and VTMA members have anted up for the 2014 membership year. By any account, the presence of the VTMA at this year's Northern New England Sled Dog Trade Fair & Seminars (affectionately known as NNESDTF&S) was a success. Since December 2012 the board of the VTMA has been diligently working at framing up the backbone of the association. It has always been our goal to grow the membership base, and if the response we got at our table at the Trade Show is any indication of the direction we are headed, we are definitely on the right trail. Over the course of the weekend we added over twenty new members from both Vermont and New Hampshire to our organization and a lot of current members renewed on site. We also sold many VTMA t-shirts and bags and many people were seen sporting temporary tattoos with the VTMA logo.

The board of directors should be very proud of the steady progress we have made over the past year or so. In addition to growing the membership, it has also been our goal to build a network and create a vibrant mushing community in Vermont and the region. With the infrastructure just about complete, the task of the board will be shifting from attracting members to engaging members. The bar has been raised, and the board of the VTMA – as well as the membership – has a new responsibility. And that is to all work towards building the vibrant community of folks engaged in dog powered sports we desire. This won't happen with a passive membership, and we invite all new members to be active participants in the VTMA.

As a statewide association, we struggle with geographical challenges and we have adopted a minimalistic approach to our meeting schedules in recognition of this challenge. Many we talked with at the Trade Show expressed difficulty in attending

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Questions:

Your mainline has just broken and two of your team dogs are now the mainline. What do you do?

What equipment do you take on runs for emergencies? Does the equipment differ between fall and winter runs? If so, why?



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meetings, and that's OK. There are many other ways to be an active member of the VTMA. We publish our meeting agenda and minutes to the website, and comments on agenda items are always welcome via email prior to a meeting. Though the association does not at this time sponsor social or training engagements, we have heard this is a desired benefit to membership with the VTMA and we will be working towards facilitating gatherings in both the Northern as well as the Southern Counties of the state. Please watch for such engagements close to you and be as supportive as you can if these are indeed of value to the membership. Another very easy way to support the VTMA is to contribute to the quarterly newsletter. Judy Gilmore, our editor, is always receptive to material for the next publication ~ tails from the trail, kennel or dog biographies, race and training plans or goals, kennel management tips or tricks, historical perspectives on the sports or a short product review of something you may use are all great subjects to expand upon.

A common comment and desire from people at the show was networking for training opportunities and trail access information. To that end, some of the VTMA members attended a trails presentation from the New Hampshire

Mushers Association, and we look forward to working with and learning from our neighboring mushers in the future. We would hope that new members to the VTMA would not only let us know what they want from the association, but would also help in facilitating those desires and goals as well. There is truly strength in numbers, but also in growing our membership we can better identify what member's desire as benefits to the association, and we can better identify the resources within our members to realize those benefits. Very early on in the re-initiation of the VTMA it was pointed out that a vibrant and functioning association is just plain good for the sport.

The Vermont Mushers Association was one of the many vendors at the 18th annual NNESDTF&S held October 5&6, 2013 at the Hopkinton Fair Grounds in Contocook, NH. This annual gathering of mushers and interested parties from all over New England, Quebec and even some celebrity attendees from Alaska is a great way to kick off the upcoming season. This year's keynote speakers were Aliy Zirkle and Allen Moore and proved to be a great draw for the event.

The weekend is always a wonderful opportunity to see old friends (dogs), make new friends and listen to great talks by all the speakers. Saturday was filled with a

Treasurer Jay Coffey talking with prospective members

variety of presentations on canine health and raising puppies. The vendor building was bustling with activity and bursting with all things mushing; hats, harnesses and beyond. Prior to the potluck meal on Saturday, Jaye Foucher of Sibersong Sleddogs presented a wonderful "Family Feud" style game of sled dog and mushing trivia, followed by a well attended pot luck meal in the truest of New England traditions. The potluck meal was a great success followed by Allen Moore and Aliy Zirkle telling tales of the trail.

