



A TIMELINE OF THE WOMEN
WHO CHANGED AMERICA



September 2025 Her Story ENewsletter Iditarod Competitors



Mary Shields (1944-2025) entered the 1974 Iditarod, the 1000-mile sled dog race from Anchorage to Nome, Alaska. She didn't plan to win but partway through the race, she learned that the men at the checkpoints were betting that she wouldn't make it further. She also learned that women were taking those bets – and making a lot of money. That propelled her to go faster – and to finish. She became the first woman to finish. Her time was 28 days, 18 hours, 56 minutes, and 30 seconds. She was 29 minutes ahead of the only other woman competing and finished 23rd overall. When she arrived in Nome, she saw a woman holding a banner with the Virginia Slims slogan on it – “You’ve come a long way, baby!” Shields didn't compete in the Iditarod again but did enter other races including the Yukon Quest (1000 miles) and the Hope '91 (1200 miles). Raised in Wisconsin, Shields moved to Alaska in 1966, after she spent two summers there as a camp counselor and believed she would enjoy the lifestyle. As we have seen with other women: what we choose to do helps others; Shields laid the groundwork for both Libby Riddles and Susan Butcher to win the Iditarod.



Libby Riddles won the 1985 Iditarod, the first woman to do so. She did so in 18 days, 20 minutes, and 17 seconds braving a storm that no other mushers did. Riddles has been enshrined in the Alaska Sports Hall of Fame. Her Iditarod victory came after 18th and 20th place finishes in the 1980 and 1981 races. After that, she decided to breed her own sled dogs. Persistence and determination paid off! Riddles was born and raised in Wisconsin and moved to Alaska when she was still a teenager. She wrote books about her experiences, both for adults and for children (*Storm Run*, *Race Across Alaska*, and others), and served as a professional speaker as well.



Susan Butcher competed in the 1985 Iditarod that Libby Riddles won but Butcher had to withdraw from that race. She came back in 1986 and won that Iditarod as well as in 1987, 1988, and 1990. Butcher was the second four-time winner (the first woman four-time winner), and the first to win four out of five consecutive years. She competed in other races and retired from competition in 1995. Butcher received many awards for her accomplishments including induction into the Alaska Sports Hall of Fame. She was born in Massachusetts and completed training at Colorado State University as a veterinary technician. Butcher moved to Alaska to breed huskies and pursue her love of dogsled racing. She is commemorated in Alaska with Susan Butcher day, the first Saturday of March which is the traditional start day of the Iditarod.

Libby Riddles and Susan Butcher are among the more than 850 women profiled in our book *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America*. Women's accomplishments continue to inspire and encourage us. Continue to help us tell women's stories!

Charlotte Waisman and Jill Tietjen

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