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Weather cooperated to make Tamworth Sled Dog Race a success

By JOHN KOZIOL Union Leader Correspondent Mar 3, 2019 Updated Mar 4, 2019



Musher Rob Worden heads his team across the ice of Chocorua Lake during the annual sled dog races hosted by the Tamworth Outing Club and the New England Sled Dog Club over the weekend.

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TAMWORTH — The oldest sprint dog-sled race in the U.S., under the auspices of one of the oldest sled dog clubs in the world, made a successful return this past weekend to the shores and frozen surface of Chocorua Lake.

Hosted annually by the Tamworth Outing Club, which was founded in 1935, and overseen by the New England Sled Dog Club, the first Tamworth Sled Dog Race took place in 1937. Conditions permitting, it has been held every year since.

Sled-dog racing has deep roots in Tamworth. In 1924, the sled dog club was organized in the Wonalancet section of the town. Wonalancet Farm was the home of Arthur Walden, who bred the first Chinook dogs, thereby creating the sport of sled dog racing in the region.

The club held its first race in 1925 in Newport. In 1929, the club brought racing to Laconia, where the Lakes Region Sled Dog Club annually manages The World Championship Sled Dog Derby.

The derby was scheduled to run Feb 15-17, but was cancelled this year due to the poor quality of snow and a general lack of it. Those conditions delayed the Tamworth race from late January to this Saturday and Sunday. The race had to be cancelled in 2018.

Mushers from 28 teams ranging in age from 5 to 60 and hailing from as far away as Canada and New York competed in the one-dog, two-dog, four-dog, six-dog and eight-dog races over courses that varied from four miles to ten miles.

Most of the racers had “eurohounds and short-hair pointers” in their teams, said Gretchen Karlson, explaining that the dogs are bred for speed, not endurance.

Karlson, the race’s chief judge, said she has been coming to the Tamworth Sled Dog Race since 1978 and was thrilled to be back again and have weather that permitted racing.

Among the racers on Lake Chocorua on Sunday afternoon was Isabella Cottrell, 12, of Gilmanton, who bested Rylee Turner, 10, of Jay, Maine, to win the three-dog junior title.

The racers said the course was in great shape and that it made for exciting racing, as Cottrell edged out Turner by a cumulative four seconds.

“We couldn’t have asked for two better days,” Anne Chant of the Chocorua Outing Club said in her remarks before the awards ceremony.

Karlson replied that the race was fortunate to have such a good partner in the Chocorua Outing Club, adding that the Tamworth race was “one of the races where we’ve had so much support.”



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Franklin boat bash wraps up Winter Carnival