Many of our members participated in the rig race on Sunday morning. The weekend concluded with a final talk by Allen and Aliy comparing the Yukon Quest and the Iditarod, complete with some fantastic photos and videos of the trail. The trade fair was a great way to kick off the 2013/14 mushing season. Vendors and revenue are needed each year to make the trade show a reality and VTMA is proud to be a supporter of Northern New England Sled Dog Trade Fair and Seminars. As an association we must continue to support this great event. Thank you to everyone who volunteered this weekend and welcome to all our new members.

See you on the trail ~
Allan Tschorn
VTMA President

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*Top photo: Pulling with an October Siberian
Middle photo: Timing Suzie
Bottom Photo: Elizabeth Strobridge and Suzie
Photo at right: Sage at the Science Fair*

Dog Sledding Makes It to the State's Science Fair

Sage Coates-Farley's – daughter of Rob Farley and Elly Coates and born into the October Siberians Kennel – 7th Grade Science Project was testing the hypothesis on whether harness style affected the amount of weight a dog can pull. To test this hypothesis, an experiment was set-up to control as many parameters as possible and have the harness design be the variable. As we all know from working with dogs, they tend to be the largest variable.

The test vehicle was a metal rock sled with the simple shock cord and tug line. The test period was early December prior to the snow. Weather was a concern, since she wanted to have the dog(s) to have several trials and the surface needed to stay the same – a frozen ground prior to snow. The harness style chosen was the tracking harness, x-back harness and a weight pulling harness. Then came the variables – the October Siberians are trained to pull weight in a team, so the single dog in the middle of the yard with this strange harness made no sense to them. What was Plan B or Plan C? Suzie to the rescue! Elizabeth Strobridge and her Alaskan Husky, Suzie, had the weight pulling experience.

The test field laid out a distance and Suzie was timed for each pull. Suzie was provided several opportunities to pull in each harness type and several nights – this was done to provide training, learning curve, and not to tire Suzie. Weight was added to the sled until all three harnesses

were tried to a point where Suzie was not successful with any harness style.

For a 7th Grade Science Project the student needed to demonstrate how well their project followed the Scientific Process (ask a question, background research, construct a hypothesis, test the hypothesis by doing an experiment, analyze your



data and draw a conclusion, communicate your results). Sage's project not only followed and demonstrated the Scientific Hypothesis, but also demonstrated the weight pulling harness did allow the dog to pull more weight. She was awarded a Gold medal which qualified her for the State Science Fair held at Norwich University in April 2013. Sage's project placed her in the category of Physics, which incorporates sound, motion and forces. The categories were all age groups and she was neighbor to Music Projects, a Baseball Bat Project, Impact Craters and others. Sage found the project fun by using her interest in sled dogs in a school science project and an honor to be invited to the State Science fair.

~Article and photos by Rob Farley

Editor's Note: Maybe we can convince Sage to do a Science Fair project on the friction differences between rubber wheeled rigs and plastic sled runners?

Welcome to the new 2014 Vermont Musher Association, Inc members!

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 ainmirbard@gmail.com.

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Training and Racing: Qualifying Year for Iditarod 2015

Hello from Wasilla, Alaska!

This year, I am training/racing a Mackey team. Yes, that's right a Mackey team! I have secured a fantastic team of 14 dogs from Jason Mackey and they are proving themselves each day we spend together clicking up the miles on our team odometer. I also have three additional dogs to add to the 14 Mackey dogs. Jim Lanier, 15 time Iditarod musher, who I worked with last winter, asked if I would take on his three yearlings to train for the winter, while he concentrates on his Iditarod team. Our goal is to peak the fitness at the third week of January in time for our first race, the Northern Lights 300 which starts January 24th at Martin Buser's Happy Trails Kennel in Big Lake, Alaska. The next qualifier is the Yukon Quest 300 which starts February 2 in Fairbanks, Alaska.

