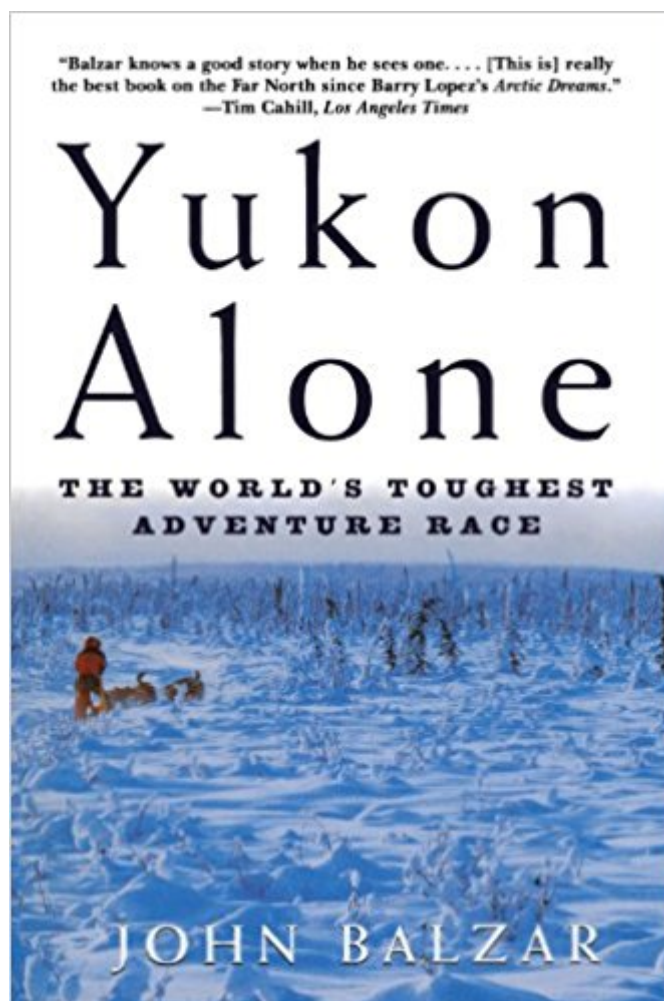


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Yukon Alone: The World's Toughest Adventure Race



Synopsis

The Yukon Quest International Sled Dog Race is one of the most challenging sporting events in the world. Every February, a handful of hardy souls spends over two weeks racing sleds pulled by fourteen dogs over 1,023 miles of frozen rivers, icy mountain passes, and spruce forests as big as entire states, facing temperatures that drop to forty degrees below zero on nights that are seventeen hours long. Why would anyone want to enter this race? John Balzar—who moved to Alaska and lived on the trail—treats us to a vivid account of the grueling race itself, offering an insightful look at the men and women who have moved to this rugged and beautiful place. Readers will also be fascinated by Balzar's account of what goes into the training and care of the majestic dogs who pull the sleds and whose courage, strength, and devotion make them the true heroes of this story.

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Customer Reviews

Twelve dogs, a sled, and your wits versus 1,023 miles of danger, snow, ice, and wilderness. The Yukon Quest is possibly the toughest race on earth. Held earlier, farther inland, and at a more northerly latitude than its famous cousin, the Iditarod, mushers on the Yukon Quest routinely experience temperatures dropping to 40 below zero, with 50 below not uncommon. Winning isn't everything; just finishing is an achievement in itself. John Balzar tells the story of the Quest, the dogs, and the mushers in *Yukon Alone*. Balzar, a roving correspondent for *The Los Angeles Times*, volunteered to act as the press liaison for the 1998 Yukon Quest. As such, he traveled the length of the trail, sharing cabin floors with resting mushers, shivering as temperatures dropped to 50 below,

and becoming somewhat delirious from sleep deprivation. Balzar does an excellent job of capturing the frozen feel of the race: The visibility worsens and now Bruce cannot see his leaders in the swirling merger of snowpack and wind. He searches anxiously for a glimpse of a wooden stake that will tell him that his dogs have not wandered off the trail, perhaps to the edge of a cliff. Bruce is not conscious of time or of distance, but only of the wind in his face. The dogs appear to be moving forward, but there is no way to measure progress. He also paints warm portraits of the mushers--men and women like Mike King, a 37-year-old biker with a Harley-Davidson patch on his sled bag and a tattoo of the Quest trail covering one third of his back; William Kleedehn, who finished seventh in the 1998 race despite his prosthetic leg; Aliy Zirkle, a rookie musher who recovered from losing a dog to finish the race. Balzar describes the Quest as "a mixture of celebration and ordeal

