

John Beargrease Mid-Distance Route

with estimated times and checkpoint directions

Leg 1 - Start to Billy's

6.4 miles

The race starts in the stadium at Ordean School, loops around the fields (the corner right after the start will be much more gentle this year), crosses Superior Street to climb approximately 350 vertical feet in the next mile as it crosses through Northland County Club, before hooking up with snowmobile trails at the edge of town just off Martin Road. There are nine road crossings in this shortest section of trail. The fastest times for this leg will be just over 50 minutes (8 mph), while the median time will typically be just under 1 hour for a speed of 6.5 mph.

Checkpoint 1 - Billy's Bar

This checkpoint is at the intersection of Tischer Rd and Jean Duluth, 3 miles north of Glenwood. The vast majority of mushers go straight through Billy's and only stop here if they need to fix something.

Leg 2- Billy's to Highway 2

35.3 miles

The route from Billy's to Highway 2 follows the North Shore State Snowmobile Trail (The State Trail). After a handful of road crossings in the first several miles, this leg quickly develops the wilderness feel that will dominate for the remainder of the race.

The fastest time up bound for this leg last race was 2:53, while the median was 3:50, for speeds of 12.2 mph and 9.1 mph respectively. 2006 saw times about 5 minutes slower.

Since most mushers treat the run to Highway 2 as a single 42 mile leg, we'll also look at these times. The fastest time in 2008 was 3:48 (11 mph), and the median was 4:45 (8.7 mph).

Checkpoint 2 - Highway 2 (Two Harbors)

The first checkpoint a significant number of teams will stop at is located in a Gravel Pit 8 miles north on Highway 2 from Highway 61 in Two Harbors. This checkpoint gets quite busy, as the teams have yet to spread out as they will later in the race, and it serves as a stopping point for the 50 teams of the Mid Distance race as well as the 30 in the Marathon. The trucks for the Marathon Teams will be spread out over the lower part of the pit, while the Mid Distance teams will be corralled and at a distance from their trucks.

The first Mid Distance teams can be expected to arrive around 5:00 pm. Most everyone should be in by 8:00pm or so. Teams will generally rest 3 to 5 hours (roughly half the 8 to 9.5 hours of total rest they must take – the number for each musher depends on when they start), though every year there are a few that leave after a snack with the idea of taking a longer rest at Finland. This means significant numbers of teams will begin to leave between 8:00 and 9:00pm, with a few hangers on leaving in the early morning hours of Monday.

Leg 3 - Highway 2 to Finland

37.7 miles

The route continues to follow the State Trail to the northeast, to the town of Finland.

The fastest teams generally run this leg in 3:15, with a median of 4 hours, for speeds of 12 and 9.4 mph respectively, and some teams taking upwards of 6 hours for the leg.

Checkpoint 3 - Finland

The town of Finland can be reached by traveling 6.2 miles north on Minnesota Highway 1 from its intersection with Highway 61 at Illgen City. The checkpoint is approximately 1 mile east of town on CR-7 in the parking area on the south side of the road. This is the final checkpoint for the Mid-Distance teams, and most will try to leave the Checkpoint the second they have accumulated their required rest.

A few teams that rest only briefly in Two Harbors with the idea of taking a longer rest in Finland may arrive shortly after Midnight, while the main group will arrive between 1:30 and 3:30 am. There will be teams in Finland at least until mid-morning on Monday.

Leg 4 – Finland to Tofte

32.3 miles

From Finland, The State Trail continues on and joins up with the unplowed six hundred road, up the notorious Heartbreak Hill before, some 28 miles after leaving Finland, turning down a spur trail to the finish line at the town of Tofte.

The fastest teams will run the leg at 12 mph in 2:45 or so, with the median team almost an hour slower at a little under 9mph.

Finish - Tofte

The Race ends just to the West of the AmericInn in Tofte, Just uphill from the Holiday station right on Highway 61.

The winner will likely arrive around 9:00am, the main group mid to late morning, and the red lantern finisher coming across the line in the late afternoon.

A word about mileage.

It seems that over time, various sled dog races have used a rather loose interpretation of the mile. Advertised mileages are frequently 15-20% greater than actual. The Iditarod bills itself as an 1150 mile race. The gps tracking devices on the sleds logged the actual distance as 908 miles. The Beargrease has been no exception. Our Mid-Distance race is actually very close to 112 miles rather than the "official" length of 134 miles, or 400 in round numbers. We found this all quite confusing as we would try to calculate when mushers could be expected to be at certain road crossings or in to checkpoints. What mileage should the calculations be based on? It was all to confusing trying to keep track of "official" mileage versus "real" mileage. So for 2009 on, the Beargrease is describing the trail as accurately as we can measure it. In our case, that means we have run the trail with a GPS and taken an exact measurement.