

A Day in The Life of A Working Musher - 2008

I spend a lot of time talking about the long hours and hard work of trying to train dogs and work full time. To give you a better idea of what I mean, let me describe a typical day. This is a lot of detail and maybe not that interesting but I've had a few people ask questions, so here it is in gory detail - a typical day during Fall training.

- 6:20 a.m. Hit the snooze button a couple of times.
- 6:30 a.m. Pry myself out of bed and throw some clothes on. Go start the car (especially important if it is in the single digits or colder. I just about remember what that was like - so far this year has been really warm.) Pack up an energy bar, a frozen dinner, and a quart of water to get me through the day. Finish dressing (maybe even brush my hair), grab my stuff and head out the door. Varan feeds in the morning, so I can make a quick get-away.
- 6:50 a.m. I better be in the car by now, or I will hit traffic. Technically, my schedule starts at 7:30, but if I get there a little ahead of time I can get a parking spot near the building.
- 7:20 a.m. Arrive at work. This time of year my work load is really light, and being at work is the relaxing part of my day. In fact, I have time to do things like write this update.
- 11:30 a.m. Go to Home Depot to get halogen bulbs for the dog lot lights, a new hoe for cleaning the lot, and some eye screws for the dog trailer. Then to the grocery store - we are out of just about everything.
- 12:45 p.m. Whoops - how did I think I could run both errands in a 1/2 hour lunch break? I will have to work through lunch tomorrow to make up for it.
- 3:30 p.m. Hit the road and go straight home.
- 4:00 p.m. Arrive home, put away groceries. Get something to eat and take a few minutes to play with Barley.
- 4:30 p.m. Get my dog clothes on. As long as the temperature is below freezing, dog clothes always include my bibs, regardless of what I wear

under them, from nothing at all to heavy fleece. These bibs deflect the slop and muck, and keep everything else (relatively) clean. They are warm and functional, and I pretty much live in them. Before heading out the door, I flip on the dog lot lights. It is just about dark. The dogs will need a few calories to operate on, so I give each dog 1/2 quart of 'wet feed', which is water, soaked commercial food, and meat. Next I get all the gear ready and loaded for a training run. I run Barley inside and kennel him. He thinks he is a sled dog, and is highly offended when we leave him behind, so the kennel (crate) is the best place for him until we get back. It keeps him from hurting himself and tearing down the house.

- 5:15 p.m. Load up 16 dogs. If you have ever been around sled dogs, you will know that they are very strong, and you must 'take them out of 4-wheel drive' (pick up their front end) to have any hope of hanging on. So each dog must be hand walked over to the trailer. They are very excited, so they are jerking and hopping around - it is quite a workout. Actually, some are learning to run to the trailer on their own (and Scooby will load himself if I leave a dog box door open). This does help make loading faster IF they are all good and don't decide to take a quick trip around the house or neighborhood first. I load Voodoo and Chase last - they scream in excitement the entire time they are in the box, and the neighbors probably don't appreciate it.
- 5:35 p.m. Pull out to drive the mile or so to the dog tracks. As soon as we are on sleds we will be able to run from the yard, but our trail is too rough for a four-wheeler. That 10 foot drop after the railroad tracks followed by the sharp right turn is tricky on sleds, but would be completely impossible on the four-wheeler.
- 5:45 p.m. Drop the dogs so they can pee (they never remember to go before we get in the car!). Unload the four-wheeler. The starter just quit, so I have to pop start it as I roll down the ramp. Set up the four-wheeler by tying it off to a post, making sure it is in gear, and setting the brake. Even in gear, with the brakes locked up, and with cleated chains on the wheels, the dogs can easily drag this 600 pound machine faster than I can run. So we take extra care to make sure it is tied off before we get down to business. Next I run out the gangline (that's a long way out - about 65 feet for a team this size), and tie it off on a cinder block, which will help the leaders keep the team lined out until we are ready to go.
- 6:05 p.m. Harness the dogs, and then walk each one out to the line (except Scooby, who is too hard to hang on to, but will dance and leap around at my feet as I walk out to his spot). Up until now the dogs have been quiet,

but as I start clipping dogs into the line, they start shrieking, yipping, howling, screaming, barking, and squealing.

- 6:25 p.m. The dogs are all lined out, harness banging, and screaming to go. I throw on my vest, parka, and hat - once I quit moving around I will get chilly quickly. I exchange my little bitty headlamp for a big, powerful lamp that will light up the trail all the way past my leaders. Once my gear is set, I climb on the four-wheeler, release the brake, and pop the quick release on the tie-off. The team shoots forward, and the four-wheeler roars to life. We are off. The plan is for a 20 mile run. Under good conditions, this would take under 2 hours. But with the ice and rough trail we have been contending with, it will probably take a bit longer.
- 8:45 p.m. We arrive back at the trailer. The dogs are feeling great, rolling around and puffing steam. Chase starts shrieking. So far we haven't tired him out yet, and he always demands more. Clearly, 20 miles is easy for these guys, and they are ready to go farther. My first step is to tie the leaders off so that the team can't turn around and go down the trail again. Then I work backwards, unclipping tuglines. The dogs are still clipped in to their necklines, but now they don't have as much power if they decide they aren't done running. Each dog gets 1 quart of water. Hydration is extremely important in sled dogs, and we want their routine to include getting some water after each run, so that they will drink automatically even when they are tired. 'Water' in the sled dog world generally means water with some kind of bait - soaked kibble, meat, or something to tempt the dogs to clean their bowls. Once the dogs finish their water, I unharness and load each one. I wrap up the gangline and store it, pick up all my discarded layers, collect and count the harnesses and water pans to make sure I haven't missed anything in the darkness. It takes a few tries to start the four-wheeler using the pull-cord, but eventually I get it going, load it up, and strap it down.
- 9:30 p.m. Head for home. If you've noticed, I haven't quit moving in awhile, and I'm not done yet.
- 9:40 p.m. Unload each dog, walk them back to their house, and clip them in. Take harnesses, ganglines, buckets, clothing, etc. inside to dry out.
- 10:00 p.m. Get the dogs fed. Meat and commercial has been soaking since morning, so I just have to top off the buckets with water, grab a bucket of dry commercial, and a couple of fat cubes from the freezer. Each dog gets another 1 1/2 quarts of wet feed, and some amount of commercial kibble, depending on their size, metabolism, current weight, etc. The skinny dogs also get chunks of fat to help put on weight. Varan is home and is cleaning up the lot already, so that will save me half an hour.

- 10:20 p.m. Soak some meat and commercial for the dog's breakfast. Hang up everything to dry.
- 10:30 p.m. Grab something quick to eat - I'm starving by now! Jump in the shower.
- 11:15 p.m. Head for bed. All the normal chores like doing dishes, cleaning the house, laundry, will have to wait for Friday, when we'll take a day off from running. Well, come to think of it, I'll have to cut meat, fix that dog box door, and get the sleds rigged on Friday. Guess those other chores will have to wait...