

# THE MAINE HIGHLANDS SLED DOG CLUB NEWSLETTER

SINCE 2002

Meetings; 3rd Sunday in April &  
2nd Sunday in November



Spring Meeting April 19, 2015 at  
Barrows-Skidgell American Legion Post 105  
82 North Street, Newport, ME 04953  
Gather for potluck dinner at 11:00  
12:00 Potluck Lunch 1:00 Meeting

Greetings TMHSDC members and supporters,

What a great 2013-14 season it was, lots of snow and cold temperatures allowed us to hold all but one of our scheduled races. These events take a lot of work, so thanks to all the race organizers, trail makers, handlers, timers, food providers, and clean up crews! We saw some new faces this past season, and hope that's a trend that continues. There were enough skijorers at some events to have a separate class, and that was a first in my few year history with the club. This October we held another successful Basics and Beyond course. Thanks to Joan and Gary Chapman for hosting once again, and to all the volunteers who took time out of a busy fall weekend to come and share their vast knowledge of dog powered sports with the students. A big thanks to the "support staff" who fed about 40 participants for 2 days, and were still smiling at the end!

We have five races scheduled for the upcoming 2014-15 season, please see the schedule posted on our website, and mark your calendars. TMHSDC is committed to putting on the best recreational race events in New England, but we need you to come out and join the fun! Before snow season starts, we will be having our annual fall meeting and rig race on November 9th at Viles Arboretum in Augusta. A new event this year, the Lead Dog Challenge, should be instructive and entertaining, and we'll have some great prizes for the winner!. The meeting agenda is posted in this newsletter.

Happy trails,  
Jill Carter, President TMHSDC

# RACE DAY BY KEVIN POWERS

(Edited for room in this newsletter)

We leave for downtown Brownville Junction at 7:30a.m.. Although the plows have been working, the snow is still pretty deep on Main Street where dog trucks are positioned.

The first order of business is to get the sled off the roof and the gang line set out. And then the second order of business is to head to the VFW Hall for a sausage and egg sandwich, home fries and a cup of coffee. That's where I find out that I'm going to be one of the "timers" for the race. This is where "mindfulness" meditation techniques come in handy. I focus on the sandwich and avoid thinking about being chased down the main street of Brownville Junction by an irate musher convinced that my timing error cost him the race.

At 9:00a.m. the race marshal gathers all the drivers to explain the race rules and brief them on trail conditions. Meanwhile, my co-timer and I are assessing the kind of trouble we are in. I've never timed and she has only watched someone time. As we head for the timing car, she looks at me and says: "You know, if we pull this off, we will be legends in The Maine Highlands Sled Dog Club"! I'm still trying to deal with that vision of being chased down main street and would be happy, after this is over, if nobody knew my name.

So, here's the set up. we've got two stopwatches the size of tennis balls each one with a little ear at two o'clock that says "Start/Stop" and a little ear at ten o'clock that says "Lap". We've also got a timing gizmo that neither of us can figure out how to use. Later on, just before the start, Jill, my co-timer, figures out how to get the gizmo working but neither of us are sure that this is a good thing.

The 30-milers go out at 10:00a.m. and the 20-milers go out at 10:30. A little after 11:00a.m., all the 20-milers are gone and dead silence hits the timing car. I think I say something like: "Well I don't think we've screwed up anything yet". To which Jill replies: "We're on our way to being legends in The Maine Highlands Sled Dog Club." That thought of being chased down main street has receded well into my subconscious.

We sit in the car for five more hours. There are moments of frenzied calculations, especially when teams start coming in at the same time. As we enter the "official times" on the score sheet and determine the finishing order I'm reminded about the old joke about three baseball umpires arguing about how they call balls and strikes. The first umpire says: "I call 'em as I see 'em!" The second umpire says: "I call 'em as they are!." The third umpire says: "They ain't nothin' 'til I call 'em and then that's what they are!"

After the race there is a spaghetti dinner and awards ceremony. Then we head back to pack for an early morning departure.

