

# OUTDOORS

## CALL OF THE WILD

The Journal welcomes ideas for stories about people in our community who have a unique hunting, fishing or outdoors tale.  
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PHOTO BY JESSICA SHOLD OF RIVERS' CROSS PHOTOGRAPHY

Photographer Jessica Shold of Rivers' Cross Photography shot this photo of Keith Aili and his team during this week's John Beargrease Sled Dog Marathon. Aili took second place in the event.

# Aili takes second in Beargrease

BY EMILY GEDDE  
Staff Writer

In all the John Beargrease Sled Dog Marathon races Keith Aili has competed, this year's was the most challenging. Still, the Ray musher conquered Mother Nature's fierce winds and bitter temperatures to take second place in the event Wednesday. "I didn't know the wind could be that strong for that long of a period of time," an exhausted Aili told The Journal on his way home Thursday. The 2006 Beargrease champion finished the 374-mile race about two hours behind defending champion, Nathan Schroeder of Chisholm. Aili also took second place in last year's event after a six-year hiatus from sled dog racing. The race started in Duluth on Sunday afternoon and took teams up the Gunflint Trail and back. Temperatures were around 20 below zero with

wind chills at 50 below zero at times on the North Shore Monday morning. "I'm lucky I don't get as cold as some people," Aili said. "There were some mushers who were literally freezing." Aili took an early lead Monday, but later in the day, slow trails dropped him to second place where he stayed the rest of the race. "There was plenty of speed in my team to win, but snow conditions slowed the trail down," he said. "Nathan had more power than me." Once he realized catching Schroeder wasn't likely, Aili said he "slacked off" to preserve the team for its next race. At the finish line, Aili ended the race with nine of the 14 dogs he started with. "They're all OK, but they had some sore wrists," he said of the five dogs he dropped along the route. "Once their wrists get sore, I always drop them right away." Because the Bear-

grease trial has more hills and low ditches than other races, Aili said dogs getting frostbite is a major concern. In fact, the fear of frostbite may have played a role in three of the 10 marathon teams deciding to drop out, or scratch, from the race, including musher Amanda Vogel. "It was a really hard decision," Vogel, also of Ray, told The Journal Thursday. "I wanted it, I needed it, I had a lot riding on it, but I couldn't get myself to do it to the dogs." Vogel was using the Beargrease as a qualifying race for the Iditarod Great Sled Race in Alaska. Now, she says she'll have to explore other race options. "It's unfortunate," she said of having to scratch from the Beargrease Monday morning. "It was a really tough call to make." But, in the end, she said her four-legged teammates come first. She said her dogs experienced frostbite and other injuries that led

her to make the decision. While athletes are prone to injuries, she said the race wasn't worth the risk to her dogs. "I would have had to drop three of my four best leaders," she said. "It just wasn't worth it to me." Still Vogel made the best of the experience. "As ferocious as the wind and weather was, it was beautiful," she said. "Cold, but beautiful." Aili said overall, he is happy with second place. "It was a challenge just to finish this year's race, so I'm happy," he said. The musher said he plans to get home and let he and his team recover before deciding the next race. "I have to get them home and look at their attitudes to see if they recover properly," Aili said, adding the cold toll the Beargrease took on the dogs goes right along with Borderland's harsher-than-normal winter. "You know it's a bad winter when mushers are complaining."

## WSI increases in Borderland

### JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

The winter severity index for the International Falls area was 80 on Wednesday, reports Larry Petersen, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources area wildlife manager. The WSI was 41 last year at this date, and 16 two years ago. The average WSI for this date is about 51. The harshest winter in Borderland in the mid-1990s had an index of 102 on this date, states Petersen. The snow depth is around 18-24 inches in the Interna-

tional Falls vicinity, he said. Deeper snow can be found south and east of here. The winter severity index is a standardized number the DNR uses when considering impacts of the winter on deer. It is calculated using temperature and snow depth in the period from Nov. 1 through April 30 or whenever winter ends. Every day the daily low temperature is zero or below is one point, and every day the snow depth is 15 inches or deeper in an open aspen woods is one point. The points are added each week until winter ends.

