

Labrador Husky -Very artistic, in general capricious and nervous, more difficult to live with than the Greenlanders. They will obey only the strongest law. Feeble or timid dogs ought to be watched closely because they will be killed sooner or later by the others.

Greenland Husky -Good dogs, rough and sober. Family spirit very well developed. Arrange their affairs amongst themselves and require less supervision than the Labradors.

Why dogs as well as machines? Experience over the years has highlighted the dog's superior performance in mountainous areas. They are also found to be safer on sea ice and crevassed country. The general idea being that man can still save himself if the dog team disappears in front of him. In a machine, like a skidoo, the driver is still likely to be inside if it hurtles down a hidden crevasse. A sledge driver can be 10 to 15 metres back from the lead dog and this gives him more time to react to save himself and the team.

In fairness I must add that the last dog team to be lost in this manner by an Australian expedition was on Mawson's ill fated 1912 journey. On that occasion a driver, Ninnis, and an entire team were lost.

Many of the mountainous peninsula areas of Antarctica have been explored with only the use of dog teams. Whilst they are a lot slower and not able to carry as great a load as a skidoo (freight carrying motor toboggan), a team of 9 dogs can haul a load of 1,000 lbs and be fully self-contained for 40 days.

In an emergency along the coastal areas, food is available for the dogs in the form of seal meat. As yet, none of the multi nationals have got as far as placing service stations on strategic ice floes. Unlike machines, dog teams don't break down. If one is injured then a replacement is available. Many of the skidoos have had to be rescued by a dog team. I'm told that the fact that they start very easily in the morning is also a tremendous plus, whereas many of the vehicles are affected adversely by the temperatures!

In a last resort the dogs themselves are edible. A rather gruesome observation perhaps, but as pointed out -an extreme last resort. Again, the last time this was done was on Mawson's 1912 expedition. The only survivor was Mawson himself and his condition when rescued was appalling. His partner, Xavier Mertz, a Swiss ski champion, had died some days before. It wasn't until the 1970s that it was realised that both men had in fact poisoned themselves by eating the dog's liver.

Like that of the polar bear, a dog's liver is high in vitamin A and too much in a human diet is fatal.

Under pressure from environmentalists the dogs' diet these days is predominantly a manufactured pemmican meat bar. Seal meat is still used to supplement the diet, but very few are killed especially for the dogs. For liquid, dogs snatch up snow as they run, but care has to be taken that the snow around a campsite is not too high in salt content. This is as bad for dogs as it is for humans.

The nature of the dogs is such that a firm hand is required in training, but in order to mould a good team this must be tempered by an affectionate relationship with each dog. Jealousy can be caused by the favouring of one dog over others and may result in that dog being killed. Dog fights are not uncommon but must be nipped in the bud quickly as they can get out of hand. There is usually a 'king' dog and it is considered wiser to keep this dog back closer to the sledge. This keeps the other dogs up front on the move. Such a dog placed in the lead can cause utter confusion if he takes it into his head to turn around and discipline one of the others. Bitches are generally considered to make the better leaders.

Over disciplining can be as bad as poor training and, as with normal obedience work, commands must be firm and clear. Because these dogs are expected to work for many different drivers instruction is given in the commands used and how they are pronounced. Individuals are discouraged from using additional commands so as to avoid confusing the dogs.

Aspiring drivers are warned that they must not allow a team to slow down or stop for calls of nature. The dogs quickly learn to 'go' on the run. The reason being that they are clever enough to learn rests can be had by the use of imaginary telegraph poles dotted all along the trail.

After some initial training on its own, a young dog is usually introduced into a team alongside an older dog. To avoid any unnecessary strain which may cause arthritis later on, dogs must be between 9 and 12 months before being harnessed to a light load, and 12 to 15 months before being asked to do any heavy work.

Puppies are permitted to wander around the base until they are about 4 to 5 months old, or until they start taking a too active interest in the penguins! Adult dogs are only released under supervision and all are exercised regularly in between field trips.

"The ideal dog should roughly conform with the following dimensions:

Weight 43 kg. Length 120 cm. Shoulder height 62 cm, width 30 cm. Hip height 52 cm, width 22 cm.

This type of dog is ideal for pulling loads over long distances. The dogs used in North America tend to be taller, leaner dogs capable of pulling light loads quickly in soft snow."

Note the measurement across the width of the shoulders and hips. It would be interesting to come up with similar measurements for some of the other working breeds.

