

# Yukon Quest Sled Dog Adventure

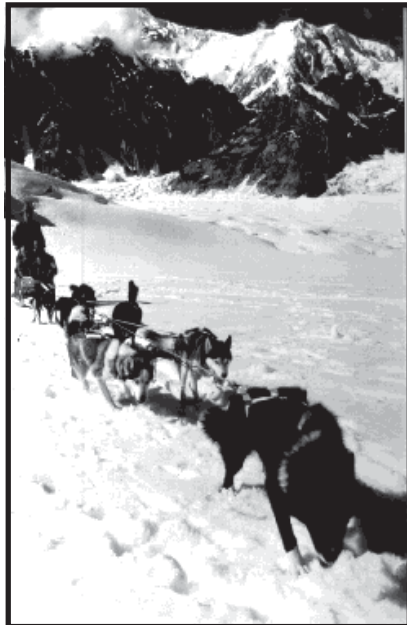
## **INTRODUCTION**

Simply put, this incomparable trip guarantees an experience of legend. In the land of Jack London and the great Klondike gold rush, you'll learn to mush your own dog team down the mighty Yukon River, overnighing in historical cabins and a wilderness camp to completely feel the spirit of this haunting country. After you've gained a new appreciation for this defining way of life and travel, the "Toughest Race in the World", the famed Yukon Quest will pass through our camp as the dog mushers challenge over a 1000 miles of frozen wilderness.

Beginning in Fairbanks we'll fly to the remote bush community of Eagle, inaccessible by road through the long winter months. Steeped in history, this fascinating little outpost will serve as our headquarters, lodging in gold rush era cabins overlooking the Yukon. From here we'll head out downriver to a cozy winter camp by the imposing Calico Bluff, perfecting our dog handling techniques in this age old means of transport.

As the race frontrunners approach Eagle, we'll head back to help out at the official race checkpoint where the mushers try to grab a few hours of rest and warmth for themselves and their dogs. As the teams head out, each according to their own strategy, we'll follow them back downriver as they enter one of the most challenging sections of the course. From here it is back by air to the hard fought destination of all the mushers, Fairbanks, only our means will be a bit more comfortable.

If ever you've longed to feel a part of a truly wild environment, after this intimate exploration we guarantee you'll leave with this indescribable area a large part of you . . .



## **ABBREVIATED AGENDA**

- Day 1** PM arrival flights into Fairbanks; visit Yukon Quest headquarters/command center; visit University of Alaska Museum; dinner on the town; overnight in bed & breakfast on the Chena River
- Day 2** Morning purchase of any last minute gear items; bush flight (1 hour) to remote community of Eagle on the Yukon River; dog mushing orientation with our particular canine colleagues; overnight in gold rush era log cabins
- Day 3** Morning departure down the Yukon River by dog sled (learning to drive the teams yourself); arrival at wall tent (wood stove heat!) camp at base of famed Calico Bluff; afternoon snowshoeing and skijorring —cross country skiing by dog power; diner and overnight in wall tents
- Day 4** Breakfast in camp and leisurely return upriver to Eagle; afternoon activities dependant on arrival times of Yukon Quest frontrunners at the official checkpoint in the old schoolhouse; participation in dog and musher "maintenance" of the trail weary race participants; overnight again in historic log cabins
- Day 5** Day trips by dog sled out of Eagle with possible overnight return to Calico Bluff camp along the Yukon Quest trail (dependant on race progress/ conditions); otherwise cabins; hopeful glorious display of northern lights . . .
- Day 6** Return to Eagle; visit historic Fort Egbert; "hang out" at the old schoolhouse checkpoint to visit with the stream of arriving mushers (who are much more relaxed now that they realize they are "out of the money"); overnight in cabins
- Day 7** Return flight to Fairbanks; lunch downtown; departure flights for home

**7 Day / 6 Night**

**\$3525 p/person**

<b><u>2011 Tour Dates</u></b>	<b><u>Code</u></b>
Feb 11 - Feb 17	7Q1

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Trip cost includes all modes of transportation beyond Fairbanks, lodging, meals and instruction, with extensive additional information sent upon request. Supplementary arctic winter gear is supplied by Adventure Alaska with suggestions as to personal clothing sent upon deposit. All remote accommodations are held exclusively for our group, and these facilities range from deluxe to very "Alaskan" (part of the experience!). With space available for an absolute maximum six persons, early reservation for this unique experience is highly recommended. Weather and conditions can necessitate last minute changes in the above itinerary.

