



CENTENNIAL SKI/DOG SLED EXPEDITION



In crisp, sub-zero temperatures, at 9:30 am, Friday, February 2009, a 9-person team composed of representatives from the U.S. and from Canada began a five-day journey by ski and dog sled that will take them along a 75-mile route from Ely, Minnesota to Atikokan, Ontario.

The purpose of the expedition is to commemorate this centennial year for both the Superior National Forest and for Quetico Provincial Park, to highlight a history of cross-border cooperation, and to recognize the important work accomplished in these areas during winter months by dog sled, ski and snowshoe. Along the way, the expedition team will perform a series of wilderness management projects and share management techniques and philosophies.

As part of this cooperative effort, during February 24 and 25, four members of the expedition team, including staff from Quetico Provincial Park and from Superior National Forest, worked on joint trail projects along the international border near Ely.

Background:

Dog sledding (mushing), snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing have a strong tradition of use on both sides of the US- Canada border as an efficient way to travel across the frozen land and lakes of the border lakes in winter. Use of dog sleds to support various management programs is documented at least as far back as 1910 on both the Superior National Forest and Quetico Provincial Park. Early photos suggest that dog sled teams were used primarily for remote timber inventory work but it is likely that travel included verifying homestead and stone and timber claims. Between 1909 and 1920, when the region was still mostly unroaded (Echo Trail built 1922, Highway 1 built 1921), dog sleds were used extensively to freight gear between the numerous guard stations scattered throughout the Forest. Most of the guard stations and lookout towers were connected by phone line; this phone line was heavy and likely transported in the winter via sled. A large number of photos depict two-man teams traveling the back-country by snow shoe pulling toboggans. By the late 1940's airplanes were being used extensively for backcountry work. Snowmobiles came into use in the 1950's for winter access to the Forest and continue to be used outside of the Wilderness. Today, both visitors and managers depend on skis, snow shoes, and dog sled to travel the BWCAW and Quetico during the winter.

For the 2008 expedition, aside from a driver, the dog sled teams will carry gear including wall tents with wood stoves to be utilized in case of severe cold or sick/injured people, as well as hauling some of the personal gear so that skiers can have lighter loads for faster

trail. Although the team will carry satellite phones and report regularly, this technology is not 100% reliable so at some points, they will truly experience the remote winter wilderness in a similar way to travelers 100 years ago.

Members of the team:

John Pierce - currently a Recreation Planner on the Kawishiwi Ranger District, Superior National Forest, John's past Forest Service work includes 6 years as a dog musher and wilderness ranger. He lives just outside of Ely and enjoys all outdoor activities. This winter John is training for the Birkebeiner 50 kilometer ski race in Hayward WI. He also coaches Ely's mini-mite hockey team. John has skied and/or mushed the winter route from Ely to Atikoken on three prior occasions and is excited about teaming up with Canadian counter-parts to accomplish this trip, share management philosophies and celebrate the centennial.

Cory Berg – currently fire module leader at the Tofte Ranger District, Superior National Forest. Cory began working for the Forest Service at the Seagull Guard Station nine years ago and since then has also worked on the Sawtooth and Payette National Forests. Last year he skied the 90 km Vasaloppet ski race in Sweden in 5 1/2 hours, but he is planning that this trip to Atikoken will take considerably longer. Cory said he can't think of a better way to celebrate the centennial year than skiing to Canada.

Robin Reilly - As Quetico Park Superintendent, it is Robin's job to oversee park management and as much as possible, he prefers to accomplish this task from the park's interior. An experienced cross-country skier and winter camper, Robin is looking forward to celebrating the centennial anniversary of this unique wilderness area with the completion of this collaborative wilderness journey. When he is not at work, Robin enjoys playing guitar, singing and reading about the history of the Quetico-Superior area.

James Burns - Born in Atikokan, Ontario, James is currently working as an Assistant Park Planner in Quetico Provincial Park. In the summers he is a park warden in Quetico and enjoys paddling and fishing his days away in the park's interior. In the winters he enjoys playing and coaching basketball.

Lisa Sorensen - An experienced bush person, Lisa has lived in the Atikokan area most of her life and enjoys hiking through the northern Ontario bush in all four seasons. In the winter, she works for various organizations laying out trails for skiers, hikers and canoeists. In the summers, she can be found at any of several of Quetico Park's entry stations welcoming visitors to the great white north. A talented artist, Lisa looks forward to the challenge of the upcoming trip, but also to the spectacular winter scenery that will grace the frozen landscape.

Chris Stromberg - As one of the founding members of the Beaten Path Nordic Ski Club in Atikokan, Ontario, Chris enjoys Canadian winters even more than he does the summers. As part of the Quetico Park Portage crew in the summers, Chris is an avid

canoeist. Winter time finds him working as the recreational planner in Quetico. In his spare time, he enjoys cutting trails, grooming trails and brushing trails. When not maintaining portages and ski trails, he can be found baking, reading, watching his forties slip into his fifties, or spending time with his family.

Nancy Moundalexis - Wilderness Ranger, Kawishiwi Ranger District, Superior National Forest since 1995. Her current position involves running the District dog program as well as her usual summer wilderness ranger work. Nancy is looking forward to running the dogteam to Atikoken and accomplishing work projects in cooperation with Quetico Park personnel.

Phil Hyde - A Real Estate Broker and Appraiser in the Ely area for the past 17 years, with Bear Island Land Co. for the past 13 years. Previously worked for the USFS in their Cultural Resources department doing archaeological research mainly in the BWCAW. Phil has lived in the Ely area for about 36 years and enjoys all the outdoor activities that the area has to offer. Phil says: "This is my third Ely-Atikokan ski trip. The first was in 1984, for the 75th anniversary of the Quetico Superior. My skiing partner on that trip was my friend, Mike Manlove, who passed away two years ago. As the years passed after that trip, Mike and I talked about doing the Centennial trip in 2009. I'm very happy to be included in this adventure and I'm sure that Mike will be there in spirit."

LynnAnne Vesper - LynnAnne participated in her first winter camping trip in 1993 as part of a group of students from Gustavus Adolphus College who skied and dogsledded from Atikokan to Ely. She is excited to be making the trek the other direction in this centennial year with a team of experienced woodsmen and women. LynnAnne guides trips for Wintergreen and Piragis Northwoods Company, depending on the temperature of the water. In her free time she plays Scandinavian traditional music on the Swedish nyckelharpa, Finnish kantele, and Norwegian overtone flute.

US Forest Service ten-dog sled team - Superior National Forest
Wintergreen eight-dog sled team - volunteered by Wintergreen Dogsled Lodge