## TRAIL, ICE CONDITION REPORTS

### IVSC

The International Voyageur Snowmobile Club posted on Thursday the following report at its website at <http://www.ridetheborder.com/trail-report.html>. "Things haven't changed much in the last week, the weather is still cold and the trails are still awesome. Our two shelters were just stocked with wood for all to enjoy. Right now we're gearing up for our annual hot dog roast on Feb. 8th and the radar run on the 15th. Hope to see you there. Again enjoy the trails and be safe."

### VNP

The Rainy Lake Visitor Center is now open Wednesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. During business hours, the visitor center offers maps, information, hot cocoa, snowshoe loans, and cross-country ski rentals. All snowmobile trails in the park are open and staked. Snowmobile trails are in good condition with some drifting on larger lake surfaces. The snowmobile speed limit within the park is 45 mph on frozen lake surfaces and 25 mph on all overland portages. Speed limit signs are posted at trailheads and overland portages. The Rainy Lake Ice Road is open around Dryweed Island and up to Dove Bay. The Kabetogama Lake Ice Road is open from the Kabetogama Lake boat launch to the Ash River boat launch. To reduce hazards to snowmobile users, all ice blocks are to be immediately chopped, submerged, or hauled to land. Placement of equipment or any type of structure must be more than 50 feet off the edge of all ice roads and 50 feet off the centerline of all snowmobile trails. Written authorization from the park is required

for individuals to plow more than 300 feet on any lake surfaces within the park. All snowshoe trails are open. Echo Bay, Black Bay, and Tilson Connector ski trails are all open, packed, and tracked. However, the back loop of the Pine Trail is closed due to flooding until the trail can be repaired. Signs mark where the trail is closed. Weekly winter trail conditions reports are available at [www.nps.gov/voya](http://www.nps.gov/voya).  
**Snowmobile Trails**  
■ International Falls to Kettle Falls (Purple Trail) – open and staked  
■ Rainy Lake/Black Bay to Kabetogama Lake to Ash River (Green Trail) – open and staked  
■ Ash River to Crane Lake (Green Trail) – open and staked  
■ Chain of Lakes (Dashed Black Trail) – open and staked  
■ Ash River to Kettle Falls (Yellow Trail) – open and staked  
■ East Namakan Lake to Sand Point Lake (Blue Trail) – open and staked  
**Ice roads**  
■ Rainy Lake Ice Road – open around Dryweed Island and to Dove Bay  
■ Kabetogama Lake Ice Road – open  
**Ski trails**  
■ Echo Bay Ski Trail – open, packed, and tracked  
■ Black Bay Ski Trail – open, packed, and tracked, the back loop of the Pine Trail is closed  
■ Tilson Connector Trail – open, packed, and tracked  
■ KabAsh Trail – open  
**Snowshoe trails**  
■ Black Bay Beaver Pond Trail – open  
■ Blind Ash Bay Trail – open  
■ Oberholtzer Trail – open and packed  
■ Sullivan Bay Trail – open and packed

This is Northwoods Eating

Breakfast Specials  
Mon.-Sat. \$6.29 • Sunday \$7.29

Mon.	Big Moose Skillet with hashbrowns
Tues.	Breakfast Sandwich with hashbrowns
Wed.	French Toast w/eggs & sausage or bacon
Thurs.	Blueberry Pancakes w/eggs & sausage or bacon
Fri.	Biscuits & Gravy w/eggs & hashbrowns
Sat.	Cinnamon Swirl French Toast with ham & eggs
Sun.	Blueberry Cream Cheese Crepes with eggs & ham

Dinner Specials

Mon.	Half Chicken Dinner	\$10.99
Tues.	Full Rack of BBQ Ribs	\$17.99
Wed.	Pan Fried Walleye	\$14.99
Thurs.	Mozzarella Girasole w/Marinara Sauce	\$10.99
Fri.	Fishermen's Catch	\$16.99
Sat.	Rib Eye Steak	\$17.99
Sun.	Chicken Kiev	\$11.99

Dinners include choice of potato & salad. Choice of soup for \$1.00 Canadian Money at par!

Breakfast • Lunch • Dinner

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