At some point between the hours of 10:00p.m. and 4:00a.m. I have the following stopwatch-induced nightmare. I am exiting the VFW Hall in Brownville Junction heading for our van when suddenly there appears before me in the road a stopwatch with spindlely arms and Mickey Mouse-type hands with only four fingers and legs with large rubber feet. It's a cartoon stopwatch with eyes, ears, mouth and nose like Mr Potato Head. It yells out "Hey I'm looking for you!" and starts running toward me. I bolted the second I saw that thing and started running full speed down main street toward the safety of the timing car. As I ran, I heard my timing partner, Jill, yell "Don't let it catch you, it's going to change all the times and we'll have to start over!" Oh my God, not another five and a half hours in the timing car!!

**What a winter! Snow, Cold, Wind....** In my 3 years of participating in Maine Highlands Sled Dog Club Activities, apparently I have been very spoiled with good weather conditions (usually at least 20 degrees ABOVE zero) at all the races. This year, almost every race started below zero with windy conditions. Even with the cold temps, it has been a great year. As my first year as Vice President of the club, it is wonderful to see such great participation at events. Races were held at Milo, Brownville, Exeter, and Augusta. Old and new friends came together to share in the sport and dogs we love.

Highlights for me over this past season have been several. The Lead Dog Challenge began this year and was dominated by Neil Fisher and Olive who won fabulous prizes from Cape Town Carts and a gift certificate from Mountain Ridge. I am hopeful participation will increase as we all strive to make our dogs better and more obedient on the trail. The next Lead Dog Challenge will be held at the fall meeting. Challenges always provide valuable lessons, of which I have had several educational opportunities-

If your snub line breaks, you had better be quick or heavy (better to be both) or your dogs will be running without you!

Provide education to any riders you take with you about brakes and snowhooks; it could save you a long walk!

Snowhooks are dangerous! Handle with care!

Always remember that sled bag and have it attached to your sled!!!!

Never leave home without a knife in your pocket! It will be the one time you will want it!

Practice defensive driving while on snowmobile trails, keep your dogs safe! Be prepared.

Strapping long toothpicks to your feet and then hooking a dog to yourself takes A LOT of practice!

At the spring meeting, we will be reviewing a list of responsibilities that are required to make a positive race day and am hoping for club members to step up and take on some of these responsibilities which generally fall to just a few members.

I have had the pleasure of bringing in a few new members, Gina and Barth Deuyour from Ornaville with their 3 new pups and 3 older dogs. Gina and Barth both participated in a couple of races this year and provided manpower at several events. Brittany Robinson, 14, from Milo, started working with me this year to learn the art of mushing and the care and training of dogs. She started in the rec class with two dogs and moved up to the four dog at the last race of the year in Augusta. I met Don Banker from Milo with his two malamutes who ran their first race at Milo. There was also a group of young people who traveled up from Massachusetts for the sprint race in Milo. My four dog team performed the best ever except for that little cluster at Milo.... And perhaps my favorite moment this year was seeing the one dog race at Exeter with 5 wonderful participants; I don't know who was smiling more, dogs or kids!

For the coming year, I have several new pups to train, young people to develop, and I am sure more lessons to learn. The key is to enjoy what you do! Now go work on that GEE and HAW during the off season!

Val Parent, Vice President

## The Mushing Adventures of the Benson Family

So I've been asked to write about what it's like traveling and running sled dogs with three kids under the age of 4, one husband, ten sled dogs, and one angry cat. Here goes...

Let me start by introducing the cast of characters and telling you a little bit about each of us. I, Catherine, am the mom, sometimes dog musher/racer, cook, chauffeur, and occasional poop scooper. I wear many hats. My husband, Eric, is the dad. He too wears many hats: dad, handler, musher, equipment manager, dog wrangler, chauffeur, cook, and more frequent poop scooper. Then there are the three kids or mini mushers as we sometimes call them. The oldest mini musher is Ethan, age 3.5. Ethan has mushed in two countries, run his own one dog team, ridden in the sled twelve miles round trip to lunch at our friend, Gino Roussel's, "Outpost" through, what Gino has aptly named "Blizzard Alley" in Canada at temperatures well below zero, and explored the trails in Winona Forest in Tug Hill, NY by dog team. Our second mini musher is Eloise. She's still a little too young (and impatient) for many rides in the sled but she climbs on the dog sled and can say "hike, hike!" better than Lance Mackey. Eloise is two. Her current nickname is dark and stormy because (a) she'll make you want to drink a Dark and Stormy; and (b) it's a pretty accurate description of her two year old persona. The third mini musher is our three month old newborn daughter, Emmaline. She's an expert at sleeping in the dog truck and was the proud owner of a passport to enter Canada on mushing trips at two weeks of age. She's also a veteran spectator of the Can Am and the the KI Brownville and Beyond races. In addition to the mini mushers, there are ten sled dogs, ranging in age from 15 to 2 years old and yes, I wasn't kidding, one angry 15 year old cat, Chloe, who travels with us on most trips north.

