

Unit 10: The Sled Dogs of Greenland

Narrator: Greenland's sled dogs are one of the world's oldest breeds. They are descended from animals that traveled with the Inuit people when they began their journey from Siberia to Greenland a thousand years ago. Until recently, they had been a necessity to their owners—hunters and fishermen who live on Greenland's ice. But as global temperatures rise, the landscape is changing. And as the landscape changes, so do traditions which have been around for centuries.

Finn Sistall, a fisherman, grew up with sled dogs. His family needed them to cross the ice, which was solid for more than half the year. But that is now a thing of the past. In Greenland today, there is simply less solid ice, and most fishermen use boats instead of dog sleds. So, Finn's family had to give up their team of 19 dogs.

The town of Ilulissat is home to 4,500 people and 4,000 dogs. Teams of sled dogs have quite simply become an expense most families can no longer afford. Many of these unwanted dogs are therefore left out in the cold with little care and not enough food. But there is hope. Marit Holm is a vet who works to help the dogs.

Marit Holm: So, that's what I do, I drive around and look after the dogs.

Narrator: Marit specializes in sled dog care. Every day, she patrols the town looking for dogs who need help. The government has also passed laws that say owners must take better care of their dogs.

Marit Holm: The dogs are hungry, so I have to be a little bit careful not to get bitten.

Narrator: Marit checks each dog, and cares for the sick. She also teaches the owners and their children, the next generation of Greenlanders, to take better care of their dogs.

Marit Holm: It doesn't seem to be sick. He's very skinny. So, I have to try to find out who's the owner and talk to him.

Narrator: With help from people like Marit, the future for the sled dogs is looking a little brighter.