

# Time to Put up a Fight

Excerpts from the 2008n long distance racing journal of Ken Anderson

Each year, veteran Iditarod racer Ken Anderson compiles a well written journal of his Iditarod race which he makes available on his website- [windycreekkennel.com](http://windycreekkennel.com). This year is the first year that he has run the Quest, making him one of the few mushers to run both marathons in the same year, and the 2008 journal is now about both races.

Ken's journal is written in a matter of fact, pull no punches, in the moment style that is probably the most successful transportation of race fan to trail that words can accomplish. To achieve this literary intimacy, he carries a voice recorder so he can get his thoughts down as quickly and spontaneously as possible, later transcribing the recordings to the computer.

A one thousand mile race of any kind is a grueling event. Add dogs, cold weather, competition, media, and probably most importantly, sleep deprivation to the equation, and you have enough catalyst to transform even the most stoic of mild personalities to a volatile level.

This 65+ page journal could arguably be called essential reading for Iditarod wannabes, veterans, and fans alike. The following excerpts are just a few of my many favorites. Greg Sellentin

*Ken, on racing in the Yukon Quest against his neighbor, multiple Quest and Iditarod champion Lance Mackey:*

...My goal in the Quest was to stick to the plan and forget about the competition until Dawson City. After that I would re-assess: if I had a chance to win, I would go for it; otherwise I would stick to a conservative strategy of mid-length runs with equal rest and worry only about the Iditarod competition. As it was, I was having an awesome race, running neck-and-neck with my rock-star neighbor. We were all alone up front, six minutes apart and hours ahead of the competition. It was time to put up a fight...

...We departed into the night from Dawson City with 11 strong dogs after finishing our layover at 1:46a.m, six minutes behind Lance's 12 equally strong-looking dogs. It was a full moon and a crisp night; ideal conditions for a late-night run. ...

...The tension was definitely mounting between Lance and I. The media was making a spectacle of the fact that we were neighbors and that I was having such a strong rookie run. Lance and I didn't bump into each other much while on our layovers but I recall the conversations being very brief with as much race detail omitted as was politely possible.

...As we snaked up the valley along the Bonanza Creek Road I noticed Lance either had his light off or was making way better time than me because, aside from his runner tracks, I never saw any sign of him. It seemed like the cat-and-mouse had already begun. My competitive instincts kicked in and I clicked off my light as well. Besides, it was a beautiful, clear night and the view of the lights of Dawson behind us was getting more and more spectacular with every mile we climbed... Then my mind really started to wander and I came up with all kinds of conspiracy theories.

...We passed another skier and he confirmed the prior spectator's time. I could now see the lights of town just a few miles ahead. I felt myself quickly sliding into a terrible stupor and I stopped the team and went up and told the dogs how proud I was of them. Just stopping and looking them in the eye brought my keel back to level. We had given it our best, put up one hell of a fight, and gave mushing fans around the world their money's worth. It was fun and I was proud to be a part of it. I wanted to cross the finish line with my chin up and the dogs to feel the same way. Just before we hit town I saw Gerry again on his snow machine. I was now riding the runners instead of pedaling my heart out. It was obvious the race was over. In his deep voice he said "eight more minutes to the finish line... good show."

*Ken talks about competing in both races in the same year:*

...I had been quite anxious all year long about how I would be able to handle this critical window of time between the Quest finish and the start of Iditarod. I was envisioning myself walking around in a half-coma, dreading the thought of getting back on the runners for another 1000-mile run. What I found was the opposite. Having just come off the Quest, I was very dialed in to the things that usually cause me a lot of stress before Iditarod; namely gear. It's become tradition that my mother spends two days straight sitting in front of the sewing machine while I'm running around Anchorage frantically getting last-minute gear items together. Mom still had some sewing to do and I had a few errands to run, but all-in-all I found Anchorage to be quite relaxing. Physically, my body felt great. I didn't have any real dings from the Quest and I was managing a consistent 8 hours of sleep per night. If anything, I'd say I was less anxious about the impending misery I was about to put myself through than I've ever been before. I also found that my success in the Quest didn't go un-noticed by Iditarod fans. Lots of folks were coming up to me and congratulating me on the strong showing. If anything, I was most happy for the Quest, which has kind of taken a back seat to Iditarod. In the future I hope more Iditarod mushers run the Quest for the simple sake of keeping the Quest alive and vibrant...

*On the night before the Iditarod start:*

The night before the race I fell terribly ill. My guts were on fire and it felt like my stomach turned. I was moaning and panicked. There was a terrible bug going around the Quest that hit many handlers (including mine) really hard. Mike was coughing blood, Gwen was in tears, and Cindy had to stop numerous times while walking to our camp site gasping for air and clutching her throat. In Dawson City I was teasing them that I looked the best out of the four of us (which was actually true). Now I feared it might be payback time for giving everyone a hard time.

*The Unalakleet checkpoint:*

...Martin leaves in pretty decent form about twenty minutes later, after only staying four hours and 40 minutes. I'm not sure what to think of his team and his relative rest-cutting. Rick Swenson pulls out about twenty minutes later after staying nearly six hours. His team looks steady and focused as always. I like his approach with his dogs. He's always calm and confident and totally in control of the situation. You can see his team really trusts him. I'm not sure, though, how much he's going to be willing to cut rest up the coast. ...