

Structure

Our working days are structured through the year to allow sufficient time for what we call 'everyday' tasks, 'weekly' tasks and day-specific tasks. All of these run in conjunction with other activities which are either seasonal (like safaris and quad training) or 'ad hoc' like farm development tasks (building new cages, individual dog training etc).

Participants spend at least a proportion of their week joining in with all of the everyday tasks and routines involved with watering, feeding, pooping and basic care of the dogs, including ground and snow-work and very basic maintenance. They do this accompanied by a designated mentor, and it not only helps people to integrate quickly into the team but also allows participants to gain a true understanding of the less glamorous aspects of the work (since that is, after all, a central component of working with dogs!).

A selection of the weekly and daily-specific tasks are also always incorporated into the training since it is always more useful to join in a real vs a practice session when it comes to things like preparing the teams and doing medical dog checks / heat checks / giving meds / individual dog training etc. All of the practical sessions on the farm are backed up with theoretical sessions looking in more depth at why we choose the systems that we do and how we compile records for the future about, for instance, dog checks and training. Alternative methods which might be more appropriate for different size farms / teams / households will also be discussed.

During the rest of the day, the participants work through a selection of the modules with either their mentor or the guide best suited to teaching that particular module. The selection of modules is generally influenced to a degree by the season of the visit (since we would be unlikely to be able to get a quadbike started in February in -40C, for instance, and, similarly, we can't use a snowmobile in the summer!) as well as by the interest of the participants. Those staying with us for one week + can also, clearly, work through more modules with us, than those taking part in the 3-day course.

If visiting during the snow season, mushing with the dogs is naturally incorporated since that is anyway, part and parcel of each and every day.

By working through clear modules, participants should leave with a wider understanding of the work involved with running sled dogs through the year than they would normally get from a short visit.

MODULAR PROGRAMME

We use the following modules to tailor the week-long courses to the interests of the participants.

Training Medical Equipment Ethics Safety Clients Basic Care Routines

MODULE 1: Selecting the right dog(s) for your home or kennel

- What makes a good sled dog (relative to your intentions for it and where you live)?
- Choosing the right dog for you
 - relative to your intentions for it and where you live
- Buying vs breeding vs taking on shelter dogs (pros and cons of each): age structures within a group and the associated costs (frequent vaccinations for pups cf adults, old age costs like mammary tumours etc. Special diets at each end of the spectrum).
- Country-specific legislation within the EU relating to owning and caring for dogs (dog poo, number of dogs per cage, height of fences, types of kennels etc)
- Breeding characteristics to select for and genetic traits you want to avoid

Positive

- The desire to run run run
- Fluffy or not (depending on what you want from the dog)...dogs like Leon are probably the ideal, here
- Strong feet
- Non-fussy eaters and dogs which keep wait on rather than dogs with such high metabolisms / nervous energy that they need to eat more than others to stay stable
- Quite long legs (not so important for working dogs)

Negative

- Panus, cataracts, aggression etc are all inheritable traits
- In our farm, the shorter the hair of the dog, the better the dog, roughly, with a few exceptions – but why, then, do we want fluffies?

MODULE 2: When you do and don't want to breed

- Charting heat cycles to avoid unwanted pregnancies
- To castrate / spay or not? Pros and cons
- Lactation within farms – the wolf response
- Pre and post birth - dos and don'ts and some of the common occurrences / things to prepare for and against.

MODULE 3: Basic Meds & Everyday Dog Care

- Basic wound care and dog first aid session...working through our 'How to' Guides
- Basic dog anatomy and physiology
- What are the basic medicines we use and why / amount etc
- The range of dosages and types of antibiotics that can be given, for the different issues, and how we have come up with a kind of standard dose that we can increase from as needed.
- What should be in your dog medical first aid kit and trail kit (have a look at ours and replenish as you go)
- Dog medical overseer's folder

Practical Exercises:

- Giving meds (morning routine)
- Weekly medical checks and computer recording tools
- Nail Clipping
- Teeth Cleaning (using both toothbrush and implements)
- Giving injections
- How to put in and take out staples and stitches using Marianne's arm cast (depending on previous experience)

Discussion focusing on our medical 'how-to' guides

- nail clipping,
- nutrition section
- Feeding plans
- Stock Use and Check
- Vaccination & De-worming Schedules (excel-based vs outlook type calendar reminders).
- Movements within the EU

