



# The Wolf's Den Kennel

## The Howler

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## Going Unplugged

One of my absolute favorite ways to spend time with our dogs is what I refer to as 'going unplugged.' In essence it is exactly the same as what many mushers refer to as free running, (letting dogs loose to chase an ATV). However, I make the distinction primarily to help me focus on what it is I'm doing, and that is relaxing.

Just like MTV's show unplugged, where famous rock 'n rollers go acoustic in an informal, relaxed, more intimate setting; I try to do the same thing. No lines, no harnesses, no hassles, more like a jam session than a concert, just trying to keep it real, trying to improvise as much as I can, and most importantly having fun, fun, fun.

I try to let the dogs lead the charge as much as they want, sometimes even letting them decide the route. If we come across a clearing I'll stop and just let them chase each other's tails, chew sticks, eat grass, or whatever they want. I always bring water and food with me not only for the dogs, but for myself as well. You never know how long one of these sessions will go on.

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*"There are strange things done in the midnight sun"*

- Robert Service



Alberta's puppies charging up the trail



Recently while out on an unplugged run, I spent two hours parked in an alpine meadow with a few of our dogs. There seemed to be no end to the fun they were having, of course they were benefiting from an incredible workout as well. They just ran and ran and ran, all without any pressure or persuasion from me. When they got a little winded they came back over to the water bucket and had a drink. Each time they came back for water I gave them a little snack. When they got a little hot they laid in the shade of the ATV. We wrestled a little, and soon they got antsy and started running again.

While out on another one of our unplugged runs I all of a sudden realized how many ponds there were scattered about. Well I'm happy to report I've found a new use for some of my old scuba gear. Yes that's right, canine triathlon. I don my wetsuit, let a few dogs loose, get on the ATV,



**If Grommit had a cape, he could fly!**





and away we go. We run awhile, and when we come to a pond it's time for a swim. I hop off the ATV wade into the water and swim around in circles. Some of the dogs follow me, and some prefer to run laps around the pond looking for a way to get to me without really having to swim. After about twenty minutes or so I swim out get back on the ATV and away we go again. Repeated as often as time allows.

I've also incorporated some games that I play on the dogs, and one of my favorites is hide and seek. Sometimes when they start to take off at break neck speeds and I'm having trouble keeping up, I'll park the ATV off the trail behind some bushes or trees.



Gypsy smiling

Soon they realize I'm not coming and they start desperately searching for me. Sled dogs are not known for their sense of smell, and sometimes they'll

whip right by me, back and forth, several times before they find me. When they finally do find me it always seems to be cause for a celebration.

These are just a few of the ways in which I've been able to keep each and every unplugged run different, fun, and exciting. And that's really the whole point. It's all about your frame of mind. If you consider it as an opportunity to have fun and bond



Brotherly competition



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with your dogs, I think you'll find that come fall your dogs will be more eager than ever to take to the trails.

If you are not yet free running your dogs, try it and I promise you'll be hooked and if you are currently free running and you want to take it to the next level, and go unplugged, give it a try; all you need is a little imagination. And hey, if you come up with a cool new lick or a rocking little riff let me know. Apparently I'm willing to try just about anything.

*Right: A lap full of puppies.*

*Below: Glock, Gypsy, and Grommit enjoying a jam session.*



# Sponsorship

As we continue with our plan of fielding a 2008 Iditarod team one thing has become blatantly obvious. We will never be able to afford it without help. Outside of the merchandise we have for sale, the only other ideas I've considered viable for soliciting the necessary funds are as follows:

- A letter to McDonalds, in which I express my absolute devotion to their Big Mac sandwich, their double quarter-pounder with cheese, their... okay, I confess, I love their entire menu, and a reminder to them that hey, "I'm loving it."

- A letter to Nike, admitting that although I've never been a big fan of athletic shoes, I'd be more than willing to collaborate with them in order to create what surely would be the ultimate cold weather foot wear. The Air Jordan Pac Boot complete with a reflective Nike Swoosh, (for safety, not exposure,) and a reminder that hey, "I'm doing it."

Seriously, if anyone has any ideas on how to raise money for something as outlandish as racing a dog team, approximately a thousand miles, (give or take a hundred miles or so,) on the nationally recognized Historic Iditarod trail, I'd really love to hear from you. And those of you who have supported us financially or simply by believing that our dreams are worth pursuing, thank you!

