

# Application Problem - ZZZZs for Mushers

The Iditarod Trail Committee (ITC) realizes that sleep deprivation is a challenge for mushers. The ITC is considering adding information about the subject to the Guide for the Last Great Race or presenting information at the musher's meeting held before the race. This is your opportunity to contribute to the welfare of the mushers. Read the checkpoint routine and stories told by Iditarod mushers. Use what you have learned to analyze what is happening to the mushers then share what you know about sleep; sleep deprivation and the circadian clock to help mushers understand what happens while being sleepless on the trail. You may write an essay to be included in the Guide to the Last Great Race, you may design a power point for the musher's meeting or you may create posters to be displayed at the musher's meeting. Sharing your knowledge with the mushers will help them anticipate and plan for what lies ahead on the Iditarod Trail.

## CHECKPOINT ROUTINE

- Get parked
- Tie out team, take off booties
- Get water, start cooker
- Put out straw
- Get food drop bags
- Feed dogs
- Check every dog and massage
- Get things ready for when you come out after nap
- Heat your own meal in last pot of dog water  
(All this took me close to an hour and a half)
- Go into checkpoint (if there is an inside) and eat as much as you can before crashing on the floor somewhere.
- In most checkpoints I stayed 6 hours so I slept usually 1.5 hours or sometimes 2 if I was quick with chores.
- Get up two hours before leaving to cook breakfast for the dogs, check each dog and massage..
- Go back inside and have a cup of coffee and something to eat for a half hour.
- Go out, bootie, hook up tug lines and go.

The first 3 days the "nap" almost made things worse as far as feeling tired. The good thing is that the first 3 days of the race are by far the most "adrenaline producing" so there was no chance to get too tired. After day 3, I seemed to get into the routine and that hour and a half nap felt like 8 hours of sleep. I always woke up before my alarm and was ready to get up, get dressed and head out to see the dogs.

I did fall asleep on my sled now and then, especially when we ran during the "witching hour" that time between about midnight and 5:00 am. That is definitely the time that the human body (and canine body) wants to sleep. Once I fell asleep on my sled at 1:00 am on the Yukon and woke up as the dogs pulled me into a village. I checked my watch and realized I was still about 4 hours from Nulato. I turned around, went back to the river and in my sleep-deprived state went another 2 hours up river till I saw a turn out that I recognized. I pulled over, fed the dogs, crawled in my sled bag for a few hours, then woke the team up and headed back down river. After that I never left a checkpoint between midnight and 6:00 am. As far as hallucinations while on the trail, I've seen an elephant, a road grader and a native musher running alongside my sled yelling at me to wake up. None of these things were real but being sleep deprived, I saw them at the time. Strange but true.