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Sports & Recreation

Italian trekker on the road to Nome

By Dawn Brett
News Reporter

Walking across Alaska in one of the coldest, darkest months of the year, Maurizio Belli dreamt of his cozy mountain home in Northern Italy.

"You have a lot of time to think when you're on a trail alone in 30-below," says the 36-year-old Italian adventurer, who is now visiting friends in Whitehorse.

Belli is wild-eyed as he reflects on his recent 47-day foot journey through some of the North's most dangerous terrain.

Putting his head in his hands, he says there weren't many happy days on the trail.

"When the weather warmed up I saw wolves and bear tracks," he says, noting he packed a Winchester rifle for protection.

"I travelled 15 hours a day, usually at night because the snow is harder then."

Hiking, snowshoeing and skiing, Belli dragged a 250-pound sled of supplies more than 1,050 kilometres from Fairbanks to Nome.

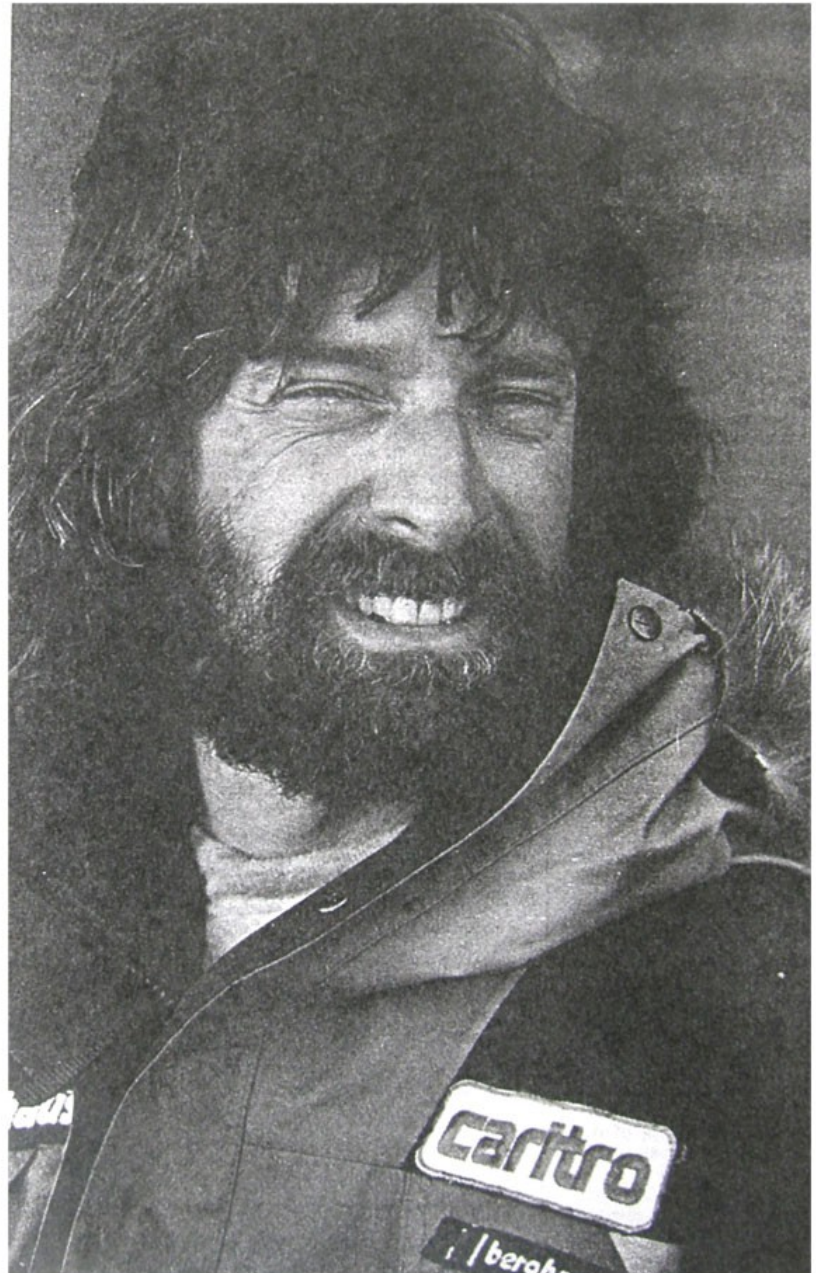
He often found himself waist deep in overflow as he traversed frozen rivers.

"I never knew how deep it would be," says the experienced outdoorsman in a thick Italian accent. "Then I feared for my life."

"I prayed to God," he says, remembering his constant fight against frostbite.

Every solo adventurer prays, but few admit it, he says.

Anyone who undertakes this kind of trip needs a little divine intervention to help them along, Belli



THE WALK OF HIS LIFE... Maurizio Belli braved wolves and bears recreating his family's bold hike across Alaska to the gold fields of the Klondike.

adds.

"If nature doesn't like you, you can die," says the professional rock-climber, gesturing as only Italians can.

"You have to be prepared and lucky.

He was both.

Despite the mental and physical strain, Belli says he never thought of quitting.

"This trip was my destiny."

Now he plans to write a

book about the experience.

It may be the first time someone re-created the journey of his Italian ancestors who came to the area during the Gold Rush.