So a trip north starts with the packing up of the house in Maryland. This involves a ten page trip "check list" which contains the "necessary" items we must travel with to support three kids, two adults, ten sled dogs and the aforementioned angry cat. The dogs are the easy part. They are satisfied with a tote or two of gear—lines, harnesses, dog jackets, snow hooks, leashes, etc.--and a couple 44 lb bags of Inukshuk dog food. The kids are trickier.

The packing process takes a minimum of 24 hours as we scurry around the house to collect and pack the items and then attempt to make everything fit in to the bed of the dog truck like some crazed jig saw puzzle involving dog food, pack and plays, potty seats, and baby swings. Some items of note that you won't find in most dog trucks include:

The Baby Swing: We went north one time without this sucker when our son Ethan was a baby and holy cow, never again. The crying and wailing that ensued. And that was just the parents. A sled dog team at hook up had nothing on that kid. We nearly drove two hours each way to the Babies R Us in Portland to fork out 200 bucks for another one but somehow managed to restrain ourselves. After three kids, we're now on Baby Swing final numero dos. The first one was a borrowed item from a friend and used huge quantities of D batteries (don't forget to pack the extra batteries). It died midway through Eloise's use and when attempts to hot rod it with an air wick motor (yes, we're members of the pimp my baby swing club) failed, we immediately invested in a new swing. And this one plugs in so no more eating through the gross national product of a small country with purchases of D sized batteries. But heaven help the guy who forgets the pluggy thing that keeps that sucker swinging. So now we travel with what can only be described as "the best traveled baby swing ever." We've lugged that sucker to at least five different states and two countries to run dogs. It just came back from an extended trip to Canada. But when sleep is at issue, you'll haul pretty much anything.

The Breast Pump: Or as I like to call it, the Electric Baby. Yes, we breast feed so at least one member of our party is lactating, occasionally one of the dogs is also lactating. The Electric Baby is for those times when I can't feed the real baby, i.e., she's asleep, she's is strapped into her car seat, or she's not with me. After three kids, I've become adept at pumping anywhere at any time. For this year's 30 miler in Brownville, I actually contemplated taking the electric baby along in my sled bag. Despite it's name, the Electric Baby is actually rechargeable so no need to find an outlet. Yee haw! Why did I think about taking the Electric Baby? Well because for one thing: we're slow. It takes us five hours to run 30 miles especially in January when the dogs are light on conditioning. The girls need to be emptied every 3-4 hours. Taking the new born would be frowned upon and likely violate race rules. Anyhow, want to stop a guy on a snow machine in his tracks? Try stopping a dog team on the side of the trail and hooking up the electric baby and pumping. I can see the gear check now: padded harnesses, check; emergency dog food, check; booties, check; cooker, check; energy food for the musher, check; breast pump, check!

This next section shall be captioned: in re: matters of the potty. The baby bjorn potty chair, the potty seat, and loads of diapers to be more specific. The dogs are simple when it comes to in re: matters of the potty. They require a poop bucket, poop bags, and a poop scooper. Items that are standard issue on most dog trucks. It's not every dog truck, though, that carries its own toilet but when you are traveling with a less than fully potty trained kid, the Baby Bjorn potty chair can come in quite handy. Our potty chair has done time at trail heads from Maine to Maryland and several places in between because....a 3.5

