



What Was MARKOVO All About?

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This historic document explains the rationale behind the 1970s MARKOVO breeding project which rescued the Leonhard Seppala Strain from extinction. In its pages can be clearly seen the thinking and the principles that led to the establishment of the Seppala Siberian Sleddog as a separate evolving breed in its own right. It was originally published in the first issue of "Seppala Network" newsletter in May 1995.

MUCH INK HAS BEEN SPILT over the last decade on the subject of Seppala Strain and the 1970's 'MARKOVO rescue effort,' yet what was done in those years and why seem to have been widely misunderstood. Perhaps it is about time to clarify just what the contemporary Seppala Strain is and why it exists.

In 1976 after I had terminated the MARKOVO project I published a booklet entitled *The Seppala Siberian: A Breeder's Manual*. It was privately printed in a limited edition of only 24 copies. Since that time it has been widely distributed in pirated photocopy form, despite a clear copyright notice; its title has been plagiarised as well. I suppose I should be glad it was so popular; I would be happier had its content and message been more clearly understood.

A capsule definition of Seppala Strain was given in the 1976 book as follows:

Seppala Siberian: Any registered Siberian Husky whose pedigree lineage may be traced back exclusively to foundation stock bred by Leonhard Seppala or imported directly from Siberia.

That at least was a simple and concise definition. It was also explained that the above definition excluded the stock bred in the 1930's and later by Eva B. Seeley's Chinook Kennels under the kennel names CHINOOK, ALYESKA and

WONALANCET. I touched briefly upon reasons to support such an exclusion but without giving the matter too much emphasis. Much current misunderstanding may stem from my failure then to highlight the Seppala-vs-Seeley dichotomy.

TEN YEARS LATER Douglas W. Willett chose to redefine what (in his view) was meant by 'Seppala Siberian' in accordance with his own agenda. His definition and my own are basically compatible; they merely approach the subject from different vantage points. His methodology, however, with respect to the practical application of his definition, was radically different in that it employed a quantitative method in which each dog's pedigree was analysed and a percentage calculated for the 'pure Seppala' lineage behind the individual dog in question. This method resulted in a situation in which it immediately became unclear what was to be considered a 'Seppala dog.' In Willett's percentage terms, where was the cutoff point to be — 80%, 90%, 95%, 98%? For nearly every single AKC/CKC Siberian Husky is 'part Seppala.' Even the famous CH. MONADNOCK'S PANDO, to take an extreme example, will be found to have 68% Seppala background in his pedigree! Willett sought to exclude show-dogs from his definition by means of a proviso that no pedigree line should pass through three generations or more of cosmetically-oriented breeding, yet this also created its own uncertainties. The situation has never been resolved, with the result that many Seppala/outcross dogs are now widely regarded as 'pure Seppalas' despite the Seeley content of their pedigrees.

My own position is that this kind of quantitative analysis is unsatisfactory as it tends to degrade the purity of the bloodline through the gradual admixture of Seeley-based stock. I have watched the percentages crawl downward until there are now very few 98% or better litters bred and more and more stock in the 90% to 95% range is regarded as 'pure Seppala. As Willett points out in his 1992 Breeder's Manual, nearly all the 'SEPP-ALTA spinoff kennels' are based on stock from outcross matings! Willett has tended over the years to sell off his less successful outcross efforts while retaining his MARKOVO-based pure-strain stock. In the recent manual he expresses his feeling that his satellite kennels can now breed back to pure strain animals for several generations, but so far no such tendency to do so has been observed in most cases.

My present standards are based on the premise that no degree of Seeley admixture is admissible. This premise is no vain personal quirk but is grounded in the parameters which governed the breeding of Harry Wheeler, William L. Shearer III, and J. D. McFaul for over thirty formative years of Seppala Strain history! For me a dog is either Seppala Strain, in which case no Seeley-derived stock is present in the pedigree (apart from the now vanishingly-small element of contaminant unavoidably introduced by LYL OF SEPSEQUEL into the MARKOVO foundation) — otherwise it is not, whatever the quantitative percentage of Seppala background might be.

