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Dog Mushing, Stella Hamilton of Allakaket.

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Notes: Original in 7-inch tape, master copy on CD. Produced by Roger McPherson. THESE TAPES WERE PRODUCED AS A PART OF AN EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAM NOW DEFUNCT AND WERE BROADCAST OVER THE RADIO FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES.

A lady [Stella Hamilton] explains that they didn't have enough good dogs of their own, but mostly puppies so they went around and asked people to lend them dogs. One family lent her 3 dogs and another guy lent 3 too so Stella had 6 new dogs to break in. They were nice dogs and didn't fight. She was racing with 8 dogs. She was supposed to have 9, but her leader didn't make it. This was for the Yukon River Race at Tanana. Sandy flew the dogs and Stella down. He tied the sled to the wings of the airplane and loaded in 5 dogs and Stella who had to kneel the full hour. They had a friend with a truck [in Tanana] who transported the dogs. Sandy made another trip for the rest of the dogs.

The interviewer asks if she practiced at the track before going out with the rest of the dogs. She says she went out one time when it was "snowing and blowing." She has never driven a complete river trail because they have trees and everything "around here." The dogs didn't know what to make of it, but they practiced one time, three days before the race. One of the guys helped Stella to hook up the dogs since she didn't have a handler. Everything was just flat on the trail, but there were snow drifts. The dogs would jump off the trail when they had a snow drift because they looked so hard. They had a hard time that day and the track took Stella 45 minutes which she thought was really slow compared to when they were running up at home. Everything was new to them: white open space.

At 3:04 the interviewer asks how long the course was and how it was laid out. She tells it was all on the river and one goes between two islands in the middle of the

river. It's a big loop: One goes along one side of the river and returns on the other side. The course was 10 miles each day. Stella was on the top of the list in choosing a number by drawing it in random. She got no. 11 which meant that she was the last person to leave. It was really warm, too, and her dogs were used to running in below zero temperatures. It was really warm for them and the trail was mushy.

The interviewer asks how the temperature affected the dogs. Stella tells they can't run at top speed if it's warm outside and they are slow and eat lots of snow, losing lots of time. They eat snow even if they got water before the race because it cools them down. Her team's coats are perhaps warmer than those of the other dogs because they are used to 60-70 degree weather [not entirely clear what is meant here. Does she mean that the dogs are used to colder weather?].

5:28 Stella had a double lead and dogs hooked up in pairs. She was running 8 dogs so it was even. Her leaders are Little Girl and Victor. Victor is one of the dogs Stella borrowed and Little Girl is in training. She was just 2 weeks old as a leader when Stella took her to Tanana.

A woman's voice asks what the difference between using a single lead and a double lead is. Stella tells that double lead keeps the line tighter. If the leader in single lead doesn't keep the line tight, the dogs get tangled up. If one has stronger dogs in the back of the leader, they'll get ahead and jump over the leader. Stella's swing dogs were like that. Little Girl wasn't trained so when they passed other teams she would shy back and go slow so the swing dogs ran over the tow-line.

Stella didn't have trouble holding her team while she was waiting the other teams to go on the day of the race since she had her nephew handling and another guy who helped her with hooking up the dogs. Otherwise, she would have been late since the dogs were so excited they were hard to get into their harnesses. They could have disqualified Stella since she didn't show up 10 minutes prior to her start time, but she got away with it and was able to start when she was supposed to. They had sticks where one could hook their anchor on to hold the dogs.

8:33 The interviewer asks if Stella could see the last team ahead of her. Stella said they were 3 minutes apart and she could still see them. She could see her dogs gaining on the other team that only had 7 dogs. It was really exciting. She hated the

thought of passing any teams since she couldn't trust her big wheel dog who would just chew up any dog that would growl at him. She had told the other musher prior to race that she'd like to pass from the right. The other musher let her pass when she yelled for trail. Stella says one has to tell the other mushers which side they want to pass so they'll be prepared.

Her leader's necklines are about 14 inches long and they could each try to pass from their own sides, but Victor had passed teams before and pulled the other leader. In the end, she passed the other team on the left and none of the dogs tangled up. The next team she was approaching wasn't moving and the musher was standing on the side with her dogs. Stella's dogs automatically slowed down and the other teams' dogs jumped over her tow-line. She couldn't anchor them since the trail was so mushy and the sled was a light, oaken sled so she couldn't "stand the sled". It also had narrow runners on it so it just dug right into the snow like a plow. The other musher's dogs started growling at Stella and that really scared her. She finally whipped the tow-line loose and started yelling her dogs to go. She was all shook up after that. Then her wheel dog started screaming since she had the tow-line wrapped around her front paw.

