

Dogsledding with Expedition WOLF, the Thrill of the Ride - Rivière-Rouge, Quebec, Canada

[The Adventure Kids aka Debra C. Argen and Edward F. Nesta](#) experienced the thrill of **dogsledding** with [Expedition WOLF in Rivière-Rouge, Quebec, Canada](#) just outside [Mont-Tremblant](#). "Musher" Edward F. Nesta drove a team of six Siberian Huskies through a beautiful snow-covered Canadian forest while Debra enjoyed the view tucked under a blanket on the sleigh!

Dogsledding has always captured our imaginations even before we watched the **Disney** film **Snow Dogs**, although that film did renew and confirm our desire to experience the thrill of the ride. During a trip to Mont-Tremblant, Canada in February 2011, we finally had the opportunity to go dogsledding with the experienced and professional **Expédition WOLF**, owned by Gaëtan Lambert, Musher, and located near by in Rivière-Rouge.



Exp édition WOLF

Our Guide, Sonia, picked us up at 8:00 am at our hotel and told us about what to expect as we learned the art of dogsledding on the short drive from Mont-Tremblant to Rivière-Rouge. In a word, we were pumped.

We entered the lodge where a fire blazed in the large open fireplace and gathered around as Sonia and Annette, Expédition WOLF's photographer, told us about the facility and the 300 dogs consisting of 80% Siberian huskies and 20% Alaskan Huskies, and explained what our duties dogsledding would entail. Armed with our new found knowledge, we were eager with excitement and ready for our adventure to begin.



The
Exp
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dition WOLF Team

The morning was bright, cold, and the air was crisp, with the snow crunching underfoot, although we were comfortable bundled up as we were in multiple layers, ski outfits, warm ski hats on our heads, neck warmers, and ski gloves. We walked the short distance to the kennel area, and although Sonia, Annette, and a few other Guides lead the way, we would have been able to locate the dogs by their howls of pure delight, as people approaching meant they would be running and pulling sleds.

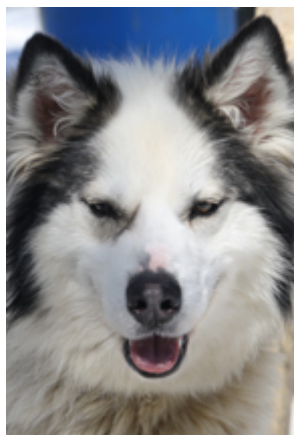


Malouk Greeting Edward

Photo by Annette Faille

Although Siberian Huskies are medium-sized dogs, ranging from 21-23.5 inches (53-60 cm) and 45-60 pounds (20-27 kg) for males, and from 20-22 inches (51-56 cm) and 35-50 pounds (16-23kg) for females, their hearts and personalities are huge, and we would learn that they love running and playing in the snow.

Siberian Huskies have a lifespan between 12 and 15 years, and can start training around 1 year old, although training usually begins around 18 months to 2 years. Typically, from the ages of 2 years until 8 years they can run twice per day pulling a sled and once per day as they get older, although it depends on the size and strength of the dog.



Snow Dogs Waiting for You

Photo by Annette Faille

We experienced their raw power, energy, and excitement as the Guides in the kennel introduced us to each of our sled dogs one by one and told us its Inuit name as they handed us the dog's leash. The next step was leading the dog to another Guide who would slip a harness on the dog. With the harness secure, we would lead the dog over to our sled where another Guide hooked the dog to the main line that would pull our wooden sled.

Sled dogs run side by side, usually with a male and female paired together, although Sonia told us that brothers could be trained to run together side by side. The lead sled dog is usually an older dog, and must be intelligent and fast. Our six-dog team consisted of "double lead dogs," Harricana, a sweet female with ice-blue eyes, and Malouk, a handsome male with a loving personality.



Malouk and Harricana

Created by: Debra C. Argen and Edward F. Nesta

Next in line were our "swing dogs" or "middle dogs," the adorable Soscumınca and Wishwachibi, who would help swing the sled through turns. Although blind, Wishwachibi has the heart of a champion, jumping in the air in anticipation of the run, once the Guide attached the dog to the line.