Enthusiastically communicating his love of Alaska's captivating landscape and his attachment to the rugged eccentrics who make it home, Balzar introduces readers to the rigors of the Yukon Quest International Sled Dog Race. The Quest, as it's natively called, is colder and more dangerous than the more renowned Iditarod. Covering 1023 miles and taking more than two weeks to complete, the Quest offers Balzar a vehicle for exploring the varied richness of Alaskan culture. Along the way, as he profiles trappers, bush pilots and others who come to test their mettle in the race, he returns to the question of what makes these people mush. He hitches along not only for the adventure of a lifetime but for a taste of an earlier, primordial state of being. Between profiles of the racers and others associated with the Quest, Balzar muses on what it means to pursue a wild life at the end of the 20th century. "The trapper and the vegan," he writes in a passage about fur trapping, "both live in constant awareness of animals and their suffering. The rest of us worry about getting rain spots on our suede jackets and complain because the people who package hamburger meat these days are always trying to make you buy a little more than you need." Throughout, Balzar remains somewhat of a detached observer. He enjoys the company of the mushers he meets, but he is always somewhat apart from them, too much a part of the civilized world even as he celebrates the ways people can, at least briefly, separate themselves from civilization and follow their own demons wherever they may lead. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A stirring adventure in dogsled racing; a magnificent portrayal of the faith and trust which dogs have in humans and the tests of endurance of the 38 men and women who participate in the Yukon

Quest International Race. Well written and detailed, difficult to put down.

this is one book you read and actually feel like you are there with them. great fun read.

I will be heading out as a dog handler on my first yukon quest in a few weeks and decided to read this book. I enjoyed the look at it from the outlook of someone outside the race itself. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in the sport or not. It's a good read and reinforces the connections between the dogs and the musher.

Reading "Yukon Alone" gave me the hint of the thrill of mushing across a frozen landscape that I could never hope to experience in my home state. Balzar's talent in describing the scenery gave me goosebumps. His characters were true to life. The best book I have read in years.

A great book that gives good insight into the Yukon Quest, parts of the trail, different mushers and the organization

For a used book, it was in excellent condition. It was also delivered in days after ordering. Great Service!

I've seen the two and one star reviews, and although I've never been west of Kansas City and have absolutely no experience behind a dog sled, I have read a lot and written some myself. I agree with the other reviewers who note the author injecting himself into the story too much. I can't comment about the accuracy of his sledding experience, so I'll defer to those in the know. I would point out that the editing left something to be desired: reluctant for reluctant, breach of contract instead of breach of contract and let along instead of let alone. I'm not sure where to place the blame for those errors, but they were jarring. I was more interested in the competitors than I was the author, but the split was about 50-50. At least the book introduced me to this event. If for no other reason I give it two stars for that.

John Balzar is a roving correspondent for the LA Times and as such won the Scripps Howard Foundation Prize for human interest stories. Even so he had an enormously difficult task facing him in writing about the Yukon Quest, the longest, loneliest and most dangerous arctic race of them all. The true measure of a book like this is how well the author holds up as a companion, introducing

people to a world and to people totally outside their experience."To spend time with sleigh dogs, and the men and women who dedicate their lives to them is to witness a relationship so primary and so ineffable that the temptation is to reduce oneself to murmurs and tears. John Balzar fights this temptation and tells this story of the Far North and of the unbelievable characters he found there gracefully and with all the humor, honor and slack jawed wonder it deserves." - Pam HoustonHis book becomes an outstanding tale of adventure, one of the books which, hard to put down, will be reread many times, being a skilled and enormously well written eyewitness narrative of a tale of wild adventure in what is probably the most remote and inhospitable land on earth."...a wholly true tale that's more suspenseful, riveting and memorable than any fiction." -David PetersenAnd yet Balzar avoids the dreamy metaphors that spoil most writing about the North, displaying a gritty reality in his writing as he describes the race, the country, the incredible characters who live on the edge of desperation to compete in this race, and above all the real athletes, the dogs.As Jeff Greenwald said about a similar book, HONEST DOGS by Brian O'Donoghue (a racer who's the only dog driver to finish both the Iditarod and the Yukon Quest by coming in last} "I'd love to try this myself." and "This guy's out of his damn mind."With this book, as O'Donoghue once told me, you can relive the race without the pain.Dawson Gratrix

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