Optional Additional Modules

Massage and stretching – watch the video and have a go eg with Jupi / Princess (avoid the sore leg) & maybe Max
How we give fluids under the skin when need be and how to use needles to drain fluids etc

MODULE 4: Common Sled-dogs Injuries and Illnesses & How to deal with them

Key injuries / issues relating to sled dogs

- Cardio-pulmonary related issues (standard long distance athlete fair)
- Blood brain barrier issues relating to big dog farm use of medicines like ivermectin (in case they are planning to work in a farm in the future and want to know to look out for this)
- Bite wounds
- Orthopedic issues in old age of the bigger dogs
- Limps (keep nails trim to reduce this)
- Pyometra (just because it is 'the silent killer')
- Zinc deficiency
- Some useful homeopathic treatments
- Frostbite (testicles, nipples, penis, ears)
- Chaffing
- Panus and other eye conditions with the bright snow
- Mass heat and lactation cycles

MODULE 5: Skin & Footcare

- Feet-related problems in winter (booties used to minimise this – some dogs have softer feet)
- Taking care of your dog's feet & nails (and use of booties): why this is more than just for aesthetics.
- Talking about when to use booties and when not (and the implications of using broken ones etc).
- Brushing, hotspots, pressure sores, collar sores etc

MODULE 5: Nutrition Linked to maintaining an Optimal Weight

- Food, hydration & performance through the year
- Nutritional information for the dogs
- Food, hydration & performance through the year: Psyllium additives in heavy season. Soup vs water in winter. Blood ice cubes. Snacks on the trail optional. Why our dogs' diet has far more fat in it than needed for their diet.
- Example spreadsheets as to how we analyse the commercial foods and decide what supplements to add

- Examining dogs to determine if they are over or under weight or at a healthy running weight (and what IS a healthy running weight, vs a house dog weight).

MODULE 6: Training

- Conditioning: How to train for condition and speed at different points during the year
- Age-related training structures – puppy play and relaxed jog-runs, oldie suppleness targets etc.
- How to create a training program for the dogs
- How human training tools / methods can be adapted to dog training – apply what you already know about conditioning etc. Don't over-complicate it.
 - ie...uilding strength and proprioception as part of conditioning training before speed is introduced, as in marathon training, interval / fartlek training / rest days vs training days so that there is built-in recovery time, etc) can be adapted to dog training tools and methods
- Selecting and developing wheel, swing and lead dogs and how to progress your dogs through these positions over time
- Recording tools and using excel macros to drive your training schedules – and the legal requirements relating to these
- Year-round training tips – how to train individual dogs during the summer and then how to train for condition and speed at different points during the year

How to train individual dogs during the summer

- Basic dog training in the GEE HAW maze
- Agility course as a tool in training
- Running fence play time
- Running fence group training
- Running fence basic obedience
- Line out etc

Autumn training tips

- How to put together the equipment needed to run a team
- Setting up & using holding posts and tying systems optimally – and ways of ensuring that the lead dogs line out
- How to tie out a dog team to the holding post
- How to safely use a quad or trike during conditioning training – eg How to have a team tied, pre departure (into the back of the harness of the lead dog, etc)
- How to safely use the red bike type as a different type of training apparatus during conditioning training...
- Quad Bike Training: Top tips and common mistakes
- Belly bands and Line-out / pass / hold still training
- How to physically put your team together
- How to have the team waiting calmly on the start line for your safari or training session to start (minimising energy wastage, fights and harness chewing)
- Training back to back rounds

Winter training tips

- Top tips and common mistakes w.r.t. driving sleighs safely
- Maintenance training (consistency) and speed training

Spring training tips

- Speed training
- Passing on the trail when moving as something we do during spring training when they are running with ease and passing with one 'team' at standstill in autumn, when energy is higher

Optional Modules

- Thinking about racing? Tweaking training accordingly...more lead dogs etc.
- Mountain biking
- hike-joring,
- kick-sledding or
- Skijoring with dogs

MODULE 7: Equipment & Sleddog Terminology

- Kit nomenclature:
- Introduction to basic farm equipment and nomenclature, (bungees, dog lines, backlines, main / gang lines, travel chain, harnesses, prussik cord etc)
- Critical equipment choices, 'nice to have' additions and things which you can easily make yourself to save money (eg skijoring lines and the bungees between the sleds and the teams) and things which you can easily make yourself to save money (for instance leads)

- How to make a knife...
- How to make leads / backlines using splicing methods
- How to size and make necklines using crimping pliers, wire cutters, crimps etc
- How (and why) to size and add prussik to harnesses as an exercise / use belly bands / double lead system
- How to determine the appropriate harness and blanket etc size for each dog
- Choice and sizing of sleighs, lines, anchors etc
- How to make a metal dog line, skijoring line, leads etc
- How to make & when to use a travel chain / stake-out chain
- How to rope a sleigh and keep it in good condition. How to do standard sleigh repairs
- How to make & when to use a travel chain / stake-out chain

The different types of sleighs.