Dogs are almost adult weight at 6 months and continue to gain 1 to 1 1/2 kgs per week, full adult weight being attained at 8 months. The feet are large and well padded. I was told that they could be likened to the size of half a tennis ball.

The coat is all important. Temperatures at Mawson range from -40C in the winter to + 5C in the summer. It can be colder inland. As well, it is quite common for a 20 degree variation in the one day.

Apart from pens for the whelping or in-season bitch, no kenneling is provided. Dogs are tethered at intervals to a long length of chain which is anchored at both ends. Apart from the impossibility of carting kennels in the field one must remember that these dogs are entirely reliant on the protection afforded by their coats to survive.

There appear to be two types of coats and both are acceptable. They are described as being:

"A thick felty coat with short guard hairs or a coat with long guard hairs and a short insulating felt below. The shiny guard hairs protect the coat from being saturated by soft snow in a blizzard."

Although described as 'long' in the above description, from the photos it is apparent that the coat is not as long as some of the Spitz breeds we see in the ring today. The felty undercoat and density of the coat are all important.

Occasionally a dog with a long shaggy coat appears and such dogs are not used in the breeding programme - if they are kept at all.

Such coats tend to ice up especially when the weather gets warmer! This is not really such a contradiction in terms that it may appear at first. At very cold temperatures snow is dry and not unlike sand -for instance, you can't make snowballs from it since it won't stick together. Thus, contrary perhaps to expectation, the colder it is the less likelihood there is of a dog's coat freezing over, because it is easy for the dog to shake off any wind crust that forms.

The problems arise when things warm up - 10C to zero degrees (ie approaching the melting point of ice). A shaggy or open-coated dog tends to ice up in the 'wet' snow and the dog either jingles with hundreds of ice blocks attached to his coat or else appears to be armour plated. Experience at Mawson with such a coated dog, "Dizzy" by name, showed that upward of 20 lbs of ice could be formed. Obviously very uncomfortable for the animal and since "Dizzy" showed a marked objection to being held down whilst the ice was belted off with a hammer, the only alternative was to keep the coat clipped (in the manual the word used is 'mowed').

regard is also on record, and it seems that the original dogs must have carried the genes for this incorrect coat. Either that or a dog with a long shaggy coat was amongst the original team. A cable from that expedition was sent to Paris for advice as to how to deal with a coat which was carrying ice 7" thick. Attempts to pull it off resulted in ripping out the skin.

It is pertinent to record that the introduction of the long coated St Bernard in the Alps of Switzerland was found to be unsatisfactory for the same reason. In that area it would be reasonable to assume that 'wet' snow would be more prolific.

Short and bandy legged dogs also appear from time to time but they are unsuitable for the task in hand.

"The ideal is a well proportioned dog able to travel reasonably well in deep soft snow should it occur and also be sturdy enough to pull heavy loads in rough country without tiring."

Colours and combinations of colours are many and varied. Brown, brindle, blotchy, white and black are all quite common.

Some effort is made to train the dogs to return to base but they cannot be relied upon to have a well developed 'homing instinct'. Unless carefully watched, teams will turn towards easier routes or away from prevailing conditions, even if it means taking the party straight out to sea. For these reasons it is unwise to travel in bad weather.

Whilst the dog's foot is the heaviest pressure applied to the ground and may give it some warning of unstableness (skis on driver and sledge distributing the weight more evenly) this cannot be relied upon. Nevertheless the manual advises:

"Watch dogs in bad ground, if they start tip-toeing or acting frightened - do likewise". The adage 'man's best friend' has certainly been proven in the Antarctic. As well as the valuable work they do the dogs can also provide a form of social therapy. The strains and stresses on some men, living in such isolation for a period of time, has been found to be lessened if they become interested in the dogs.

Expeditioners can become very attached to these animals and countless requests for permission to bring individual dogs home have been refused.

The only ANARE dogs to come back to Australia were a pair which went to Adelaide zoo in the '70s. It is known that a litter was bred and the dogs went to the Bacchus Marsh Lion Park, but what happened after that has not been

followed up. One gains the impression of a sturdy well-boned working dog, strong in character and body, just above medium size and superbly suited to the Antarctic environment.

"The pleasures gained from working with dogs, and the great affection they invariably display, make driving of a well disciplined team an experience never forgotten. Every person who has the privilege to drive dogs in the Antarctic speaks highly and rather romantically of the experience."

The Antarctic Division is well aware of the importation of the Alaskan Malamute and the Siberian Husky into Australia. It may well be that the future will see some of their offspring join the Anare dogs.

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That the French expedition of 1950 had problems in this

