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FRIDAY, MARCH 24, 2006

Congratulations, Wilco

Date: March 24

Mileage: 31.3

March mileage: 247.2

Temperature upon departure: 34

On the iPod: "Waiting for Something" ~ Sense Field

This is Wilco van den Akker, and he's someone you've never heard of. Google his name, and all you'll see is references to a site



called [Sleepmonsters](#) and a bunch of stuff supposedly in Dutch. But don't be fooled by his obscurity. This guy is one hardcore adventure racer.

This morning, Wilco won the 1,110-mile [Iditarod Invitational](#) march to Nome in something just shy of 27 days. He's one of only two people who attempted to finish the race past the 350-mile mark, after nearly two dozen dropped out. He's spent nearly a month hiking through this godforsaken Alaska wilderness, watching dogsledder after dogsledder go by - and seeing few other signs of civilization. When he finally arrived in Nome, at 12:04 this morning, the only people there to greet him were two local police officers - who were probably more

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"Ghost Trails" is a sometimes joyful, often harrowing ride through my experiences in the 2008 Iditarod Trail Invitational, and the events that inspired it.

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concerned about the motivations of this punch-drunk, frozen stranger stumbling into town in the middle of the night than they were interested in greeting the man who quietly won the "other" race to Nome.

I continue to be amazed just how little attention this race receives, even locally, when this has got to be one of the toughest - if not the toughest ultramarathon in the world. In the modern world, we like our races bigger, badder, faster, longer. We like to watch athletes push the extreme until there's nowhere to go but over the edge. These guys have reached the edge. It really doesn't get a whole lot harder. So why the disinterest? A local columnist made a good point about it recently:

"And we, who sleep in warm beds almost every night, think the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race is a spectacular challenge," [Craig Medred](#) wrote in the Anchorage Daily News. "That would make the Invitational a truly unbelievable event. Maybe that's why it gets so little attention."

So I just wanted to give a shout out to Wilco, even though he's a runner in a race I wanted to see go to the cyclists. But all the cyclists quit. And Wilco didn't. That's saying something.

Speaking of laboring in obscurity, I also want to encourage anyone who has a soft spot in their heart for acoustic punk rock to check out [Hamell on Trial](#). I interviewed this guy today and he's hilarious. Imagine what would happen if the Dead Milkmen sold their bitchin Camero and tried to raise a toddler (a child who happens to feel righteous indignation against the current administration) - and you have Mr. Hamell. His show should be hours of fun.

POSTED BY JILL AT 11:42 PM 

8 COMMENTS:

 [miss king](#) said...

That man is amazing.

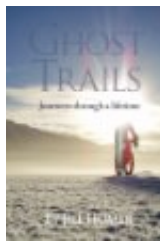
5:00 PM


 [Tom Stormcrowe](#) said...

Now that is an IRON MAN!

7:13 PM

 [Mike](#) said...



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CrAZY mAn!
Cool blog.
"Hey Mikey! He likes it!"

1:29 AM

e filtersweep said...

Alaska seems to draw all sorts of "characters" :)

10:03 AM

e Shawn Kielty said...

Roger that Wilco dude. -- wow. Purely an animal.

The problem with walking is that it's too slow. It's at the pace of a book, you know -- "Stranger in the Forest -- On foot across Borneo" (you might like that) or "Desert Solitaire" (no doubt you've read that). We can read about that later.

That same four hundred miles in Nascar takes -- what just 20 commercials. We want our stuff big, you bet, but we'd prefer it now. Not in twenty seven days. We want to vote the losers off the island, rather than wait to see if they are really strong enough, and watch the adventure weekly from an easy chair. And follow it with a dose of "your fired."

It is a truly amazing feat -- the trip that Wilco made.

8:27 PM

Anonymous said...

Hi there from boring holland. Thanx for your enthousiasm about this race. It really is something else isn't it? If you like you can check Wilco's site:

www.planetbyfoot.nl

We also kept a diary during his race with the help of a satellitophone he kept with him. Pics are also available. I know I know...lot of dutch language crap but still.....greetz from holland :-)

Jeroen

12:40 PM

e Shawn Kielty said...

"Ultraloper" is such a great word. even when spoken in



MY IDITAROD STORY

One: Knik to Skwentna

Two: Skwentna to Puntilla

Three: Rainy Pass

Four: Rohn

Five: Rohn to Farewell Burn

Six: Farewell Burn to Nikolai

Seven: Ghost trail to McGrath

Iditarod Trail Invitational

[My NPR Iditarod blog](#)

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[Step away from the cereal](#)

[Cycling as a cure-all](#)

[I hurt](#)

[Signs of Spring](#)

English.

8:54 PM

 unique_stephen said...

Wow, thanks. I'm sitting [here](#) in my office in Sydney, Australia. About as far from [ice and snow](#) as can be. Reading your wintery bike riding posts I cant help but to be aware of just how big and different the world is and how many ways there are to live a life.

10:53 PM

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[Susinta 2007 Pt.3](#)

[Susinta 2007 Pt.4](#)

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[Best 24 ever](#)

[Golden Circle](#)

SOME OF MY BETTER POSTS

Dear Canada: Fear me
Oh, the places we'll ride
Smells like spring
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Beyond dead ends
First day of spring
Juneau multisport
Ode to Pugsley
Camping in January
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10 tips for snow cycling
Pugsley's first sun ride
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The Precedent
Did Juneau
Work too hard
Of Dogs and Cyclists
Fundamentals of Basketball
Perserverance
User

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Bicycles and icicles
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My Chain Driven Ride
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CYCLISTS

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