- General nomenclature (stanchion, bush bow etc).
- Pros and cons of toboggan vs basket sleighs etc.
- How the race sleighs have got a lot more lateral movement in them, a place to sit down, different materials, quick change runners etc etc.

Optional Additional Modules

- How to make a kennel and a cage: Sizing both for the type of dogs you have and pros and cons of running circles.
- How to fence (using the running fence)
- How to make cage elements
- How and why you may need to make a track smoothener and use a snowmobile as a safety tool
- Emergency Shelters
- Camping out
- How to make a metal dog line, skijoring line etc

MODULE 9: Old and New School Ethics

MUSH with pride – kennel inspection tools: things to think about before even starting to set up your own dog yard

- Brief overview of the history of sled dogs, their use in polar exploration, the wars and the development of their breed, post gold rush, through racing.
- Using the base criteria outlined in the MUSH with pride kennel inspection tool and kennel assessment document, we walk around and look at how and why we have chosen to do some things in certain ways and how other kennels might choose to practice by comparison.
- Essentially this is all about things to think about before starting to set up your own dog yard (relative to country-specific legislation within the EU guidelines (dog poo, number of dogs per cage, height of fences, types of kennels etc) and how to analyse how highly other yards you might visit value or think about various aspects of dog welfare.
- We talk about the differences between yards and go the whole ethics part of our website as a conversation point.
- This is a huge section in our website including Finnish-specific regulations (although some Swedish ones are also listed when different, for interest), and we can look up the regulations in your country.
- Sustainable practices: standard issues and a twist – thinking about sustainability in terms of being able to ensure a long-term safe, happy, nurturing environment for the dogs you have chosen to care for.
- The hard decisions: why some farms reduce the weak and old to protect the many and why many overbreed to select the best – is it necessary?

MODULE 8: Keeping it Safe

- Risk assessments and safety management when working as a musher / starting a commercial farm or simply having your own dogs which you may go out with, with friends:
 - Some of the key issues you need to be aware of.
 - How we use risk assessments as a key training tool for our guides when moving from one season to another since everything from the everyday jobs to the training targets change from season to season and by going through the risk assessments, we can minimise the likelihood of many potential issues arising.
- How to select the minimal but necessary emergency gear to take with you to ensure that you can survive on the trail in case of emergency.
- How to make an emergency snow shelter

MODULE 9: Clients with Your Huskies

- How to run a farm tour
- How to prepare for and run client safaris, and the key things to watch for in keeping clients safe (by first keeping the dogs safely in order)
- Setting standards within your guide group
- Budgeting, pricing & marketing (producing a website & product cards) your business
- Targeting your business towards different business models (multiday safaris, small tours, day-length tours etc)

- Integrating handicapped clients

MODULE 10: Basic Care Routines

These are part and parcel of every day on the farm working alongside the guides and learning how to optimise basic systems.

- Helping with morning and evening routines on the farm circles
- Helping with morning and evening routines on the farm cages
- General cleaning routines for the rest of the farm including dog bowl and cage cleaning
- Standard puppy feeding followed by individual puppy play time (when appropriate).
- Participation in morning and evening medical care needs
- Discussion about the different basic care needs of old and young

MODULE 11: Comparative Visit to Other Farms

Visit to Harrinivia (400+ dogs), Akaskero (600+ dogs) and one other farm to examine the pros and cons of different operating systems.

MODULE 12: End of Week 'Test'

The purpose of this test is to bring together everything learned in the week. Clearly we will tweak the test to the modules (or module components) that the group has worked through - but we would hope that all clients would be able to demonstrate setting up the equipment for running a dog team and harnessing their dogs and putting them in the team with ease and efficiency. If conditions are appropriate, they should also be able to deal with basic problems that may occur when running their team as well as calling and enforcing commands appropriately on the trail.