



## The Story of Balto

60-Minute History and Health Lesson

Interactive Video Conference

Grades: K-12 (*or Balto fans of any age!*)

## TEACHER GUIDE

### Balto: A History of Humans, Huskies, and Health in Alaska

#### Description

Why is this famous husky from Alaska found at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History? Join our historians for this heroic tale of dogs and mushers in Alaska, from the 1925 Serum Run to the Iditarod of today. Discover facts about the disease diphtheria, and why the outbreak in Nome, Alaska is so famous. Experience how humans and huskies survive in harsh Arctic conditions today by trying on authentic Iditarod gear! Uncover the Cleveland connection to Balto and how he has become the “spokesdog” for this unique event in Cleveland history.

#### Objectives

- Use a map to locate Alaska and measure the distance between key stops in the Serum Run.
- Compare and contrast conditions in Alaska with those in Cleveland in the 1920's, and describe methods of transportation used in both areas
- Identify the pathogen that causes diphtheria, and the difference between a vaccine and antitoxin
- List ways that proper equipment can help dogs and humans exist in extreme cold
- Describe how cooperation and teamwork can complete an almost impossible job

#### Ohio's Learning Standards

**Kindergarten:** Geography – Spatial Thinking and Skills

Grade 1 & 2: History – Historical Thinking and Skills

Grade 3: Government – Civic Participation and Skills

Grade 4: Economics – Production and Consumption

Grade 5: Geography – Spatial Thinking and Skills

Grade 6: Government – Civic Participation and Skills

Grade 7: History – Historical Thinking and Skills

Grade 8: Geography – Spatial Thinking and Skills



## National Health Education Standards

### Kindergarten – Grade 12: Standards 1 & 2

- Students will comprehend concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention to enhance health
- Students will analyze the influence of family, peers, culture, media, technology and other factors on human health

## Before Your Program & How to Set Up Your Room

- A kit of materials will be sent to your school for use during this program. Please allow a two-week lead time when booking and alert your school office about this delivery.
- The kit materials will be explained during our connection. If you have room for a display table between your room monitor/screen and where the students will be seated, you can place the big blue bin there and we will invite the teacher to reveal various items throughout the program.
- We've attached a detailed pamphlet about Balto to this guide for your reference; the kit will have color copies of this item for you to keep.
- **KIT CONTENTS**
  - Big red snowsuit (what Alaskans use to stay alive when it's -50°F)
  - Big snow boots (the kind you'd use in the Iditarod)
  - Big snow mittens
  - Serious snow face mask
  - 2 dog harnesses
  - 2 dog 'booties'
  - Cast of a dog skull
  - Current US Map
  - 1914 map of the territory of Alaska (it didn't become a state until 1959!)
  - Pamphlets about the 1925 Serum Run (you may keep these!)
  - UPS return label for sending the kit back to us

## Vocabulary

**antitoxin** – a medicine containing antibodies produced by either an animal or human that has been exposed to a bacteria and the toxins (poisons) they produce. When used on a sick person, the antibodies bind to the toxins produced by these germs and stop them from harming the victim.



**cockpit** - the small space where the pilot sits to fly a plane.

**dime museum** – a small showplace specializing in the odd and unusual, charging a fee to view the items.

**diphtheria** - an extremely contagious bacterial disease affecting the throat and lungs. Toxin, or poison, caused by the bacteria can lead to a thick coating in the nose, throat, or airway. This coating is usually fuzzy gray or black and can cause breathing problems and difficulty in swallowing.

**Iditarod** – annual dogsled race from Anchorage, in south central Alaska, to Nome on the western Bering Sea coast. Each team of 12 to 16 dogs and their musher cover over 1150 miles in 10 to 17 days. There are certain pieces of equipment each team must have: an arctic parka, a heavy sleeping bag, an ax, snowshoes, musher food, dog food and boots for each dog's feet to protect against sharp ice.

