

# *Dizzy*

I was out with a 12 dog team, trying to get at least 40 miles on them. We'd been out to the inlet and Beach Lake, all around the Fort Richardson trails, back to the main trails, and out to Clunie Lake. I was adding miles any place I could, so we were making laps around every lake we came to. We went around Beach Lake (at least a mile there), Dee Lake (another 1/2 mile), Clunie Lake (maybe 2 miles?), and every other puddle we came to.

I had Coho and Pelly in lead. Little red Coho could usually be counted on to do a good job, and I frequently relied on her. Pelly did a fine job of keeping the line tight, and seemed to know gee and haw, but had no confidence if her partner didn't back her up. I often put her up front with a stronger leader, and she seemed to be gaining skill.

Coming off the 14 mile loop, I hawed the dogs off the trail and onto a small lake for one more little lap. We sailed around the lake, and I called out gee to regain the main trail. Coho ignored me completely. Pelly twitched to the right, then decided her co-leader must know something she didn't, and kept on rolling.

I braked, called the command again. No response. Stomping in the hook, I hopped off the sled to remind the girls what 'gee' meant. I couldn't get a good hook set in the hard frozen lake, and I knew it would only hold if the dogs cooperated. They didn't.

The dogs were fit, motivated, and happy to be running. They didn't care where we ran. They just wanted to go. So of course, the snow hook popped almost immediately, and I had to catch the sled as it surged by. Three more attempts, and each time the sled lurched forward as the hook popped and the dogs pushed on.

By now we had passed the trail we were aiming for. It's never a good idea to let your leaders ignore you, but we were yards from the shore and any possible way to hold the team. OK, I sighed, around the lake again.

I set up for our exit early, slowing the team and calling the command. Nothing. I stomped the hook, it popped, I caught the sled. I stood on the brake and chastised my leaders. I talked to my swing dogs, to see if they could influence our direction. Nothing. Just like before, we slowly jerked on by the trail we

needed until the only way forward was to go around again. Crap, I thought. I might be stuck on this lake forever, making lap after lap.

Third try. I called out gee. Pelly twitched, Coho put her head down and kept on shouldering forward. By now I knew I was never going to be able to get off the sled to lead them over. I stopped the team with the brake, and hopped the heavily loaded sled over crabwise. For each lurch sideways toward the shore, we went forward another team length.

Finally, I had the sled crouching near the deeper snow cover on the bank of the lake. I set a sort of crunchy hook, tipped the sled over onto it hoping it would hold, and went to the front of the team.

As I led the team off the lake and towards the main trail, Coho looked up at me with a sparkle in her eyes. I am sure she was laughing at me. After loop-the-looping all over the woods, I am not sure if she was letting me know she was tired of it, or just having a good joke at my expense.

I went home that night and sharpened my snow hook to a fine point.