

OUTDOORS

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Local mushers gear up for racing season

BY EMILY GEDDE
Staff Writer

As temperatures drop, preparations for the upcoming sled dog racing season heat up. Three mushers from Ray are taking advantage of the snow on the ground to train their teams for the first race of the season in two weeks.

Amanda Vogel and Ryan Anderson said they will both compete in the Gichigami Express Sled Dog Race in Cook County Jan. 4 and will use it as more of a training run to kick off the 2014 season.

Musher Keith Aili is also expected to participate in the race, however, The Journal was unable to reach him for comment.

The second-annual Gichigami Express Sled Dog Race is scheduled to start in Grand Portage and take mushers up the Gunflint Trail the first day. The second day's stage is from Trail Center to Devil Track Landing near Grand Marais, and the third and



Keith Aili of Ray runs the final day of last year's Gichigami Express race in Cook County.

final leg of the race is from Devil Track back to Grand Portage.

"The terrain is very hilly," said Anderson of the route. "We're going there to have fun more than anything."

Anderson took fifth in last year's event and said because the race is set up in a stage format — with mushers completing set distances each day — it is a little different than what he personally enjoys.

Vogel said she agreed.

"Races like Gichi are not what us locals here train for," said the musher who took 16th place in last season's event. "It's fun, though, to do a different format."

Aili, who came back to the sport of sled dog racing last year after a seven-year hiatus, took third place in the 2013 Gichigami Express — the first race since his break.

Anderson injured a dog during the 2013 Gichigami race and said he plans to



FILE PHOTOS

Amanda Vogel and her team of 12 dogs finished 16th in the 2013 Gichigami race.

cross the finish line with 12 healthy dogs.

"I'm going to run my team with that in mind," he said. "When you injure dogs you're using for the season at the first race, that really doesn't help. I'm not going there to win it. Whatever I get, I get."

Anderson, who has several wins and records under his belt, said he expects to have a good team this year, as all the dogs on the team have some racing experience.

"I enjoy racing and this year, I'm not going to put much pressure on myself or

the dogs," he said. "I need to make some money, but I'm focusing on other things rather than trying to win, it takes the fun out of it."

Right after the Gichigami Express, Anderson says he plans to compete in the more localized Voyageurs Classic Sled Dog Race Jan. 10 and 11 headquartered at the Northome School.

"I like supporting the local races," he said.

Vogel is concentrating her goal for the upcoming season on passing a 300-mile race qualifier for the Iditarod

Trail Sled Dog Race, an annual long-distance sled dog race run from Anchorage to Nome, AK.

"My main goal is to finish my last qualifier," she said. "That is what I would like to see happen this year."

The musher said she's had some turnover in her team, but still has most of her veteran dogs to compete. She hasn't yet decided in which of the races she'll participate.

"It's going to be a very interesting year," she said. "I'm looking forward to the season."

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