**prospector** – someone who explores an area for valuable mineral deposits.

**serum** – fluid made from the blood of an animal inoculated for a specific disease.

**telegraph** – a long-distance communication system that relied on a signal of short and long pulses (dots and dashes) transmitted over an electrical wire from one place to another. In the standard Morse code used, each letter of the alphabet had its own code signal. For example, the standard call for help was SOS: \*\*\*---\*\*\*. Morse code was also used in signaling with flags, lights, etc.

**vaccine** – medicine containing either weakened or dead bacteria or viruses. When given to a well person, it allows their immune system to protect them from the specific disease.

**Vaudeville** – a variety show featuring short performances of singers, jugglers, comedians and, sometimes, trained animals.

## Extension Activities

- Find stories of other amazing animal rescues and famous dog adventures.
- Investigate some of the other diseases that caused widespread problems in the past, such as smallpox, cholera, and malaria. Are they still problems today? Where? How are they prevented or treated? Are there any that have been eliminated worldwide?
- Look up alternative modes of transportation used before modern mechanical means, such as automobiles and planes. Were they restricted to certain environments or geographic locations?
- Find out about rescue dogs, seeing-eye dogs and service dogs. How they are trained and used to help people?
- View the Universal Pictures animated film about Balto and list the differences between what happens in the cartoon and the true story.



## Online Resources for Teachers and Students

Click the link below to find additional online resources for teachers and students. These websites are recommended by our Museum Educators and provide additional content information and some fun, interactive activities to share with your class.

CMNH Educators regularly review these links for quality. Web addresses often change so please notify us if any links have issues.

Cleveland Museum of Natural History <https://cmnh.org/edlinks>

## Some Common Questions We Are Asked About Balto and Alaska

### **Who are the two most famous mushers from the Serum Run?**

1.) Leonhard Seppala-- Born in Norway in 1877. Came to Nome in 1900 during the gold rush. During the Serum Run, drove 170 miles (274 kilometers) from Nome to Shaktoolik, from January 27th to the 31st, on his planned run to Nulato to meet the antitoxin. In addition to his return trip of 91 miles (146 km), from Shaktoolik to Golovin, that represents a grand total of 261 miles (420 km) covered by his team. That was nearly five times the total distance covered by any other team. Died in 1967 at age 90. His ashes were scattered along the Iditarod Trail by his wife, Constance.

2.) Gunnar Kaasen-- Born in Norway in 1882 and came to Nome in 1904. His team ran the last 53 miles in the Serum Run. At one point, the wind was so fierce that his sled was blown over and the box of serum was lost in the snow. Kaasen amazingly found the box and brought it into Nome on Feb. 2, 1925, with the well-known quote about Balto: "Damn fine dog". Kaasen retired from mushing in 1950, and died in November 1960 in Everett, WA.

### **How did Balto get the name "Balto"?**

Balto was named after Samuel J. Balto who, along with Fridtjof Nansen first crossed the Greenland Ice Cap in 1888. He also held mining claims in Alaska.

### **When was Balto born, and when did he die?**

Balto was born in either 1919 or 1922 (there are no conclusive historical records) in Leonhard Seppala's kennels in Nome. He died March 14, 1933, and was assisted in his last hours by Dr. R. R. Powell. His body was preserved by taxidermist Frank Tobin of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, where it is displayed today.



**How old was Balto during the Serum Run to Nome?**

Leonhard Seppala was once quoted as claiming that Balto was six years old at the time of the serum run, which would make Balto's birthdate in 1919.

**Did Balto ever have any puppies?**

No. He was neutered at 6 months because Seppala did not consider him worth breeding.

**What other dogs were on Balto's team?**

Seven dogs from Gunnar Kaasen's team came to Cleveland with him. Their names were Balto, Fox, Billy, Tillie, Sye, Old Mocket and Alaska Slim.

**How far did Balto and Gunnar Kaasen's team run?**

53 miles. The entire Serum run from Nenana to Nome was 674 miles. With 20 mushers and their average of 13 dogs per team involved, there were over 200 dogs included in the rescue effort!