**Day 1** Our adventure starts upon your arrival in Fairbanks, with most arriving in the late morning or early afternoon hours. Our evening's accommodations where we'll first rendezvous are at the Plane Country Bed & Breakfast located a short taxi ride from the airport. Situated on the banks of the Chena River, the Plane Country is named such, as just in front is a pond for float planes (ski planes in this season) and a gravel airstrip (and of course the proprietors are pilots). Before the afternoon is over, we'll head over to the University of Alaska to visit their excellent museum with hopeful views of the northern side of the Alaska Range, and then wander downtown to the headquarters and command center of the Yukon Quest. Here we'll get a glimpse of the tumult as the race is already underway, the headquarters staffed mostly by volunteers dedicated to the event and the sport in general. Dinner is on the town before heading back to the bed and breakfast for the night.

**Day 2** After a hearty breakfast we'll take stock of our personal gear and make a stop if need be at the local outfitter store, to fill in any gaps in our arctic "armor". Then it's back to the airport, the "local" terminal this time, for the air taxis that service all the outlying areas from Fairbanks as the northern hub. Our flight across the roadless frozen Interior mountains and tundra will take about an hour, ending in the tiny outpost of Eagle on the banks of the Yukon River, just four miles from the Canadian border. With the only road in, 160 miles of twisting gravel, closed for the winter months, the only means of access to Eagle are by air or by surface via dog team or snowmachine over the river. Eagle has long served as the last supply post for the vast upper Yukon valley, providing the earliest miners and current wilderness dwellers with their link to mail delivery, telephones and the rest of the world. Its frontier nature hasn't changed much and we'll bunk for the evening in historic cabins overlooking the Yukon. Listed in the National Register of Historic Places, one of the cabins is where the famous Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen "wintered", after arriving in December of 1905 from mushing by dog team from his ship locked in the ice 1000 miles to the north. It was by telegraph from Eagle that he was able to notify the world of his success in finding the long sought Northwest Passage, after three years with no communication. There should still be plenty of time in the afternoon to meet up with our canine colleagues for the next few days, as well as their mentors, long time locals Steve and Patty Nelson, for an introduction.

**Day 3** We'd best have a hearty breakfast in the belly this morning, before our first experience organizing our canine means of transport. After channeling the wild enthusiasm (you'd swear they live for this alone) of the dogs into harness and sled, we'll drop over the bluff bank of the Yukon and head downstream past Eagle Bluff, long a landmark to river travelers of all seasons. As the dogs settle into the pace, we'll switch out and give each of us a turn on the runners. You're now a dog driver. Heading around several of the sweeping bends of the Yukon, we'll steer toward Calico Bluff, a unique site of geologic study and just plain beauty, with the swirling patterns of metamorphic rock. At the base on a bluff overlooking the river we'll find our toasty warm wall tent camp, with nary a neighbor for many many miles. With a hot snack and beverage the arctic almost feels tame, and the waning hours of daylight are open to snowshoeing, or mushing the dogs about the neighborhood, or trying your hand at skijorring—cross country skiing by dog power (the more dogs the greater the thrill level . . .) The evening's meal is necessarily a great one as we settle into our wall tents for the evening, stoking the wood stove and sharing stories just as the earliest explorers for gold, fur and excitement. Stepping outside periodically to experience the indescribable stillness of the arctic night, the northern lights will surely see fit to give an appropriate display before drifting off to sleep, just possibly with the sound of a distant wolf howling . . .

