

Iditarod Dogs Subject of New Study

Study aims to find the reason some Iditarod dogs have low blood protein levels.

Posted: March 23, 2007, 5 a.m. EST

To study Iditarod sled dogs and their incredible stamina, an assistant professor at Oregon State University's College of Veterinary Medicine is collecting blood protein levels of sled dogs that participated in the annual Iditarod Trail Race in Alaska.

Professor Erica McKenzie is testing 100 dogs that have completed the 1,150-mile race. The research, funded by the American Kennel Club's Canine Health Foundation, focuses on measuring blood globulin levels in sled dogs participating in the Iditarod.

"There are several reasons why these dogs may have low blood globulin levels. One possibility is that globulins are being used to help meet the energy demands of exercise, which would be a somewhat novel finding from the perspective of traditional exercise physiology," McKenzie said.

The Iditarod race started March 4 and ended March 21. McKenzie traveled to the finish line in Nome, AK, for the on-the-spot data retrieval. By taking blood samples from 100 dogs, McKenzie will determine the prevalence of low blood globulin levels in dogs participating in the race.

McKenzie has worked with sled dogs for four years, including during the last Iditarod race where she was involved in studying antibodies to specific vaccines.

In addition to McKenzie, Manoj Pastey, an assistant professor in veterinary medicine, is helping with the research project. Pastey says his job will involve taking the samples McKenzie collects and measuring the globulins in the blood.

Globulin, produced by the body, contains antibodies that protect against bacterial and viral infectious diseases.

McKenzie said she expects this preliminary study will help define the prevalence of low blood globulin levels in racing sled dogs.

"It's important to know what's going on. How do the dogs endure training? How do they run for so long? Why don't humans do that? It's a mystery, but right now we're waiting for those answers and conclusions," Pastey said.