

## Inuit Sled Dogs



Our Furry Friends of Winter Travel

The best part about winter travel, besides the solitude, is traveling with dogs. Skiing across a frozen lake or along a frozen river with a hearty dog pulling a toboggan full of gear is thrilling. Part of the thrill comes from relying on your knowledge you're your companions' instinct, but much of the fun comes from knowing that you're traveling in the same manner that people have for thousands of years.

In areas that are blanketed with snow for most of the year, where temperatures rarely climb above freezing, people have had to adapt to their surroundings. They've had to rely on their environment to provide their shelter, clothing, food, and safety. In Alaska, Greenland, northern Canada, and the Russian Arctic, people have had to forge an existence out of very harsh climates and landscapes. However, the native people who have lived in these areas have thrived for thousands of years, creating wonderfully rich and distinctive cultures.

The term Inuit refers to the diverse cultures of people who live in Eastern Siberia and populate the earth all the way around the globe back to Greenland.



So, for thousands of years people have had to adapt to their surroundings. Of course people can't do it alone, so they need to rely on the help of the animals.

Not only do the animals of the Arctic provide the Inuit people with shelter, food, and clothing, but they have also provided them with transportation.



### What's an Inuit Sled Dog?

According to most sources, the roots of the Inuit Sled dog can be traced back to over 4,000 years ago! It is believed that the dogs first originated in the northern reaches of Mongolia, where the dogs were bred as work dogs. Because the Inuit Sled Dog's purpose hasn't changed all that much, or perhaps they were such a perfect breed to begin with, they haven't needed to evolve the way that other species of dog have. Therefore, many of the Inuit Sled Dogs today are very similar in physical and behavioral characteristics.

The Inuit Sled Dog is perfectly adapted to its environment. It has a thick layer of fur that keeps the cold and snow away from its body. Below the longer, wiry fur is an under-layer of soft fur that acts as an insulator. Think of wearing a down jacket or sleeping bag that is actually part of your body. This allows the dogs to curl up comfortably in the snow at temperatures lower than  $-40^{\circ}$  F.

The Inuit Sled Dog has almond shaped eyes that are set close to the bridge of the nose like a wolf, giving the dog its distinct appearance. Why do you think that it would be important that the dog's eyes would be more almond-shaped than wide and round? The dogs' eyes are brown, not blue, which many people instinctively believe to be the color of sled dogs' eyes.

The dogs also have pointed ears which act like radar to alert it to danger or food. Inuit Sled Dogs are amazingly strong. Their muscle structure gives it the ability to pull almost

twice its weight for long distances and many hours of travel per day. Although, the Inuit Sled Dog is not built for speed, its endurance is what makes it the best long-distance sled dog in the Arctic.

Just like Dave and Eric use snowshoes to stay on top of the snow, Inuit Sled Dogs have large, rounded paws. This prevents them from sinking too deeply in the snow, where other dogs might. The paws are strong and well padded. Many mushers have to put booties on their dogs' feet to protect their paws from the sharp ice. Inuit Sled Dogs don't seem to be bothered by conditions that would otherwise hurt a different breed of dog's paws. In between the toes is a layer of fur that keeps the dogs' feet warm and allow them to travel for many miles per day. Some Inuit Sled Dogs have even been known to travel for 70 miles per day, while pulling heavily loaded sleds!

### Why don't they look like the dogs I think of when I think of dog sledding?

Inuit Sled Dogs come in a variety of colors. Usually they are grey and brown, however, they come in infinite varieties of coloring. Some dogs are all charcoal in color, while others are pure white. Cinnamon reds, beiges, and tans are colors that can also be found on Inuit Sled Dogs. So the truth is that no two Inuit Sled Dogs are the same color. This makes them quite unique and easily distinguishable. Individual puppies become easily distinguished even while still very young.

Typically Inuit Sled Dogs are smaller than the dogs most people think of when imagining dog sledding. The average male Inuit Sled Dog weighs between 80-95 lbs., while the females weigh 55-70 lbs. Although the females are one-third smaller than the males, they can run as fast and as long as the males.



### What other types of dogs are used for pulling?

Today, many sled dogs are bred for speed. Many mushers around the world are involved in dog sledding races. An Inuit Sled Dog is used more for its strength and stamina, rather than its speed.

As dog sled races become more and more popular, dogs that are strong and quick are becoming the sled dog of choice. For the Iditarod, the most famous endurance race from Anchorage to Nome, Alaska, dogs called Alaskan Huskies are used. They are cross-bred

dog rather than a pure-bred dog. Alaskan Huskies are composed of the warmth of an Inuit Sled Dog and are then mixed with the speed of hounds, giving them the ability to run fast for long distances in very cold conditions.

