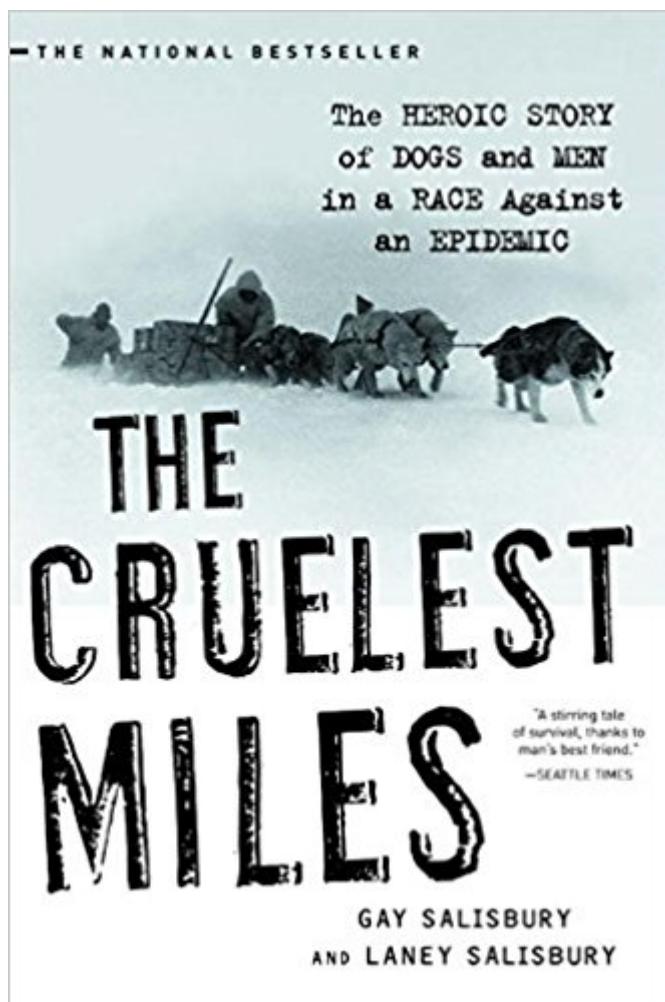


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# The Cruelest Miles: The Heroic Story Of Dogs And Men In A Race Against An Epidemic



## Synopsis

"A stirring tale of survival, thanks to man's best friend." — Seattle Times When a deadly diphtheria epidemic swept through Nome, Alaska, in 1925, the local doctor knew that without a fresh batch of antitoxin, his patients would die. The lifesaving serum was a thousand miles away, the port was icebound, and planes couldn't fly in blizzard conditions — only the dogs could make it. The heroic dash of dog teams across the Alaskan wilderness to Nome inspired the annual Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race and immortalized Balto, the lead dog of the last team whose bronze statue still stands in New York City's Central Park. This is the greatest dog story, never fully told until now. 2 maps; 48 illustrations

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## Customer Reviews

"No one understands Alaska. [Officials in Washington] wire me to step over to Nome to look up a little matter, not realizing that it takes me 11 days to get there." That's the state's governor, Scott Bone, in 1922, three years before the distant, former Gold Rush outpost would need help combating an incipient diphtheria epidemic. As the Salisbury cousins amply demonstrate, upstate Alaska during winter was about as alien and forbidding as the moon—total isolation, endless night, bizarre acoustics, unreliably frozen rivers, and 60-below temperatures eventually causing both body and mind to shut down altogether. Under these circumstances, the 674-mile dogsled journey required to bring Nome the desperately needed serum seemed destined to fail, to put it mildly. The authors rightly frame the undertaking as the last gasp of an ancient technology before the impending arrival

of air and road travel. As soon as news of the situation reached the "lower 48," it instantly became headline fodder for weeks. The book demonstrates the remarkable intimacy mushers develop with their lead dogs-only a handful of sled dogs have the character, courage, intelligence and will to be the lead dog. Especially heroic were renowned musher Leonhard Seppala and his lead dog, Balto, who undertook the treacherous and long final leg; the dog is immortalized by a statue in New York City's Central Park. The journey itself occupies the second half of the book; the authors judiciously flesh out the story with fascinating background information about Nome, the Gold Rush, dogsledding and Alaska. This is an elegantly written book, inspiring tremendous respect for the hardy mushers and their canine partners. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Adult/High School-Many readers are familiar with the story of the dog Balto and the Nome, AK, diphtheria outbreak of 1925 and how 20 men and more than 200 dogs raced 674 miles against time and weather to save a community. The Salisburys provide a complete account of that feat-the first book in 40 years to do so-and, perhaps, introduce readers to two of the most crucial and courageous characters in this drama, Leonhard Seppala and his peerless lead dog, Togo. The authors supply a constant flow of interesting facts about Nome, the introduction of Siberian Huskies to Alaska, the beginnings of the Alaska airline industry, and why air delivery of the serum was discounted as an option. The heart of the book, however, is the run itself. Readers will be on tenterhooks as they follow the mushers and their dogs through minus-60-degree temperatures, unbroken trails, "ice fog," treacherous ice floes, gales, and blizzards, from the January day when Dr. Curtis Welsh realized that he faced an epidemic with only three nurses and an outdated supply of serum to that early morning less than five days later when Gunnar Kaasen and his Balto-led dogsled team arrived in Nome, exhausted and frostbitten, and carrying the new serum. At a time when a cost/benefit analysis is a major precursor to action, this book is a refreshing look at the lengths people and their devoted animals went to simply because, as one musher put it, "I wanted to help."-Dori DeSpain, Fairfax County Public Library, VA  
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One of the best books I've purchased. Not only do the authors do a great job with capturing the feel of the race to Nome, but also you can really tell that they did their research. The pictures that they have in the center of the book are beautiful, and would be worth the price of the book

alone. Granted, there are some filler chapters as they talk about the native style of life and how mukluks etc are made, but these parts are short enough that interest is not lost and they don't interrupt the flow of the narrative either. I've purchased this book three times now: Once for myself and twice as a gift. This is an excellent book for anyone who has an interest in history, medicine, dogs and the story behind the fiction