**How long did it take for the teams to make the run?**

Less than 5 ½ days. That means they averaged a speed of 5 miles per hour.

**Tell us more about Togo the dog.**

Togo was the lead Siberian Husky sled dog for Leonhard Seppala's team: courageous and strong, obedient and possessing an exceptional ability to find the trail and sense danger. Seppala's team had set out from Nome and traveled 150 miles to meet the relay and return with the serum. They then turned around and ran 91 more miles before handing off the serum to the next musher. Togo was 12 years old at that time! He was retired shortly after and died December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1929 at age 16. His body was mounted and is on display at Iditarod Trail Headquarters Museum in Wasilla, Alaska. His skeleton is stored at Yale University's Peabody Museum of Natural History, Connecticut.



DISCOVERY  
STARTS  
HERE

The  
Cleveland  
Museum  
of Natural  
History

**HOURS:**

Monday through Saturday, 10 am to 5 pm  
Wednesday, 10 am to 10 pm  
Sunday, noon to 5 pm  
Closed major holidays

**ADMISSION PRICES\*:**

Adults (19 and older): \$12  
Youth (ages 3-18), College students (with ID),  
Seniors (60+): \$10  
Toddlers (2 and younger): Free  
Members are always FREE!

\*Prices subject to change.

**MEMBERSHIP:**

It makes sense to join. Receive free admission to the Museum and Shafran Planetarium all year, discounts in the Museum Store and more. A deal like this pays for itself in no time! For more information, call (216) 231-4600, ext. 3309 or visit [cmnh.org](http://cmnh.org).

FSC logo

Cleveland Museum of  
NATURAL HISTORY 

1 WADE OVAL DRIVE, UNIVERSITY CIRCLE  
CLEVELAND, OHIO 44106  
216.231.4600  
800.317.9155  
[WWW.CMNH.ORG](http://WWW.CMNH.ORG)