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# Here At The Wolf's Den

Well, we've passed the summer solstice, and the days are getting shorter. We now receive only 23 hours and 59 minutes of daylight, with a minute of what I can best describe as twilight. I've been told that we have almost two more months before it will actually be dark enough at night to get a glimpse at a star. However there are very few days that aren't cool enough to run the dogs, so who needs darkness?

We were hoping that by now we would be the proud owners of five fairly expensive acres in Cantwell, and that we would be busy putting in our kennel and building ourselves a home. Unfortunately, the seller decided at the eleventh hour not to sell the property to us. We were quite surprised especially because we had met the asking price and were literally a couple of days away from closing on the property.

We were so convinced that everything was going along as we had planned that perhaps we forgot to establish a backup plan. In a really



**Glock and Grommit sharing a "doublewide."**

quirky set of circumstances, which would take up too much space here to explain, we not only fell into a place to stay for the summer, but as a bonus Caitlin and I both ended up with jobs transporting and entertaining visitors for the abundant tourist industry that defines Denali in the summer. However, we did have to down grade our living space some. Our cabin in Cantwell was twelve feet by fourteen feet, and the cabin we are in now is what is locally known as a twelve by twelve. Fortunately there was a dog lot here which we've been permitted to use, and after spending a month and a half with the dogs living out of the truck I'd trade another couple of feet of living space for a dog lot any day.

The most exciting news of these past two months is that we finally got the newest member of our team, Martina. We had purchased Martina from Aliy Zirkle before we left Quebec, and we are really pleased with her. She is what I call a self-excuser; she just loves to run, all day long doing laps around her post. Her puppies, that we are



**Martina**



**Aliy Zirkle's leader A.J.**

expecting any day now, probably already have two hundred miles on them.

We bred Martina to Aliy's Quest winning/Iditarod contending leader, A.J. A.J. is a village dog/sprint dog cross, who seems to not only possess, but also passes on to his offspring the rare combination, of a no nonsense work ethic and mental toughness combined with grace and athleticism. In my opinion a really gifted animal.

Over the past fifteen years of maintaining a kennel of sled dogs, I always lived much closer to an assortment of veterinarians than I ever was to a decent place to train. Over the course of those fifteen years I can only remember one instance that one of my dogs needed the readily available emergency medical attention.

Peculiarly, now that I'm approximately a two



**Glock**

and a half hour drive away from the closest veterinarian clinic, Glock who always eats with such vigor that I usually feed him last just so I can watch and listen, refused to eat breakfast. He looked a little hunched up and slightly uncomfortable.

Apparently Glock decided sometime during the past couple of weeks to eat enough gravel to fill a medium sized pothole. We quickly took him "to town," Fairbanks, where he was left in the capable hands of DVM Mark May and his competent staff. They performed what I insist on calling "the excavation," they of course prefer the term surgery.

Now I'm well aware that a veterinarian emergency once in awhile is not all that unusual, however, it wasn't twelve hours after I'd gotten Glock back from Fairbanks that his sister Gypsy looked as if she too had thought that gravel eating might not have been such a bad idea. Thankfully we knew the drill, however before we headed back to town we actually contemplated bringing the whole kennel in for preemptive rock detecting x-rays.

Thankfully, Gypsy hadn't eaten gravel, however despite her x-ray being clear of rocks, there was something visibly bothering her intestines. Doctor May wasn't sure what it could be, but because she was slightly dehydrated, refused to eat, and was

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**Hook**

running a temperature, it was apparent that she would need to stay for treatment anyway.

I returned home to learn that Inca, one of the obvious stars of Alberta's litter, was disturbingly exhibiting the same symptoms that were currently plaguing Gypsy. Thankfully by this time Gypsy



**Iowa helping clear the kennel**

was recovering remarkably well after being placed on antibiotics and anti-inflammatories, so when I went to pick her up I returned armed with enough medication to combat just about everything imaginable excluding perhaps a SARS outbreak. I even purchased some sedatives for Caitlin, who seems to possess an exponentially limitless ability to worry. Thus equipped we have been able to successfully avoid any further unplanned trips to town, all the dogs are once again healthy and happy, and Caitlin is feeling much better.

As our quest to find the right piece of property continues, we are looking forward to spending the winter here in the Denali area. Both Caitlin and I have truly fallen in love with the mountains and the alpine tundra, and we hope we can somehow stay here permanently.

As always I hope all of you are having as much doggy fun, in whatever capacity that might be, as we are.

## The Howler

Mike Santos and Caitlin Brady

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