

Emigrant girl in tough dog sled race

By Matt Dettori, Enterprise Staff Writer

At 15, Lacey Hart already has a full-time job — taking care of her kennel of 34 dogs.

Her early mornings and hard work are paying off because on Feb. 28, 2009, she will be the first Montanan in 10 years to compete in the Junior Iditarod in Wasilla, Alaska.

The Junior Iditarod takes place a few days before the main Iditarod. The two-day junior race starts and finishes in Wasilla after making an 180-mile loop. The musher who wins the race will lead the start of the official Iditarod race.

College scholarships are also awarded to the top finishers.

Hart started to learn about mushing while attending Arrowhead School, when she studied a unit connecting reading to the Iditarod race. For every one mile a musher raced, the students would read a page in a book, following the musher they chose mile-for-mile, according Hart's father, Carl Brook.

Hart was able to participate in the official 2005 Iditarod, taking care of Iditarod veteran Scott Smith's dogs and holding his sled before the start of the race.

According to Brook, the experience peaked Hart's desire to become more competitive with dog sled racing.

Hart adopted her first sled dog from the local pound, and found an advertisement in the local paper offering a team of eight sled dogs shortly after.

After striking a deal with the West Yellowstone man who was advertising the huskies, Hart ended up buying a total 17 dogs.

"She had all the equipment she needed," said Brook. "We went from one to 18 dogs in about a week."

Hart since then has bred and raised several huskies that are genetically linked to dogs that have competed in and completed the main Iditarod race.

Her kennel also has four dogs loaned to her by the Barrons, a Lincoln family well known for their experience in the Iditarod community.

Hart takes care of her dogs and kennel with minimal help from her parents.

"Her mother and I are here to guide her in the right direction," Brook said. "We help her out if she needs it, but she does almost all of the work herself."

Operating the kennel costs more than \$500 a month, Brook said.

Hart breeds, trains and sells Labrador retrievers to help cover expenses. When she is not training her own dogs, Hart works with other people's canines, training them in obedience and for hunting.

Hart, who is home-schooled, works with her sled dogs regularly, waking before dawn so the dogs can have cool weather to train in. She harnesses the team, then jumps on an old four-wheeler used as a training sled. When the snow falls, Hart will use a dog sled and train at Mill Creek.

The distance Hart will travel in the Junior Iditarod is comparable to the distance from Whitehall to Norris Geyser Basin in Yellowstone Park.



Enterprise photo by Angela Schneider

Lacey Hart and her team of sled dogs crest a hill during a practice run in Paradise Valley, Monday, Nov. 3.

The race is split into two 80-mile sections, with a mandatory checkpoint in between. The mushers will start the race on Feb. 28 at 10 a.m. and end the first leg at a checkpoint 80 miles away, Hart said.

A mandatory eight- to 12-hour layover at the checkpoint gives the mushers a chance to camp out with and care for the dogs.

According to Brook, neither he nor his wife can communicate with their daughter or help care for the dogs during the two-day race.

During the layover, Hart will feed and water her dogs twice, wrap their legs up after rubbing them with anti-inflammatories, set up camp and sleep with the dogs. According to Hart, most of the second stage will be raced in the dark.

One hurdle Hart faces getting to the Junior Iditarod is raising money for the trip.

She has found several generous sponsors to help cover some of the costs, "but we still have a long ways to go," Brook said.

Hart is having a spaghetti dinner and auction Friday, 7 p.m., at the Emigrant Community Center. The cost is \$7. Auction items, which include guns, power tools, pet supplies and more, have been donated by local supporters and businesses.

Those unable to attend the dinner who want to donate should contact Hart at 223-1276.

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FWP tests elk for disease

By Mark A. York, Enterprise Staff Writer

While Montana grapples with managing the risk and stopping the spread of brucellosis, hunters and landowners are working together this fall to detect the disease in hunter-harvested elk.

According to Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks documents, since 1981 nearly 7,000 elk have been tested by the agency for brucellosis exposure, mostly in the greater Yellowstone area north and west of the park. The results of those tests show brucellosis exposure rates that range from 0 to 5.5 percent of the herds.

"The blood test kits were sent out to registered hunters and are also provided at stations in the Shields and Paradise Valleys," said Kevin Hughes, wildlife sciences lab technician at the Bozeman Office of FWP.

"I have kiosks set up at the major turnoffs on Highway 89 South," said Ryan Easterday, a brucellosis technician with FWP. "There is a kiosk at 89 and Trail Creek Road, one at I-90 and upper Trail Creek, and one at the Emigrant Store. The kits contain a vial and syringe for drawing the blood. They just have to put the sample in the envelope and put it in the mail."

Last year, cattle in a herd near Bridger tested positive for brucellosis. The infection was suspected to have originated in a herd from Emigrant, according to FWP.

Montana's brucellosis-free status is in jeopardy due to two positive cases for the disease in a 12-month time frame. The livestock industry is fearful of the increased costs of testing with the loss of the brucellosis-free status, local ranchers report.

"Brucellosis threatens to wipe out every rancher south of Interstate 90," newly-elected Park County Commissioner Marty Malone said recently.

"Standing by in the face of today's uncertainties and risks with brucellosis is not an option," said FWP Director Jeff Hagener in a news release. "Montana's livestock industry and ranching families are too important to this state."

In Montana, brucellosis has been detected only in elk, bison and recently, cattle in areas surrounding Yellowstone National Park.

Brucellosis can cause pregnant cattle, bison and elk to abort their calves.