# Balto

## and the Legacy of the Serum Run



Cleveland Museum of  
NATURAL HISTORY

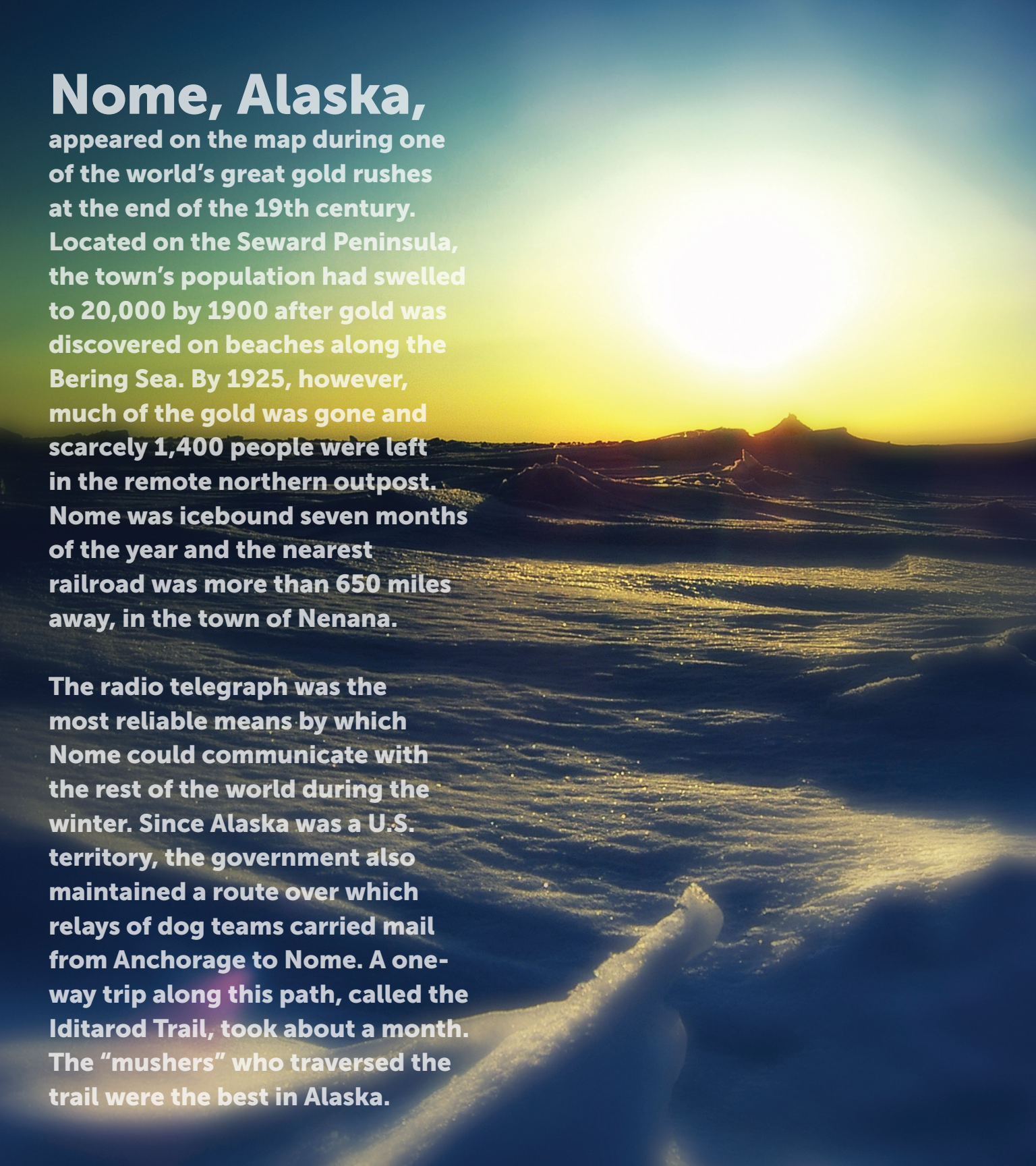




# **Nome, Alaska,**

**appeared on the map during one of the world's great gold rushes at the end of the 19th century. Located on the Seward Peninsula, the town's population had swelled to 20,000 by 1900 after gold was discovered on beaches along the Bering Sea. By 1925, however, much of the gold was gone and scarcely 1,400 people were left in the remote northern outpost. Nome was icebound seven months of the year and the nearest railroad was more than 650 miles away, in the town of Nenana.**

**The radio telegraph was the most reliable means by which Nome could communicate with the rest of the world during the winter. Since Alaska was a U.S. territory, the government also maintained a route over which relays of dog teams carried mail from Anchorage to Nome. A one-way trip along this path, called the Iditarod Trail, took about a month. The "mushers" who traversed the trail were the best in Alaska.**





# A RACE FOR LIFE

On January 20, 1925, a radio signal went out, carried for miles across the frozen tundra:

Nome calling...  
Nome calling... We have an  
outbreak of diphtheria...  
No serum...Urgently need  
help...Nome calling...  
Nome calling...

Nome's only doctor had diagnosed cases of diphtheria, an extremely contagious disease affecting the throat and lungs. The native Inuits were particularly vulnerable to this illness, as they had been to measles and the flu, both of which had wiped out entire villages. The frantic search for antitoxin began.

Seattle calling...  
Seattle calling... Fresh serum  
available here... Airplane  
standing by to fly to Nome...

## JANUARY 25

The long twilight of the arctic winter had settled over Nome. Heavy snow had fallen and temperatures dropped far below freezing. These weather conditions were beyond what the airplanes of the time, with their open cockpits, could handle.

Anchorage calling...  
Anchorage calling...  
300,000 units of serum  
located in railway  
hospital here...Package  
can be shipped by train  
to Nenana... Package  
weighs 20 pounds...  
Could serum be carried  
to Nome on Iditarod  
Trail by mail drivers  
and dog teams?

