



## Balto Finishes Strong



### Mini Fact:

Gunnar Kaasen, shown with Balto, was an assistant to the fastest musher in Alaska, Leonhard Seppala.

On March 3, about 70 daring mushers, or sled dog racers, and about 1,000 dogs will meet in Anchorage, Alaska, for the official opening of the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race.

The Iditarod (eye-DIT-uh-rahd) is one of the most challenging races in the world. It starts in Anchorage and crosses more than 1,000 miles of Alaskan wilderness. It ends up in Nome.

This week, The Mini Page learns about a legendary sled dog who was the hero of a journey that inspired the Iditarod.

### A race to save lives

In January 1925, a dangerous disease called diphtheria (dif-THIR-ee-uh) threatened the people of Nome. Dr. Curtis Welch treated children who had come down with the contagious disease, but as more kids got sick, he knew he would run out of medicine. Doctors in Anchorage had more doses of the medicine, but the two cities were hundreds of miles apart.

The medicine could be sent by airplane, but cold and windy weather made it too dangerous. The only other option was to send the needed medicine by dogsled.

Gov. Scott Bone decided a relay of dogsled teams would carry the medicine from Nenana, where railroad tracks met the sled trail to Nome, 674 miles away. The relay started on Jan. 27.

### Balto gets his chance

During the race, mushers and dogs met dangerous challenges, including sea ice and snowdrifts that could lead them off the trail.

When it was Gunnar Kaasen's turn, he chose his favorite husky, Balto, and put him at the front of his sled for the next-to-last leg of the relay. They set out on Feb. 1 into a blizzard, running toward a town called Port Safety, where the last musher was waiting.

However, the musher in Port Safety had received instructions to wait for better weather and was asleep when they arrived! So Kaasen made a quick decision: He would finish the last 20 miles of the journey, with Balto in the lead.

Thanks to Kaasen and Balto, the medicine arrived in Nome on Feb. 2, just 5 1/2 days after leaving Nenana. The previous record for the trip had been nine days.

### A hero

The 1925 Serum Run was famous all over the country, and Balto became a national hero and symbol of the journey. In New York City's Central Park, a statue of him honors his service.

In 1973, Dorothy G. Page and Joe Redington Sr. started the Iditarod race. They wanted to celebrate the many things sled dogs have done for Alaskans. The sled dogs' life-saving trip was just one of the services such dogs have provided.



Balto



Balto's statue in Central Park.

## The Iditarod race

"Iditarod" is the name of a ghost town along the trails. Many experts believe it means "distant place."

The Iditarod begins in Anchorage with a ceremonial start. The race truly begins the next day from Willow.

The Iditarod Trail runs for about 1,049 miles. It varies year by year because obstacles may arise, forcing mushers to break new trail.

The race keeps going until the last team comes in. The fastest winning time was eight days, three hours, 40 minutes and 13 seconds, set in 2017. The last racers can take nearly three weeks to come in.

Mushers begin training dogs in August, with the dogs pulling four-wheelers. In the spring and early summer, when the snow thaws, the dogs get a vacation.

Teams must stop at checkpoints throughout the trail. These stopping points are often villages where mushers and their dogs might get a chance to eat and drink.

At each checkpoint, veterinarians look over the dogs. Mushers rub salve, or ointment, on a dog's paws. If a dog is injured or too tired, it might leave the race and be flown home from a checkpoint.



photo by Frank Kovalchek

## Resources



### On the Web:

- [bit.ly/MPIditarod](http://bit.ly/MPIditarod)
- [bit.ly/MPhusky](http://bit.ly/MPhusky)

### At the library:

- "Balto's Story" by Kevin Blake

## Try 'n' Find

Words that remind us of Balto are hidden in this puzzle. Some words are hidden backward or diagonally, and some letters are used twice. See if you can find:



ALASKA, ANCHORAGE,  
BALTO, CHECKPOINT,  
DIPHThERIA, DISEASE,  
DOGS, HUSKY,  
IDITAROD, KAASEN,  
MEDICINE, MUSER,  
NENANA, NOME, RACE,  
RELAY, SALVE, SERUM,  
SLED, STATUE, TRAIL.

W O A T M E D I C I N E N K B  
W S G O D I S E A S E V L A S  
S E R U M G M U S H E R D F Y  
D I P H T H E R I A N A N E N  
A N C H O R A G E K A A S E N  
L Z E U E T N I O P K C E H C  
U E C L Z O D X E U T A T S E  
A L A S K A Q D E L S K O K M  
L Y R T R A I L H Y K S U H O  
C D O R A T I D I O T L A B N

## Cook's Corner

### Oven-Baked Chicken Bites

#### You'll need:

- 3 boneless chicken breasts, cut into 1-inch cubes
- 1/3 cup Italian dressing
- 1/2 cup Italian bread crumbs

- 1/4 cup grated parmesan cheese
- 3/4 teaspoon dried basil
- cooking spray



#### What to do:

1. Place chicken cubes in bowl with Italian dressing.
2. Mix bread crumbs, parmesan cheese and basil in a separate shallow bowl.
3. Coat chicken pieces with bread-crumbs mixture.
4. Spray a medium-size baking pan with cooking spray. Place chicken pieces in one layer in the pan.
5. Bake for 30 minutes until chicken is done. Makes 4 servings.

\* You'll need an adult's help with this recipe.

## 7 Little Words for Kids

Use the letters in the boxes to make a word with the same meaning as the clue. The numbers in parentheses represent the number of letters in the solution. Each letter combination can be used only once, but all letter combinations will be necessary to complete the puzzle.



1. where a bank puts your money (7) \_\_\_\_\_
2. probably not (8) \_\_\_\_\_
3. school or house (8) \_\_\_\_\_
4. middle Beckham son (5) \_\_\_\_\_
5. wooden box (5) \_\_\_\_\_
6. light on a stand (4) \_\_\_\_\_
7. it goes around a picture (5) \_\_\_\_\_

ACC	UN	LD	ELY
FRA	OUNT	CRA	LA
ING	TE	LIK	ME
EO	MP	BUI	ROM

Answers: account, unlikely, building, Romeo, crate, lamp, frame.

## Mini Jokes



**Ivan:** What should you give a dog with a fever?

**Iona:** Mustard — it's the best thing for a hot dog!

## Eco Note



Animals called **keystone species** play a vital role in their environment. One example is the wolf, a top predator. Wolves affect many links in the food chains below them. They keep down numbers of plant-eaters that might otherwise graze habitats bare. In this way, they help nature to stay in balance. They also prey on weak and sickly individuals, which helps to keep prey populations at numbers the habitat can support. Can you think of other keystone species?

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## For later:

Watch your newspaper for updates about the 2018 Iditarod.

**Teachers:** For standards-based activities to accompany this feature, visit: [bit.ly/MPstandards](http://bit.ly/MPstandards). And follow The Mini Page on Facebook!



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