

History of Mushing in New Hampshire

Long before the invention of the snowmobile (Patented by Joseph- Armand Bombardier 1959) and the ATV, dog teams were traversing the hills and trails of New Hampshire. Sled dogs enabled explorers Byrd, Peary and Amundsen to explore the Arctic and Antarctica and played a vital role in opening these snowbound areas of the world.

Perhaps one of the best known sled dog kennels in the world originated right here in New Hampshire. Arthur Walden's Chinook Kennels in Wonalancet, NH dates back to 1913 and dogs from his kennel participated in Byrd's Antarctic Expedition in 1929. The trails used to train these dogs are still in use today by mushers from around the country who participate in the annual Sandwich Notch Sled Dog Races.

In 1925 Nome was hit with a diphtheria epidemic and it was dog teams that saved the city by relaying serum into the town. Leonhard Seppala, being the final team to deliver the serum was given much of the publicity and credit for this remarkable feat. In 1926 Seppala came to New Hampshire and was hosted by Chinook Kennels. Seppala came from Alaska to New England each fall to race his dogs, amassing more wins and records than any other musher. His last year of racing in the lower 48, in 1932, included the Winter Olympics at Lake Placid, NY where sled dog racing was staged as a demonstration sport.

In 1924 the New England Sled Dog Club was organized and still exists as an active club bringing sled dog races to many towns throughout New Hampshire and New England. The formation of this club was followed shortly, in 1931, by the formation of the Laconia Sled Dog Club, now known as the Lakes Region Sled Dog Club, and produced the first World Championship Sled Dog Derby which is still held annually in Laconia, NH. These races and other sled dog events bring thousands of tourists and spectators to New Hampshire each winter. In 2003 the New Hampshire Mushers Association was formed to promote the safe and responsible use of New Hampshire's trails for mushers and all trail users alike.

Although relatively small in numbers, there are still hundreds of mushers residing in New Hampshire who rise early in the mornings beginning each fall to run their teams on the trails in preparation for the upcoming winter. They range from purely recreational mushers with 2 or three dogs to seasoned veterans running teams of 16 dogs or more. They continue a tradition that has gone on for many years and their enthusiasm and dedication far exceeds their numbers.

It is with this rich New Hampshire tradition in mind that the New Hampshire Mushers Association requests that dog teams, or "Mushers", be recognized as a trail user group in the State of New Hampshire.