Yes! There were still some problems the technology of the early 20th century couldn't solve. As they had for years, the settlers of Alaska put their trust in courageous men and strong dogs.

By the next day, three children in Nome had died of diphtheria and more cases had been diagnosed. Time would make the difference between life and death for those who were ill. A relay of dog teams along the Iditarod Trail was quickly organized.

## JANUARY 27

The serum arrived in Nenana by train, and the relay to the stricken city began. "Wild Bill" Shannon lashed the life-saving cargo to his sled and set off westward. Except for the dogs' panting and the swooshing of runners on the snow, there were no other sounds on the trail. The temperature was dropping fast. It was 30 degrees below zero when Shannon started. Then it fell to minus 35 degrees...40 degrees...45 degrees...and finally minus 50 degrees in the arctic darkness. Shannon rushed on, mindless of the cold, until he handed the serum over to Edgar Kalland in Tolovana, 52 miles from Nenana.

## JANUARY 28

Kalland, in turn, traveled 31 miles before passing the serum to Dan Green at Manley Hot Springs. Green took it to Fish Lake (28 miles), averaging an astonishing nine miles an hour. From Green it passed to Johnny Folger (26 miles). He passed it on to Sam Joseph (34 miles), then to Titus Nikolai (24 miles) and Dave Corning (30 miles).

New snow fell and the wind picked up, creating whiteouts, but on and on the mushers went: Harry Pitka (30 miles), Bill McCarty (28 miles) and Edgar Nollner (24 miles). Eskimo, Indian and white mushers carried serum in the "Great Race of Mercy." The relay teams were challenging the limits of endurance. The serum that passed from frozen hands to frozen hands was itself frozen, despite protective wrappings. Though thawed in one of the shelters along the way, it froze solid again on the trail.

## JANUARY 30

At Galena, Edgar Nollner gave the serum to his newly married brother, George. The young Indian chanted Athabascan love songs through the wilderness to keep warm in the minus 50 degree weather. On the 30-mile stretch he ran, Charlie Evans harnessed himself to the sled after two dogs froze on their feet.

The serum was passed to Tommy Patsy (36 miles); Jackscrew, the Koyukuk Indian (40 miles); Victor Anagick (34 miles); and Myles Gonangnan (40 miles). Both men and dogs used their bodies to break trail through four-foot snowdrifts.





## JANUARY 31

At Shaktoolik, Henry Ivanoff had traveled a half-mile along the trail when his team darted after a reindeer. While untangling the dogs, the Russian Eskimo spotted Leonhard Seppala, the greatest musher in the territory, and Togo, one of the territory's greatest dogs, rushing down the trail.

Due to a breakdown in communication, Seppala and his famous Siberian huskies had set out from Nome, 150 miles away, to meet the relay and return with the serum. The serum was handed off to Seppala, who set off on the 91-mile journey to the next relay point.

As the storm grew more vicious, Seppala was faced with the decision of whether to take a shortcut across the frozen, dangerous Norton Sound or to go around it. Gale-force winds hurled seawater over the ice, which threatened to break up at any moment.

Togo was a consummate lead sled dog: courageous and strong, obedient and possessing an exceptional ability to find the trail and sense danger. Each dog on a team has an important position, but it is the leader that must guide them onto the safest route. Seppala was confident of his team and headed onto the ice. Togo unerringly led them across the jagged, groaning floes to the safety of land. Just three hours later, the ice broke in Norton Sound.



**Forgetting their own safety, 20 toughened drivers and sled-dog teams faced the peril of the trail, each racing six to nine miles per hour.**

## FEBRUARY 1

Through blinding snow and hurricane-force winds, the vital serum was passed from Seppala to Charlie Olson (25 miles) and then to Gunnar Kaasen. Had Kaasen had any inkling of how wildly the storm would rage, he would not have chosen Balto to lead his team. Although Balto was one of Seppala's dogs, he was not thought of as a very good leader. But Balto proved his mettle when he plunged into the roaring blizzard, at one point halting to save driver and team from instant death in the Topkok River.