**Day 4** The pace of our morning will be determined by that of the Yukon Quest front runners, as we

keep tabs on their progress by radio. Trying to time our return trip upriver to Eagle with their arrival will dictate whether our afternoon is as leisurely as the morning. Traveling the great Yukon, now with more experience and assurance, we'll stop frequently to examine stories told by the animal tracks in the snow and some of the other seasonal phenomena that are hard to put into words when someone asks, incredulously, why one would *enjoy* winter. Depending on the weather and trail conditions as always, the mushers could be arriving in Eagle at any hour, with usually several of the frontrunners traveling within a few minutes of each other, sharing in the trailbreaking as they eye the conditions of each other's team and plot strategy for the final push. The official checkpoint is in the historic one room schoolhouse just up the road from our cabins and is a scene that has to be witnessed to be fully appreciated. With dog teams staked out in the schoolyard, the mushers soak in the easy warmth after hundreds of miles of brutal trail, accepting many a helping from the ever full vat of chili and fixings prepared by the local townspeople. Those in contention for the top finishes, quickly take care of their dogs before all else, and then after eating, pile themselves on any available surface for a few hours of snooze in attempts to beat back the increasing exhaustion that wears on them all. It's chaos, excitement, pathos and reverence all at the same time. At least we'll be able to enjoy a full night's sleep back in our own cabins.

**Day 5** Today's activities depend on those of the top mushers, and when they decide to hit the trail. We'll continue to use Eagle as our base, and follow by dog team a few of those pushing on toward Fairbanks as the race tightens and those with a chance, executing their homestretch strategies. Following the location reports of the arriving mushers, we might head upstream toward Eagle Creek and the Canada border to greet and encourage those not yet to Eagle and their long anticipated rest. If the conditions and timing are just right, we might possibly head back down to our camp at Calico Bluff, as it is on the race route, though at this point the frontrunners will be all business, rested and jockeying for position as the finish line in Fairbanks awaits. Our lodging for the night will depend on our choice for the day, either in the Calico Bluff camp or back in Eagle at the cabins. Either way, the northern lights will surely give us another display or make amends for the previous evenings' no show.

**Day 6** Today's the day the "other" mushers arrive, those that know they have no chance of winning but all hanging in there for their own personal reasons. Some are merely trying to survive and make it to the finish, having spent so much time, effort and money in training for the event they can't possibly go home to family and local sponsors without at least finishing. Others, mostly veteran mushers that maybe have done better in previous showings, view it all a bit more philosophically and at this point are out to enjoy themselves. The atmosphere about the checkpoint is very definitely more relaxed, those there now with the leisure to chat at length and visit with local friends from previous Quests, or us as visitors curious about their lifestyle and motivations. Today is leisurely for us too, with time now for snowshoeing, another jaunt by dog team, and to visit historic old Fort Egbert, initially the army's northernmost presence until World War II, but decommissioned not long after the gold rushes of the early century. The atmosphere of the gold rush and Jack London permeate our whole time here in Eagle, down to the event we're here to experience and the cabins where we'll again spend the night.

**Day 7** Today we step from our time capsule and fly back to Fairbanks for another visit to the Yukon Quest command center and lunch downtown, before our return flights to our respective worlds. Back in the 20th century you'll probably want to keep up on the latest progress of each musher, and in doing so your mind might just wander to how that while in so many ways the world has changed, in some ways and places, it hasn't much at all.



## *Client Pre-Trip Information*

---

### *7-Day Yukon Quest Adventure*

#### **Accessibility/Fitness**

This is a participatory winter trip and though not overly strenuous, clients should be moderately physically fit and not averse to cold temperatures as this is an arctic environment. Clients are provided supplementary arctic clothing and boots, and while comfort is our overriding concern, by nature of our activities we will be outdoors a considerable amount of time, and temperature is a very definite factor. Dog mushing in these circumstances is not overly strenuous, though some of the optional activities such as cross country skiing and snowshoeing can be if pursued vigorously. We will also be traveling by bush plane to and from Eagle, and those apprehensive about small plane travel will want to take this into account.

#### **Weather/Temperatures**

Always a subject of great interest and occasionally, a few choice words. By mid February, Old Man Winter has just begun loosening his hold on things, but has been known to come back with a good swipe or two, to remind us just why bananas don't grow very well here. Temperatures could be in the upper twenties, or, they could be minus fifty. Most typical would be from fifteen below to ten above Fahrenheit, the coldest being during the often cloudless nights. Being well prepared is of course the key, allowing one to enjoy why winter is actually the favorite season of many. Even if these temperatures seem beyond comprehension, you'll be surprised what good equipment will do for you, though we promise that you won't win any fashion contests. Weather is of course a factor in the flying portions of the trip, and it is advisable to allow an extra day in Fairbanks in case of possible delays. Besides, when was the last time you had being trapped in a remote winter cabin in Alaska as an excuse . . .