Soscumınca and Wishwachibi

Taking their place directly in front of the sled were the "wheel dogs" or "wheelers," brothers Tasniak and Tehotiwakan, a matched set whom we affectionately called "the twins," who would be responsible for pulling the sled out and around corners.



Tasniak and Tehotiwakan

Dogs harnessed and ready, it was time for us to learn what was required of the musher before our adventure could begin. As Edward would be driving the sled and acting as musher, it was important for him to learn how to control the dogs and the sled, while Debra's job as passenger was much easier, just sit back on the cushion and enjoy the ride, tucked securely under a nice, warm blanket.

The wooden sled has long runners, which run behind the basket where the passenger sits. The musher stands with one foot on each of the runners and holds onto the bar behind the passenger's head. A rubber mat glides along the snow between the runners that the musher can step on with one foot to slow the sled, or jump on with two feet to stop the sled. When climbing up a steep hill, the musher can either hold onto the bar and run up the hill along side the sled, or use "pedaling," which involves placing one foot on the runner and the other foot pushing along on the snow to help the dogs up the slope and not tire the team.



Getting Ready To Run

Dogsledding uses specific terminology to signal the dogs, and we needed to learn the terms used by Expédition WOLF. Calling out "hop, hop" would instruct the dogs to run, calling "slow" told them they needed to slow down, and calling "whoa" instructed them to stop.

Guide Sonia took the lead position driving a team of sled dogs, as each of the sleds in our group took their position behind her with their dog teams, and we were ready to begin our adventure. Adrenaline shot through our bodies as Sonia and each of the mushers called out "hop-hop" and the dogs sprang into action bounding over the snow-covered trail through the forest passing as Annette captured photographs of us racing by.



Musher Edward Running the Dogs

Photo by Annette Faille

Two of the most important things to remember when dogsledding are, to not to let the dog team's lines get loose, and to always maintain a good distance between dog sled teams. A mainline runs from the sled and each of the dogs is attached to the main line. If the lines get loose, the dogs will run into one another. There is definitely a skill learning when to slow the dogs down, and when to let them run. When traveling downhill, it requires slight to firm braking from the musher depending on the steepness of the hill, as well as the weight and strength of the driver, and the weight of the passenger. When traveling uphill, the musher must often run alongside the sled instead of "pedaling" dependent again on the weight of the driver and the passenger.



View from the Sled

Naturally, just as she does as a passenger riding in a car, (Debra) was a "back seat" driver on the sled, reminding (Edward) to watch the lines, to slow down, and to brake until we both adjusted to the rhythm of the dogs and the handling of the sled.

Little by little, our confidence and comfort level grew and we were able to continue to concentrate on the dogs, as well as enjoy the beauty around us, admiring the forest and the stark white birch trees and tall, dark, pines dramatic against the white snow.



Debra with the Dogs

Halfway into our ride, we stopped to give the dogs a break and the first thing that they did was to roll and play in the snow. We gave each of the dogs a soft pat and a little hug, and headed to the warm hut where a fire blazed and hot chocolate and maple-filled cookies awaited us.

Warmed and rested, we took our places back on the sled and signaled our team with a hop-hop, and once again, they raced with enthusiasm. We flew over the snow-covered trail, until alas, we were back where we started, and wished that we could head back out again, just like the dogs.



Musher Debra Resting the Dogs

At the end of our ride we thanked our dog team and gave them biscuits, and they rewarded us with showers of hugs and kisses as we posed for photographs. The Guides unhooked each of our dogs, and we lead them back to the kennel, with of course, more hugs and kisses, as we were reluctant to say goodbye to our dream team. We had always dreamed of dogsledding, and this memorable experience with Expédition WOLF truly lived up to our expectations.



After a Good Run it is Time for a Cookie Reward

For more information on dogsledding with **Expédition WOLF**, please visit the website:
www.ExpeditionWolf.com.



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