No one believed Kaasen would make it through the storm, so when he arrived at the safety shelter, 21 miles from Nome, he found the next driver asleep. The team was running well, so they forged ahead. Their endurance was tested even further when a sudden, fierce blast of wind lifted both sled and dogs into the air. While fighting to right the sled and untangle the team, Kaasen's heart sank — the serum had disappeared! He frantically searched the snow with his bare hands. Miraculously, he found the serum.

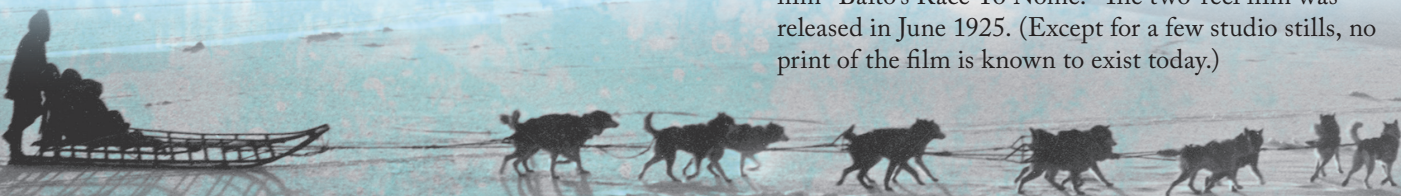
## FEBRUARY 2

Before daybreak on February 2, 1925, Balto led Gunnar Kaasen's team into Nome. The town was saved! Exhausted and nearly frozen after the 53-mile run, Kaasen, Balto and the rest of the mushing team became instant heroes across the United States. The 674-mile trip was made in 127½ hours, considered by mushers to be a world record.

## FORGOTTEN HEROES

News accounts with glorified depictions of the "Serum Race" impressed people across the United States. Only weeks after the feat, Hollywood producer Sol Lesser contacted Leonhard Seppala and asked to lease Balto and the rest of the team. Seppala welcomed the chance to rid himself of the "newspaper dog," as he called Balto. Lesser also hired Kaasen to work with the dogs in Los Angeles for 10 weeks.

Lesser took Kaasen and the team to Mt. Rainier in Washington state, where they starred in the short-subject film "Balto's Race To Nome." The two-reel film was released in June 1925. (Except for a few studio stills, no print of the film is known to exist today.)



**Dog teams such as these huskies worked year-round and are credited with helping conquer the vast Alaskan Territory in the early 20th century. In work or sport, the driver commanded the team, but ultimately he depended upon the lead dog's ability to find the safest route.**



During a dispute between Kaasen and Lesser over unpaid wages, it was revealed that Lesser had purchased the dogs from Seppala and sold them again. To make a living, Kaasen was forced to tour the country's vaudeville circuit with the dogs for two years. But by 1927, the whirl of the Roaring '20s and the hype of Leonhard Seppala's own sled dog promotions had overshadowed the "Heroes of Alaska." This would be the last time Kaasen worked with the team. He returned to Nome and the dogs were relegated to yet another indignity.

On a visit to Los Angeles, Cleveland businessman George Kimble discovered the dogs displayed in a "dime" museum and noticed that they were ill and mistreated. He knew the famous story of Balto and was outraged at seeing this degradation. He struck a deal with the dog's owner, Sam Houston, to buy them for \$2,000 and bring them to Cleveland—but Kimble had only two weeks to raise the money. Now there was another race: to save Balto.