year old will NOT use a porta potty, a privy, an outhouse or anything that doesn't flush. Note to the state of Massachusetts: Who the heck thought composting toilets at the rest area off of 95 was a good idea??? Clearly you who thought this idea wonderful did not have kids. And then there's that long stretch of road (I-95) north of Bangor and south of Fort Kent. Desolate. Populated only with frost heaves, trees and the occasional speeding logging truck. Not a toilet in sight and it's invariably where Ethan will announce somewhere around the exit for Benedicta "Pee!" in a loud voice. On our last trip north, in the middle of a white out conditions, with the wind blowing at least 50 MPH, somewhere near the town of Island Falls, Ethan got the urge to pee. This resulted in us rolling into the only gas station in town with a full tank of gas and a full three year old bladder. Boy did we draw some stares. Also on matters of potty, it's tough for little kids with...ahem...little equipment shall we say to potty outside without peeing on themselves (or mom). I was a proud musher mom the first day at a trail head when Ethan managed to wee outdoors without peeing all over his snow pants. Bye, bye potty chair riding around in the spare dog box (or at least it is on sabbatical until the girls are ready for it.) Then there's the potty seat that goes over the big potty. Much like our swing, this thing has visited at least 5 or 6 states on different mushing trips and two countries. While Ethan doesn't necessarily need it all the time, it makes for a happy mommy musher when he has it because it means he can go to the bathroom all on his own without assistance. Yee haw. For those members of our party who are not potty trained, there's the diapers that we haul. Costco sized packages of diapers and wipes (don't forget the wipes) travel with us on all trips. To figure out how many diapers we must lug involves a detailed algorithm required at least Calculus II. Did I mention I'm a lawyer by training? I suck at math. Basic algebra is frequently beyond me. Let's just say we've had one or two "miscalculations" in the number of diapers necessary for a two week trip north to mush requiring a middle of the night trip to purchase more diapers. Of course, not only are there lots of diapers toted along on our trips but the diaper bag must be fully stocked with both sizes of diapers. Woe befalls the man who puts a size 4 toddler diaper on his newborn daughter. Woe is equated with a blow out of monumental proportions. And no a "blow out" does not involve the tires on the dog truck.

Now that the necessary items are packed and loaded into the dog truck, it's time to get on the road. Entertaining three kids for 14-15 hours as the truck rolls north is challenging. We sing, we check out the scenery, we look for construction equipment, and emergency vehicles. Emergency vehicles are like crack cocaine for young children. Other people's misery is the kids' entertainment. We have also resorted to bribing them with a new Rich-

ard Scarry book or two. A note to any parents out there: Richard Scarry books rock. They will keep the inquisitive three year mind busy and blissfully quiet for 7-8 hours. Dark and stormy—oops I mean Eloise—is usually satisfied with her paci (which she calls “foo”) and her monkey. Both of these items travel everywhere with us and again have visited several countries and many states on our adventures. We’re actually on monkey numero dos but don’t tell Eloise that! Occasionally monkey and foo like to fly about the cab of the truck. This is when having a husband with long arms and the ability to contort himself into all sorts of crazy positions to reach foo and monkey is quite helpful.

As day turns to evening, we typically approach Kittery, Maine and our primary stop off point for dinner: Bob’s Clam Hut. This is where the kids enjoy a kids meal of grilled cheese and French fries and a free kiddie ice cream cone (yes the kids eat ice cream even when it’s 20 below) while Eric and I enjoy some chowda and a lobstah roll. Yum! In the waning hours of day light, we also typically drop dogs and feed. After an hour or two at Bob’s we’re back on the road heading north. Typically as we leave Bob’s the kitty Prozac we’ve dosed the cat with wears off and we hear the cat’s plaintive meow. When the meow turns more to a screechy howl, we know we are approaching Augusta and our exit from 95. We typically roll into our cabin in Starks at about 8:30 or 9 PM. If we’re lucky the kids are asleep and the dogs are enjoying their food coma. The cat is either howling mad or back asleep having been dosed with another kitty valium (can I have one of those please?) When we arrive, we hope that Earl, our plow guy, has plowed our driveway. Eric shovels the stairs quickly making enough of a path through weeks of snow for us to carry things indoors. We turn on the heat in the cabin and, when it’s warm enough, begin the process of unwinterizing the pipes. And expeditious unwinterization is important as the typical three year old, in addition to a general unwillingness to use porta potties, pit toilets and out-houses, will typically refuse to use a toilet filled with pink RV antifreeze. Who knew? When the temperature in the cabin is warmer than the temperature outside, we bring the kids in and begin the lengthy process of unpacking the dog truck, settling dogs, bringing the cat inside, unloading and putting things away. Fast forward to 1 AM or so and it’s time to go to bed. Good night ya’ll. See you at the next big dog sledding event up north!

Catherine, Eric, Ethan, Eloise, and Emmaline

Thank you to all the contributors to this spring edition of the Maine Highlands Sled Dog Club Newsletter