

## **Essay Contest 2015/16, Zentrum für Kanadastudien**

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Muttersprache**

### **Canadian Sled Dog Races**

What is the first thing that crosses your mind when you think of sled dog races? Huskies? Transport? Animal cruelty? Many people believe that sled dogs are being abused and mistreated to compete and win in these races. However, why would the dogs feel mistreated when they love to run? Sled dogs have grown up into this tradition, to pull sleds across the wide Canadian land. This excitement and energy to run, runs through their blood. Before snowmobiles and cars, Inuit would sled across the country, for transportation of goods, or for travelling (Neary, 2008.). They would harness the dogs up, every morning, and they would run tens of kilometers a day..

When wanting to compete in sled dog races, you cannot just harness the dogs to the sled and expect them to run. This training takes time and effort; for the dog, as well for its trainer. The best way to train a sled dog is by starting at an early age. Most dogs begin training at the age of eight months. The best sled dog teams consist of dogs that have grown up and been trained together because this leads to them working well with each other. To train a sled dog, it should get used to its harness and pulling heavy things behind them so that they get a feeling of what it is like. Sled dogs train every day, and when a race is coming up, they will take a trip for about ten to fifteen days so as to get used to running such long distances, while pulling a sled with them. Training does not only include running, but also learning commands. There are special commands to tell the dogs exactly what they must do

next. Over the years of training, it is possible to find a dog that is especially good at a certain job, if it is being the Lead dog or the dog with most upper body power, they all have a gift.

There are reasons, as to why huskies were chosen to take part in this sport. All types of this specific breed have the same set of skills: they are strong, healthy and can run long distances. Since sleds are heavy and not easy to transport, the dogs have unbelievable upper body strength. Also, the amount of strength that an entire sled dog team has comes close to the strength of a small horse. They are harnessed around their chest, which gives them even more opportunities to pull the sled faster. Additionally, these dogs have tough feet to grip the ground and not fall onto the snow covered land. Furthermore, to be able to run such long distances, the dogs eat fat, protein and special high protein, with enough calories to help their endurance and to not get tired. (Lee, 2015). When they run long distances, they eat less because if they ate more, they would begin to feel sick and their nutrient cycle would get mixed up. Huskies are built for the cold and snowy weather conditions. Nevertheless, because they sleep outside in the cold, they have little booties on their feet to keep them warm, and occasionally, a little jacket, in case of extreme weather conditions. In the early morning they get up, full of new energy, and are ready to start the new day of running. Despite the fact that huskies are strong, healthy and have an extreme amount of endurance, they are also extremely intelligent. Dogs that have been running and racing for a long period of time can spot certain things, for example: bad ice spots, or where the ice will crack if they run over it (Dogsled, 2010.). The lead dog is usually the one that spots these obstacles to prevent the rest of the team from getting hurt.

One of the most important aspects of a great sled dog team is that the dogs work well together, and give each other positive attitudes (Dave and Deb. 2015.). The dogs are all very close and have special connections to each other, which makes them even more thrilled to run these long distances. In every team, there is a special order for the dogs so as to be as fast as possible. Every sled dog has its own position on the team. The strongest dogs are exactly in front of the sled to pull its weight; these are called Wheel dogs. In front of them are the Team dogs, which help to pull the sled and keep the speed at the right level. The Swing dogs, are next, and their job is to follow the lead dogs' orders and help the dogs behind them to follow what the lead dogs are doing. At the very front of the sled there are the Lead dogs, they give directions, and follow the orders of the Musher (The person on the sled) (Schurke, 2015.). Running in general is their favorite activity. These dogs need open spaces because they are made to run. When preparing for a race, there are things that dogs do, to show that they are excited, for example; they tend to bark, and jump around people.

To answer my initial question, sled dog races are not a kind of animal cruelty. Sled dogs are bred (!) to run for such long distances. They work well as a team and take care of those in the team that might have been injured. To make sure that they do not injure themselves, they get special training and are cared for. This sport is the exact opposite of animal cruelty, it is loving and caring for the animals.

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