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Six Billion Stories and counting...

One of the greatest travel experiences of my life, if not *the* greatest, was in Canada in 2005 when I spent ten days writing a magazine feature story on the Yukon Quest International Sled Dog Race, next to the Iditarod the best known mushing event on earth and arguably the toughest.

Rugged up in thermal cold-weather gear that wouldn't be out of place on Pluto, I followed the [1000-mile race](#) for just a short section of its route from Alaska into Canada's Yukon and was blown away not just by the magical beauty of the frozen Canadian landscape but the beauty of the race itself.



Nothing in my experience of covering sport for over a decade has as come close as Yukon Quest to embodying the synergy of man with beast with nature. It is probably, outside of open-water solo yacht racing, the loneliest sporting event on earth, competitors not seeing other humans for days at a time and being at the mercy of the harshest elements.

It takes a brave man (or woman) to race it – even hardy old-timers from the Yukon and British Columbia, used to the conditions, balk at the idea of competing.

So it is remarkable news that [Newton Marshall](#), just 25, has become the race's first ever Jamaican entrant. Black faces in Whitehorse and Dawson City, the two main stops on the race's route, aren't exactly dime a dozen. You're more likely to see a moose.

And he has arrived on the sled-dog scene by rather unconventional means: while working as a horseback-riding guide in the Caribbean he was called in as emergency kennel help at a tourist company in Jamaica called Chukka Caribbean Adventures, where paying customers can race through the forest on a sled on wheels.

Marshall showed some aptitude for it, got his start on ice in Minnesota, put in a couple of promising performances on the circuit, one thing led to another and the idea of the Jamaican Dogsled Team was born.

Marshall has some illustrious company in his corner, too. The team is sponsored by the great tropical troubadour Jimmy Buffett and in preparing for the race Marshall came under the expert tuition of Hans Gatt, a three-time winner of the Quest and the virtual Eddy Merckx of sled-dog racing.

"I'm the first black man and first Jamaican [to race the Yukon Quest] so I'm quite proud of that," he told the *Anchorage Daily News*.

"I will just work off the schedule, and hopefully, it will get me to the finish line."

At time of writing, he might just get his wish.

After nine days of racing, though well behind race leader Hugh Neff, who was two checkpoints ahead at the penultimate stage of Two Rivers, Marshall was back in 13th at Circle City out of field of 22.

Still, in just finishing the race Marshall is doing something no black man has ever done before – and blazing a trail for others to follow.

And that's its own kind of victory.