A Balto Fund was established. Across the nation, radio broadcasts appealed for donations. Headlines in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* told of the push to rescue the heroes. Cleveland's response was explosive. Schoolchildren collected coins in buckets; factory workers passed their hats; and hotels, stores and visitors donated what they could to the Balto Fund. The Western Reserve Kennel Club gave a much-needed financial boost. The people responded generously. In just 10 days the deadlines read, "*City Smashes Over Top With Balto's Fund! Huskies To Be Shipped From Coast at Once!*"

On March 19, 1927, Balto and six companions were brought to Cleveland and given a hero's welcome in a triumphant parade through Public Square. The dogs were then taken to the Brookside Zoo (now the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo) to live out their lives in dignity. It was said that 15,000 people visited the dogs on their first day at the zoo.

Balto died on March 14, 1933, at the age of 14. The husky's body was mounted and is now housed at The Cleveland Museum of Natural History.



## BALTO TODAY

Balto's mount remains a part of the Museum's permanent collections, carefully protected and cared for by Museum curators. Balto is known and loved around the world, and preserving his legacy is a duty the Museum takes very seriously.

Research for Balto-related articles and artifacts is ongoing. The Museum recounts the story in major exhibitions commemorating the serum run's anniversary.

In 1996, the Museum began negotiating with the Anchorage Museum of History and Art to ship Balto and related materials to Alaska for a special exhibition in 1998 and '99 that would coincide with the meeting of the National Association for Interpretation in Anchorage and the 26th Iditarod.

In early 1998, as plans for the Balto exhibition at the Anchorage museum were being finalized, a class of second- and third-grade students in Palmer, Alaska, petitioned The Cleveland Museum of Natural History for Balto's permanent return to their state. Eventually, the Alaska state legislature passed a resolution requesting that the mount of the dog be returned.

The Museum politely but firmly declined to return Balto, citing his importance as a symbol of Cleveland's philanthropic tradition. After hearing Balto's entire life story, the schoolchildren decided that Cleveland was his rightful home after all.

In October 1998, Balto's mount left Cleveland for a five-month stay at the Anchorage Museum of History and Art—his first appearance in the state where he'd made his name in more than 70 years.



**A statue of Balto was erected in 1925 in New York City's Central Park. It bears the words:**

*Dedicated to the indomitable spirit of the sled dogs that relayed antitoxin six hundred miles over rough ice, across treacherous waters, through arctic blizzards, from Nenana to the relief of stricken Nome in the winter of 1925. Endurance...Fidelity...Intelligence.*



Balto and his display case and pedestal were shipped via jet airplane in a special protective crate. A Museum staffer accompanied them every step of the way—even into the cargo hold of a freight airliner.

The exhibition *Balto Returns to Alaska* drew more than 65,000 people to the Anchorage museum, including several thousand each weekend for special sled dog-related programs.

Balto returned home in March 1999, again accompanied by a Museum curator. Though the fanfare wasn't as grand as what the living Balto had enjoyed in 1927, many in Cleveland were glad to see their Alaskan goodwill ambassador arrive home safely.



In March 2010, the Museum celebrated the 85th anniversary of the serum run and the bravery of Balto and the hero dogs of Alaska with a special exhibition.

## THE IDITAROD TODAY

Alaska changed dramatically in the years following the serum run. The territory became the country's 49th state in 1959 and modern conveniences reached the great northern wilderness. Cold weather no longer deterred aviation. Telephones and television provided instant communication, and the snowmobile became the standard mode of winter transportation. The great era of the sled dog gradually came to an end.

Some, however, believed dog sledding was an important part of Alaskan history, and that snowmobiles would never surpass the achievements of people and dogs working together.

Among those individuals were Dorothy Page and Joe Redington, Sr. In 1973, they and other volunteers rallied to reopen the old Iditarod Trail, the mail route from Anchorage to Nome that had been used in the historic serum run. Today, the trail serves as the route for a race stretching 1,049 miles across two mountain ranges, through miles of frozen wilderness and along 200 miles of the Yukon Valley.

Held annually in March, the Iditarod not only commemorates the 1925 serum run, it reflects the spirit of Alaska, the people who settled the territory and the dogs whose loyalty and endurance helped to conquer the Far North.



Gunnar Kaasen and Balto, c.1925