14:19At that point, Stella thought she was too new for racing. But that's how one gets experience. One has to remember anything any other musher tells them. Stella used to go watch Peters hook up his team and she would ask him questions. She had no way of putting anchor down and so she talked to her dogs really quietly and tried not to do anything exciting so they'd stay put. She was worried that if they'd take off, the dog's leg would break. Just when she was fixing the situation, the dogs took off and left her hanging onto the tow-line. She did everything she could to slow them down, and finally she got onto runners and hit the break. She was drenched with sweat and didn't care about the race anymore.

The trail marshal told her that the two teams behind her had got into a big tangle. Another trail marshal said that she was one of the top mushers that far and Stella started pushing for a win again. She can't remember the time for finishing. She thought it was really slow, but she came in second. It was 48 minutes or something which is really slow for 10-mile race.

17:54 The interviewer asks if she relaxed before the following race, but she tells that her dogs relaxed more than she did. She woke up 5:30 in the morning to think about watering the dogs. She kept herself in bed until 7:30 but then she got up to pet the dogs and to take the chain off the one who had hurt her leg, thinking that she wouldn't race her that day. She walked the dog who was really lively and jumped around so she decided to continue racing the dog which didn't seem to bother her. She fed her dogs only broth since she thinks that giving them sugar would give the dogs stomach ache. At night they would have caribou meat and Friskies.

At 19:35 the interviewer asks what day they started at the second day and if she was right behind the first one. Stella says she started second. Sandy had made it to town and Stella was more relaxed since she didn't have to check her tow-line [as Sandy had done that?]. One has to check her tow-line to make sure it's not ready to break and one has to check all the harnesses too. Stella waxed her sled on the first day when Sandy wasn't there and she was nervous about remembering everything.

The guy she was staying with suggested her to light up a candle and drip wax in the rivet holes on her runners. Stella didn't have Petex runners at the time like she has now. She used ski-wax and one has to match the wax according to snow conditions. She would use the least sticky wax. Some men who were working on her sled 2 hours prior to the race said it was no good and that she should borrow somebody's sled. They said her runners were too narrow and that they'd slow her down. The lady she was staying with encouraged her to not care what they were saying.

23:38 The interviewer asks when the last race begun and Stella tells it was 1 pm and Sandy just made it in to help her wax everything. Another woman asks how long the sled is she used for racing and she says she doesn't know. It's 8 or 10 – feet long.

On the last day she had another handler and they made it to the race point 10 minutes ahead of time. The other gal had 10 big dogs. Stella's dogs were really excited and ready. The trail was even mushier and it was +20 F. One had to wear goggles to see where the trail is due to flat, gray light conditions. As soon as she started out, her dogs wanted to catch the front team. When there was a curve in the

track and they were catching the front team, Stella slowed down. She wanted to wait until there was a trail marshal before she would pass. The passing went well. Then 4 minutes later the other musher passed Stella again. Stella, having held down the brake, had tired her dogs so she couldn't leave the other musher behind. They waited for the next trail marshal and the other musher passed without trouble. Then her leader turned around and started running towards Stella's team since the dog would have liked to follow rather than lead. Finally the team straightened out. Stella's dogs wanted to pass her, but they were too tired to stay ahead.

29:06 A stretch on the trail was really mushy. Stella was pushing in order to help the dogs out, but her feet would sink about a foot into the snow. The lady in front of her had her whip out and the dogs picked up speed so Stella didn't stand a chance. They got to the stretch where one can pass on their own without having to ask for trail, but the other team was far gone. She was happy to finish and she was so nervous and excited that her legs felt like rubber.

People told her she was first, but she wouldn't believe it in the beginning. She had enough total time to win.

They had a banquet a week after that, after the men's race, and she got a trophy and had to give a speech, but she was tongue-tied and nervous. She hadn't thought she could win.

At 32:40 the interviewer asks if she is going to enter a race "this year, too". Stella says she is going to go to Women's North American in Fairbanks. She hopes to have a 10-dog team, but one of the dogs is so smart he knows he can get away with fighting when she is running them. If she chickens out, she'll have 9 dogs.

She's been to 2 races in Allakaket. Last fall she was the 1st on 4.5 mile race and on Christmas time she was over-confident and kept yelling at her team so they were slower. She lost that race by 10 seconds.

The interviewer inquires how many dogs she has at her house and she tells she has 4 puppies and 6 big dogs. She can't even keep track since she borrowed 4 dogs.

[End of the recording.]