October is the month dry land training begins in earnest here in Alaska. The temperatures in the Wasilla/Willow area have been hovering in the high 30s, low 40's, making it much too warm for healthy training. Jason and his 24 year old mushing son Patrick, who wants to qualify for the Iditarod this year invited me to join them for a week training at Lance's Comeback Kennel outside of Fairbanks. Lance had called Jason and said there was

a thin layer of snow and the temperatures were in the 20's. We loaded the trucks and headed north. It was a treat to see Lances' kennel and rub elbows with him for a few days.

To take advantage of our training time we decided to train our teams twice a day. We started with six miles two times a day with a minimum of six hours in between sessions.

To start the training, the speeds are slow, seven to nine mph. As the fitness improved we increased the speeds to 10 mph before



increasing the distances. In the beginning the fitness training of the long distance Alaskan Sled Dog is a cycle that looks like this, twice a day:

*Days 1 to 3; six miles at 7-9 mph

*Day 4; day off

*Day 5; six miles at 7-9 mph

(occasionally increasing to 10 mph to test how they are handling the fitness)

*Day 6; six miles 9-10 mph (always go slow 7-9 downhill)

*Day 7; Bump up the distance to 7-8 miles but slow the speeds to 7-9 mph.

*Day 8; seven to eight miles at 7-9 mph

*Day 9; seven to eight miles at 7-9 mph occasionally increasing speed to 10 mph.

*Day 10; seven to eight miles at 10 mph (7-9 mph downhill)

*Day 11; Day off

*Day 12; ten miles at 7-9 mph

*Day 13; six to eight miles at 8-10 mph

*Day 14; eight to nine miles at 8-10 mph

*Day 15; Day off

Gradually, as the distances are increased, around 12 miles the training sessions can be once a day.

General notes:

* For long distance training, generally keep speeds around 10 mph.

* Occasional short wind sprints are fun and good for the dogs.

•Keep the team slow 7-8 mph downhill to help mitigate shoulder injuries.

•A conservative training schedule is best. If you question your dogs fitness, keep it shorter and slower.

Eventually, my team will be training three days in a row with 40-75 miles a day at 8-10 mph. Sometimes we will travel six hours, camp for six hours and then run another six hours. Generally, we train three days with a day off. Camping with the dogs is a key component to training as that is what races are all about.

Please feel free to email me with any questions gwennwbogart@gmail.com

Editor's Note: For Gwenn's bio, see page three of the VT Mushes August 2013 edition. Gwenn is a Vermont Musher's Association, Inc. member - in Alaska!

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Mushing Boot Camp

Erin and I made it to Call of the Wild kennels, where the boot camp was being held early Thursday afternoon. We dropped the dogs and gave everyone some water...talked with some of the other mushers while waiting for the first session of Boot Camp.

The first session made use of the belly bands and the eight foot leash with snaps at both ends. It was a command/pulling session - how to correct, when to give the command, etc. I'm still not sure I've got the whole concept down, but it was a good learning experience. I learned that Rogue isn't crazy, just very independent and used to her own way and I've let her get away with it. Oops.

After the training session, we fed the dogs and left them on their tie outs while we went to supper. (Very good food all weekend!) After supper, it was introduction time and to go over what we were hoping to get out of the weekend. Jamie Nelson and Ann Stead both gave introductions about themselves and some of what they expected from us over the weekend.

Erin and I learned that out of about eight or nine groups, we were one of two groups where this was our first boot camp.

All the others were at their second, fourth, etc. boot camp.

Friday morning Erin and I were both out the door and back over to the dog yard about 6am. We got the dogs out of the trailer and watered them.

After some initial questions of the mushers around us, we finally figured out what we thought was expected of us by the instructors. Jamie and Ann wanted us to mix stuff up from our normal team order, so we put Turin in single lead with a choke collar and leash for easy corrections. While I worked with Turin on line out, Erin hooked up the rest of the team.

The run went well. Gambit and Hemi worked on their issues a bit, but like normally happens, once we start the run, the dogs work well together. It's just the standing around they snap at each other. Turin was getting a lot better at lining out and letting the other dogs pass without getting in their way, at least until the end.

