



Anchorage Fur Rendezvous 2012

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The time was an exceptionally brutal and cold winter in late February 1935. It was twenty-four years before Alaska became a State of the Union and only fifteen years after Anchorage became an official city. But as was the custom of the times, old time grizzled fur trappers and miners from the Alaskan wilderness would descend upon that small township of 3,000. Not only to replenish their supplies and rekindle their spirits, but to trade their winter's wares.

This was a much anticipated occurrence and to coincide with this beloved annual event, the good people of Anchorage established a three-day Winter Carnival. With of course the main attraction being the Fur Auction, for trappers to ply their trade. Trapping contests were held, and prizes were awarded for the longest fox, the best fox and the finest ermine pelts. Other official events included sports tournaments featuring hockey, skiing, boxing and a children's dog sled race down Fourth Avenue.

Each day would conclude with a torchlight parade and communal bonfire where the entire community would participate. In 1938 it was renamed to Fur Rendezvous to attract more of the fur buyers due in large part to the economic importance of the Alaskan fur trade.

Seventy-seven years later this annual celebration is alive and well. Today it is known throughout the world as the **Anchorage Fur Rendezvous**, or simply the **Fur Rondy**. It occurs in the streets of downtown Anchorage and runs from February 24th through March 4th. It has developed into a ten-day international Alaskan cultural event

attracting visitors from all over the world. With over 120 popular attractions it ranks among the top ten of world-wide Winter Festivals.

As the years passed, so did its evolution. More cultural events were added to the celebration such as the Blanket Toss, an ancient Native Alaskan tradition where tribal members were flung into the air from a blanket held taut by tribal members to signify the end of a successful whaling season.



Native Alaskans were flown into Anchorage from Nome and the Little Diomed Islands to participate in the Blanket Toss and to showcase



their captivating tribal dances. Multi-tribal gatherings took place where the different Alaskan tribes were showcased performing native music, dance and traditional dress.

The World Championship Sled Dog Race made its debut in 1946 and became the cornerstone event. The race took place in three consecutive days bringing teams of sled dogs and mushers to Anchorage from across Alaska and all over the world.

Starting in 1973 the end of the Fur Rondy commemorated the start of the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, the annual sled dog team race across

Alaska. Musherers and a team of 12-16 dogs (of which at least 6 must be on the towline at the finish line) would cover over 1,049 miles in 9–15 days from Anchorage to Nome.



Other traditional events included the Rondy Carnival, the Grand Parade, the uniquely Alaskan Original Men's Snowshoe Softball and the Grand Prix Auto Race, one of the oldest street races in North America.

Newly introduced events include snow and ice sculpture competitions, the Outhouse Race, the Frostbite Footrace and Costume Fun Run and a new classic, The Running of the Reindeer.



It is a race where these horned and hoofed creatures chase a festive mob of people. But unlike the Running of the Bulls at Pamplona, these runners get to hug and pet their docile pursuers prior to the race. This one block race (held in five heats) has up to 2,000 joyful participants and there is no bigger crowd pleaser.



Unless it's Yukigassen. That is the Japanese word for Snowball Battle. It is a team sport that combines the elements of paintball, dodge ball and good old fashion snowball fights. What better place for international teams to compete than in the snowy Fur Rondy.

From its small and humble Anchorage beginnings the main focus of the Winter Carnival was to bring its people together, to show community support for the fur trade and to have fun celebrating the beginning of the end of winter. Although now on a grander scale, the goal remains the same. This year it is estimated that over 250,000 people will participate in the Fur Rondy with the same purpose. The muktuk may be more difficult to find, but the reindeer sausage grinders and reindeer nachos will be plentiful.