#### **Clothing/Equipment**

Because this is a winter trip and due to the fact that conditions this time of year can on occasion be severe, personal clothing should be chosen very carefully to ensure comfort. Adventure Alaska will provide you with the supplementary arctic outer wear to complement the basic clothing that you probably already have, or might need to supply. We provide the following: arctic coveralls (very stylish!) for the very coldest weather; arctic pak boots for the feet; arctic mittens; and a cold weather hat. Items that the client will need to supply include the following:

**Clothing:** Two to three changes of warm but versatile clothing are recommended (please refer to luggage restrictions in a separate section) which can be layered if needed. This is a time to throw thoughts of fashion to the wind and consider above all else, the function of each item. Besides, if your stylish in the Bush in winter, you'll stick out like a sore (and cold!) thumb. Relatively loose clothing is warmer than skin tight, with wool or polypropylene pile pants and sweaters ideal. Long underwear (can be purchased in Fairbanks if coming from a warmer clime) should be of medium weight and preferably polypropylene. Several pairs (to allow for changes) of heavy wool and/or polypro socks will help keep your feet happy, and work best if layered.

**Outerwear:** A good, warm winter jacket is a must, with down and some of the synthetics having the best warmth-to-weight ratio. This, coupled with sweaters or pullovers and other clothing, should be sufficient and allow needed flexibility for most of our activities, with the coveralls handy for those times when it is colder or we are inactive. A medium weight hat or stocking cap that covers the ears is a must as well as a pair or two of medium weight gloves; an additional scarf is also preferred by many.

**Footwear:** Sorel-style arctic pak boots are provided for each participant if needed for our outdoor activities (please specify men's shoe size in advance). If you already have your own they probably fit well and you should consider bringing them. Those subject to chronically cold feet might want to consider a supply of the disposable chemical heat packets sold at many sporting goods stores. Footwear for indoors and travel should be comfortable and warm, many preferring to throw in an additional pair of down booties to lounge around in.

***Sleeping "Equipment"***: Most prefer to sleep in their long underwear as opposed to pajamas (after all, you want to dress the part). We will be in sleeping bags (provided) at the remote camp as well as in the cabins, though in beds at the cabins.

***Miscellaneous***: Personal toiletries (toothbrush, soap, etc.); small flashlight; water bottle (quart); sunglasses (UV cutting); camera, any prescription or nonprescription drugs that you might need.

### **Luggage**

***Suitcases***: Will be fine for travel to and from Anchorage but gear will need to be transferred to soft-sided bags or duffel bags for the actual trip. As dog sleds and small airplanes have limited space, total amount of personal gear for the trip should not fill more than approximately two standard grocery sacks (four cubic feet); suitcases, extra clothing, etc., can be stored in Fairbanks during the trip.

### **Accommodations**

***Accommodations***: Include a remote wall tent camp (designed for winter), a bed & breakfast in Fairbanks, and the historic log cabins in Eagle. The bed & breakfast is set up for double occupancy but the remote sites will necessitate more of a "slumber party" approach, flexibility being the rule in the Bush. Bathroom facilities at the remote locations are "rustic", of the tried and true, non-running water type (part of the experience!).

### **Legal Requirements**

***Insurance***: Health: Adventure Alaska cannot require participants to provide proof of insurance but it is more than strongly recommended to retain and review your personal policy; NOTE: Adventure Alaska cannot be expected to and will not assume payment liability for medical care or treatment of any kind. Traveler's: It is likewise strongly urged to carry traveler's insurance in case you have to cancel or cut short your trip for any reason; lose or damage your equipment, etc., —contact your travel agent for details.

### **Pre/Post-Trip Lodging**

Many types are available in Anchorage or Fairbanks as are independent extensions after the trip. Please advise us well in advance so that we are able to guarantee suitable accommodations. Do remember that the bush plane flight to and from Eagle is dependant on the vagaries of weather —at least a day should be left open at the end of the trip before unchangeable travel arrangements.

### **Suggested Reading**

The Far North is a story teller's dream of history, wildness, and people. Each client's appreciation will be immeasurably heightened by gaining some background beforehand of Alaska and dog mushing in general. A wide selection of books and information is available from Alaska Geographic: 810 E 9th Ave, Anchorage, AK 99501; (866) 257-2757; [www.alaskageographic.org](http://www.alaskageographic.org)