The runs were really slow. We normally went last since we had the biggest team by four dogs. We'd pass all the other teams, get to the front of the line, gee over and stop. Then all the teams would pass us and then we'd start again. It really isn't a bad system. You get to work with the dogs to promote good behavior while other dogs pass, learn to ignore the other teams, work on any issues that arise with the waiting,

learn patience, deal with neckline chewers and gangline pullers, learn to not snap at your teammates, etc. And one of the things they wanted us to work on was to give the commands from BEHIND the dogs and have the commands followed. You don't want to lead the dogs from in front, so move further back as the dogs do it correctly. It was a really different perspective that I liked.

We got back to the truck and trailer probably three hours after we left? I not really sure, I never got the time of the runs down, but we didn't go far in the hours we were gone with the stop and go. Which was fine, we were there to learn and train, not just rack up the miles.

After we took care of the dogs, it was off to brunch and discussion of how our runs went. I really liked the discussion part. Not only did you get to relate what you were learning and ask questions, you got to learn from what the other mushers were learning too.

For the evening run we hooked up all ten dogs this time and I was the musher and Erin the handler. Erin didn't have me handle the rest of the time we were there, except the very last part of the last run. I found out pretty quickly that the handler gets more input from Jamie and Ann than the musher on the rig does. Something to

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*Top photo: Dog truck line up
Middle and bottom photos: last morning, working on passing
Photo at right: first evening run - more passing*

Next VTMA meeting is November 22nd at 6:30pm. The location is to be determined, check the VTMA FaceBook page or the VTMA website for updates.

Check out the newly updated VTMA website!
www.vtmushers.org

consider if you go to one of their boot camps...

After supper, more discussion time and our challenge for the morning run. Our challenge was to really mix up our teams for Saturday's run in the morning. Put dogs in situations you normally avoid because of problems and work on the problems.

The list Erin and I came up with scared us. We were definitely having second thoughts about this whole line up as we put the dogs in their boxes for the night and headed back to the room and a hot shower. I was fully expecting blood on the trail the following morning...

In all honesty, the run went really well, all things considered. Star did pretty good in lead towards the end, while Rohan was scattered brained, but I knew that going in. The most problems we had with Qui and Gambit and Turin and Aros were while we were hooking up and waiting to go. I think the work with Turin from the morning before paid off as normally he's a pain the butt while we wait, but he was pretty good.

Star at first was terrified of running up front, but by the end he was doing pretty good. Rohan knows his gee/haw commands, but lining out and running straight, not wandering all over the trail, is something else. But again, I kind of figured that headed into the morning.

For the evening run we mixed it up yet again. I got to try out my new cart with my crew and Erin tried out one of the spare carts with her crew.

It was a really good run. Jamie and Ann were impressed at how well Erin and my guys run next to each other, but that's something we've been doing almost every time we run separate teams together. Good to know the work has paid off!

During the discussion, one of my favorite

parts was a story that Andre told of an experienced musher that lost his team. The point of the story was that even experience can lead to mistakes. Take your time. Take care of your team. Take care of yourself.

Another incident that was shared: what to do if your mainline breaks and now you have a dog or dogs that are the mainline. After you stop your team, what do you

do? All the dogs are pulling on those two dogs that are now your only connection from the sled to the leaders. Do you run up with wire cutters to cut the mainline? Do you undo the tugs to the dogs that are now acting as the mainline? What do you do? What is your plan?

Be prepared. Not every situation can be accounted for, but have at least an idea of what you might do in certain circumstances on the trail.

Sunday morning started like the other mornings, just a half hour earlier. The idea was to run the dogs at 7am instead of 7:30 since some of the other mushers had a long drive to get home. Well, we at least got the dogs on the trail by 7:30...

Would I do the Boot Camp again? Yes! Next year? Not so sure, but I do want to go again!

Story and photos by Judy Gilmore