To learn more about Alaskan Malamutes visit:

<http://www.akc.org/breeds/recbreeds/alasmal.cfm>

To learn more about Siberian Huskies visit:

<http://www.akc.org/breeds/recbreeds/sibhusk.cfm>

### What do the dogs eat?

Because the Inuit Sled Dog is such a primitive dog, meaning that it hasn't changed much over thousands of years, its diet requirements have remained relatively the same. Inuit Sled Dogs have virtually the same diet as wild canines in the Arctic. Wolves, fox, and coyotes eat very similarly to the Canadian Inuit Sled Dog.

Their diet is composed primarily of animal fat and raw meat. In order to keep the cold out, the dogs' diet must consist of 50% pure fat. Eating is perhaps the favorite activity of a Canadian Inuit Sled Dog. They howl ecstatically and pretty much forget all manners when able to eat. During successful seal hunts, Inuit hunters often cut off amazingly large hunks of seal meat to feed their dogs. The energetic and always hungry Inuit Sled Dog has no problem handling a 5 lb. chunk of meat in only one or two bites!

Traditionally the Inuit seal hunters would not feed their dogs every day. It wasn't that the Inuit people were being mean to their dogs, it's just that the Inuit Sled Dog has an amazing ability to keep itself nourished and warm even in the harshest circumstances. Going for a one or two days without food isn't going to injure the dogs. But just like people, the dogs do get tired and need to be fed regularly if they are going to continue pulling hard each day. However, if a dog is not properly fed, it can become quite angry and even dangerous. Eric and Dave's dogs are fed each morning and again at night.

In the evening the dogs are fed dry kibble in warm water, often with lard or leftover dinner mixed in. The water is very important for the dogs' survival. During the day, the dogs eat lots of snow while traveling or resting, but often don't get enough water to stay properly hydrated.

Each morning, the dogs are given raw meat in warm water. The water, again, helps to keep the dogs hydrated. The meat gives them protein and fat to keep them strong and healthy for the rigors of the trail.

## Where do the dogs sleep?

The Inuit Sled Dog is very comfortable in very cold temperatures. In fact the dogs are more comfortable in the cold, and really seem to enjoy being outdoors even if the temperature is well below zero.

It is for this reason that the dogs spend their nights outdoors. They are perfectly content to snuggle up in the snow and bury their heads into their thick coats. They stay warm all night long. They will dig out a little space and actually bury themselves into a little snow fort to keep the cold wind away.

## Why do Dave and Eric only have a few dogs, opposed to a big team of dogs?

Traveling with dogs is a lot like traveling with people. The more people you have on an adventure, the more food you have to bring. Since we're going to be traveling long distances each day, for almost 2 months, we need to make sure that we can carry everything without too much strain. Also the thought of harnessing 6 or 7 dogs each morning isn't one that's entirely attractive to Dave or Eric. Dogs also have a tendency to behave differently (usually more attentive and well-mannered) in smaller teams.

Controlling the dogs is also a very important part of Eric and Dave's daily routine. Some of you probably have younger brothers or sisters. Having a room full of their friends makes it seem chaotic and is quite tiring. All of the kids have different needs, and all of them expect you to help them with lots of things. It makes it much more difficult to manage all of them rather than just a few.

The same rules apply with sled dogs. When you can give them the personal attention they require, they will help you out more and you'll be less tired from helping them. Dogs require quite a bit of maintenance. Remember that dogs can't tell you what's on their mind, or if something is wrong with them. Through giving the dogs lots of personal attention we can make sure that they are healthy and happy. We spend a long time with each dog, and as a result they respond to us and will happily pull for long hours over difficult terrain.



## Do the dogs ever get tired?

Just like people get tired, sled dogs get tired. Their ability to travel long distances and for many hours each day is amazing. However, at the end of a long day, they are just as happy about setting up camp as we are.

They work hard each day and require rest, just like people. They're usually asleep before Eric and Dave can even get their tent set up.

Each dog has its own personality, behaviors, and likes and dis-likes (except we haven't met an Inuit Sled Dog who doesn't like to eat).

## Are Inuit Sled Dogs Good Pets?

Unfortunately, Inuit Sled Dogs cannot make good pets in the conventional sense. They are very affectionate, people friendly dogs, but they are bred to pull. They love working, and they are better workers than they are pets.

They require lots and lots of exercise and free space to run around. They love to be outside. Because of this, Inuit Sled Dogs do not like to be kept in a house.

