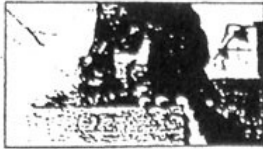


Italian ice

Gold Rush descendant retraces the steps of his family, countrymen.

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State wrestling

Nikiski wins team title, but individual matches provide rich twists, turns.

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Gold prices

Monday prices: \$343.30 troy ounce. Gold coins: American Eagle, \$383.66 troy ounce.

Bering Strait Record

Vol. 1, No. 45

April 23, 1997

'News from the edge of tomorrow'

Serving the Bering Strait region

50 cents

Italian ice

Gold Rush descendant retraces family routes

By Mark Gillespie

The Record

When he clipped on his skis at Manley Hot Springs and started his solo trek toward Nome, the sun was setting early, temperatures were well below zero and Iditarod mushers had not yet left Anchorage.

Saturday, it was five weeks later, and Maurizio Belli of Trento, Italy, arrived in Nome — following the same route his fellow townspeople did almost a century ago.

Belli grew up hearing stories about his Stampeder grandfather Agostini Vittorio, who settled in the Yukon during the Gold Rush and worked as a miner throughout Alaska and Canada for 30 years.

Though he was never able to establish where his grandfather traveled, Belli discovered another pair of Trentinos — brothers Silvio and Clemente Boldrini — who

made their way from Dawson to Nome. A third Trentino was mayor of the Tofty mining community near present day Manley.

A fitness specialist and mountaineer in Italy's alpine region, Belli became fascinated with reproducing the conditions these immigrants faced in the sub-Arctic.

In August of 1993, Belli bicycled from Fairbanks to Prudhoe Bay in 72 hours along the Dalton Highway. In 1995, he brought an Italian television crew to Wiseman to film a dog mushing expedition to Prudhoe.

"When I get here, I don't know what gear you're using. I don't know nothing," said Belli, who started learning to speak English especially for his trips to Alaska.

His trips to Alaska were but a prelude for the 700-mile journey he began in February, tracing the steps of the Boldrini brothers from Tofty



Mark Gillespie/The Record

Skier Maurizio Belli displays the plaque he presented to Nome Mayor John Handeland this week. Saturday, Belli completed a 47-day trek from Manley Hot Springs to Nome, following the original turn-of-the-century route made by fellow countryman from his home in Trento, Italy.

to Nome.

"No training in Italy," Belli said of his preparations. "You must come only here. I came to Alaska seven times for a year to train."

Starting out from Manley, Belli said he had nice sunny days and cold nights down to 40 below. Though he followed markings left by the Serum Run 1997 mushers, much of the trail from Manley to Tanana and Kaltag was not well-marked.

When he arrived in Kaltag 28 days after he began, Belli counted himself lucky to have made good

time. He felt even luckier when he made the 90-mile leg between Kaltag and Unalakleet in just three days.

On the coast, his fortunes began to change. The temperature rose 50 degrees overnight, and the increasing sunlight began melting the snow and ice along the trail.

"Every morning, it became more warm," Belli said. "From Unalakleet to other villages, I began to find very, very, very much problems."

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Belli ...

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At Shaktoolik, he ran out of snow and had to drag his sled up muddy hills. It began to rain and he had to slog through overflow. Between Koyuk and Elim, he had to resort to skiing only at night, when the trail was harder and more easily traversed.

Only after he left Elim did Belli have cold enough conditions for a fast trail. "I go fast

across the tundra," he said, pronouncing it "toondra."

He skied the last 77 miles from White Mountain in a single 52-hour stretch.

Belli will spend another couple of weeks in Alaska, revisiting some of the villages he passed through along the way. He brought a video camera along, and hopes the footage will be used on Italian TV.

When asked if he intends to mount another trek across Alaska, Belli replied, "Oh, maybe."