I did not know the history or reason for the Iditarod race. All I knew was it was an arduous race with sled dogs that takes place in Alaska each year. If you love stories of adventure and survival, this history ranks with the best of the genre. It outlines the urgency to get Diphtheria antitoxin to Nome, Alaska in 1925 during one of the worst cold spells of the winter. Dog teams were the only viable method of delivering the serum to Nome. As I read the book to learn about the Iditarod race, I would like to outline some of the differences between the 1925 event and the modern day race. In 1925 the mail was delivered to Nome by dog sled. At that time as today, Nome was completely isolated from the other towns in Alaska during the winter months as there are no roads. In summer it is reached by ship, but during the winter the only way to get there is by dog sled. It's a long trip. The 1925 event utilized numerous dog teams that relayed the serum to Nome much like the Pony Express. There were around 20 men each with their own dog team involved in the effort. Some teams carried the serum as little as 18 miles while the most arduous run was 91 miles done by the renowned musher, Leonard Seppala with his lead dog Togo which he had raised from a puppy. The serum finally arrived in Nome carried by Gunnar Kaasen, with lead dog Balto who subsequently received much notoriety. There is even a bronze statue of Balto in NYC's Central Park honoring his heroism. However, every dog team deserves credit for their part in this 674 mile race against time which took 5 and 1/2 days. Dog teams are very dependent on the lead dog and not just any member of the dog team can take the place of lead dog. Just like with humans, there are leaders, and there are followers. The 1925 event took place in extremely cold and harsh conditions. Even with many dog teams and men, it required courage, stamina and knowhow. The dogs teams of 1925 were mostly Malamutes and Siberian Huskies with thick double coats well suited to the extreme conditions. These dogs can be comfortable in 50 below zero conditions. Much of this is in contrast to the modern day Iditarod race. The modern day Iditarod was established in 1973 to commemorate the 1925 run. What is different is that the modern race is farther, around 1,000 miles in length; and single dog teams limited to no more than 16 dog run the entire distance with a single musher. The modern dogs are different in that they are bred for speed and are not as well suited to the cold as the classic Alaskan dogs. Nevertheless they run the race faster albeit sometimes with jackets on

their backs, and boots on their feet. The modern race has mandatory check points, and rest stops with food delivered to the dogs by airplane. Veterinarians are stationed at each check point and check the health and condition of the dogs. Any dogs which are sick or injured are ferried back by Bush Pilots to receive proper veterinary care and then loving friendship from the inmates of the state prison. While dogs can be dropped from the team by the musher or at the insistence of a veterinarian, no fresh dogs may be added. There is just a single musher who must complete the race by him or herself with their own team. The trail of the modern race is well marked. I'm not sure that it was in 1925 I believe it was more up to the dogs to stay on the path. In any case it is the lead dog that has a great ability to sense the suitability of the trail. The take away from both events is man's special relationship with dogs and their loyalty to man. The dogs love to run, and the shared weight they pull is not great for each individual dog. Nevertheless it takes great stamina to win or even complete the race. About half of the modern competitors give up on the race before they reach Nome. It's not possible to win the race by abusing the dogs. A good musher has to know their limits and encourage the dogs to perform their best. To win the dogs by necessity need adequate rest and proper nutrition. The musher too, must get enough sleep, although at times the musher can catch a "cat nap" on the sled as the hearty dogs pull on. The winning dog team seems to know that they are in the lead and they are reluctant to give it up to another team. In reality all the dog teams cover the ground at about the same speed. It is the craftiness, good judgment, and endurance of the musher that brings home the big prize. It's not like a short horse race where the animal is spurred up to full speed. The dogs do it because they love running on the trail, and they love the humans who support them. The dogs carry on for not only hours, but days at the same pace of between 7 and 10 MPH. I found this book to be a great read, as it increased my knowledge of dogs' special abilities and their relationships with the humans who breed and care for them. The book brought tears to my eyes and a stuffy nose on many occasions. What more can I say?

This is an outstanding true account of the famous dog sled run that carried serum to Nome, Alaska to stop an epidemic. The author has done a lot of research which is listed if the reader wants to dig deeper on the subject. The author acknowledges where conflicts sometimes appeared in the research and how he decided on how to write that part of the story. It will give you a real appreciation of the dogs and the mushers who had to deal with weather that is beyond comprehension. It also gives the history of how airplanes began to evolve after this famous dog sled run. In present history the Iditarod Dog sled race is a competition that is done annually in memory of the original run to Nome.

If you have ever been to Alaska or are planning to go, this book will give you many insights to the hardships of Alaska caused by the weather and remoteness of this vast "country". We are also reminded of the seriousness of diseases that have for the most part been eliminated in the United States. Prior to our trip to Alaska this past year and especially this book, I learned the importance of the sled dogs which were such a vital part for survival in this hostile environment. The Cruelest Miles was one of the best books I have read.

Excellent book and filled with details I never knew. I loved the movie Balto as a child and never really looked into the story behind it. I found this book by mistake in the middle of the night one night and it was so cheap I had to try it. I loved it. It really tells the tale of the heroes and their faithful dogs that served in saving the lives of not just children but adults as well who were suffering from the horrible sickness. The book really details and shows proof of the facts and events that happened. It is truly amazing and worth more than the price it is sold for.

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