## Activities for the Classroom

### FOOD MATH

Taking care of our dogs is very important. We have to keep them well fed or they won't have the strength to perform the demanding tasks we ask of them each day.

Each of our dogs eats approximately 7 lbs of food each day. While preparing to depart, Dave and Eric have carefully considered their menu and have sent boxes of food supplies to Cumberland House, La Pas, Grand Rapids, and Berens River. Look at the table below to figure out how many days each food drop is for. Then calculate the number of pounds of food each dog will require for each food drop.

DESTINATION	DAYS OF FOOD
Cumberland House	9
La Pas	12
Grand Rapids	17
Berens River	12

Lbs. of food dog requires each day \_\_\_\_\_

Lbs. of food per day \_\_\_\_\_ X \_\_\_\_\_ Number of Days = Weight of each box

*Remember that Dave and Eric need to feed two dogs each day!*

It costs \$.80/lb to ship food to these destinations. Calculate the cost of shipping all four boxes of dog food.

Price of Postage per Pound: \_\_\_\_\_

Postage \_\_\_\_\_ X \_\_\_\_\_ Number of Pounds = Cost of each box

Now, fill in the table with the accurate information so that Dave and Eric will be able to calculate the cost of shipping dog food to the appropriate destination.

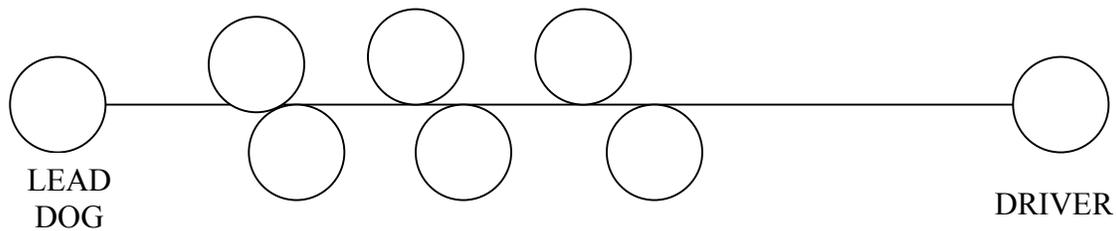
DESTINATION	DAYS OF FOOD	WEIGHT OF BOX TO BE SHIPPED	COST OF SHIPPING
Cumberland House			
La Pas			
Grand Rapids			
Berens River			

## Control Your Own Dog Team!

**Objectives:** Students will gain a greater understanding of dog sled commands and vocabulary. Students will also learn more about the skills needed in driving a dog team and what attributes are necessary for co-operative skills needed in leadership.

**Skills Needed:** Vocabulary enrichment, co-operative learning strategies, problem solving, listening skills, physical movement.

**Procedure:** Take one 20-foot length of rope and have 8 students pair up and stand side by side holding the rope with one hand between them. See diagram below. Pick one student as the leader and one student as the driver. Use the Musher Vocabulary to try to navigate around school, out on the playground, or in the gym.



### MUSHER VOCABULARY

- **Hike, Go Ahead, C'Mon, Let's Go** - start the team moving
- **Straight Ahead, Ahead** - Keep going forward
- **Gee (pronounced like the letter)** - turn right
- **Come Gee** - 180° turn to the right
- **Haw** - turn left
- **Come Haw** - 180° turn to the left
- **Whoa!** – Stop

## WEEK 1 CHAT SESSION

**Where and When:** February 5, 2003, 9:00 – 10:00 AM CST. Dave and Eric and their dogs will be gearing up to hit the trail in Cumberland House, SCW.

**Special Guest:** Genevieve Montcombroux, the leading North American expert on Inuit Sled Dogs

**Topic:** Inuit Sled Dogs and other Sled Dog Discussions

### **Suggested Questions for Students to Ask:**

What makes an Inuit Sled Dog different than other dogs?

How much can they pull?

Why don't they get tired of pulling?

Where do Inuit Sled Dogs come from, and where can we find them today?

How do you keep Inuit Sled Dogs healthy? Is this different than keeping other dogs healthy?

Do Inuit Sled Dogs have personalities? How do they show their individual personalities?

What's a pack, and who are the important members of a pack?

What do they like to eat?

How do you tell a lead dog from the others?

How do you choose where each dog will line up in the team? Does this change everyday? How many dogs make up a team?

How many dogs can you have at a kennel?

What makes Inuit Sled Dogs so special?

Are there any other uses for Inuit Sled Dogs other than to pull toboggans or polks?

How long do Inuit Sled Dogs live?

When does a sled dog begin to pull? How do you train them to pull? When do they get too old to be on the trail?