LET ME ATTEMPT to explain the reasons for the standards I now apply, which are the same ones that were applied in 1970-1975 for purposes of the MARKOVO project. These reasons have mostly to do with the Eva B. Seeley breeding programme and agenda adopted by the Seeley successors in later years.

During the early 1970's I enjoyed a lengthy and voluminous correspondence with Lawrence L. Prado Jr., then of Milton, NH. Larry was intensely interested in the early breed history of the registered Siberian and was well-placed to research these matters. He visited early breed figures (in some cases their widows or children), unearthing large quantities of photos, memorabilia, kennel records and similar material. The ultimate result was an imposing and exhaustive breed history entitled "Canis Sibiricus."

Prado's manuscript was never published despite strenuous efforts on his part to find a publisher for it. His research efforts caused great alarm in certain quarters in New England, especially since some of the facts he discovered reflected no great credit upon the bright stars of the S.H.C.A. show-dog heaven. Indeed, Prado discovered that the generally-accepted story of the first AKC Siberian registrations was not in accord with recorded facts; he learned that parties whose names were completely unknown in the 1960's (such as Judge Julien A. Hurley of Fairbanks, Alaska, and Oliver Shattuck of Alton NH) were those chiefly responsible for the first AKC Siberians, the first Breed Standard. The known existence of the Prado manuscript is thought to have spurred the writing and publication of the first major 'breed book' for Siberians, "The Complete Siberian Husky" by Lorna Demidoff and Michael Jennings. We probably have Prado to thank for the fact that the Demidoff/Jennings book contained as much detailed history as it did, slanted though it may have been. Prado's research also disclosed a great deal of confusion regarding the early Siberian breeding of Eva B. Seeley. It was found that birth dates of certain sires, dams and litters failed to correspond properly and that there were 'corrections' of AKC Stud Book entries involving early Seeley breeding. The facts regarding crucial animals such as TOSKA OF WONALANCET and CH. CHEENAH OF ALYESKA remain unclear to this day.

THE SEELEY KENNELS were also, of course, deeply involved in the development and promotion of the registered Alaskan Malamute breed during the same period of time that the Siberian was being registered, bred and promoted as a show dog. This by itself does not imply that there was any mixing of the two breeds. Nonetheless, given the obvious confusion demonstrated by the Stud Book corrections and the birth-date discrepancies, considerable doubt remains as to what really occurred at Chinook Kennels during the formative years of the AKC Siberian Husky. Although the earliest Seeley stock produced a relatively rangy animal, Seeleys made great efforts to breed a different type that was more 'short-coupled', thus initiating the reformation of the breed following a show-ring agenda. Generations of Siberian fanciers have noted the problem of Malamutish appearance, shortness of leg, snap tails, heaviness of bone and tendency to grossly over-standard body weight displayed by many dogs produced by the Seeley-derived show bloodlines.

One incontrovertible source of known Malamute admixture in the registered Siberian is none other than the legendary Leonhard Seppala leader TOGO. The 1914 All-Alaska Sweep- stakes entry documents for the Seppala team describe TOGO's sire SUGGEN as a half-breed of Siberian and Malamute! TOGO of course made his contribution to Seppala Strain as well as the Seeley bloodlines; but the Seeley foundation depended much more heavily upon TOGO progeny. TOTO, the dam of TANTA OF ALYESKA the celebrated Seeley foundation bitch, was a TOGO daughter. SEPP III, a stud owned by Dean C. F. Jackson, sired by TOGO out of an unknown dam, was also crucial to the formation of the Seeley strain.

TOGO's main contribution to Seppala Strain was through his grandson SMOKEY OF SEPPALA; early photos of SMOKEY show a black and white, short-legged, wide-fronted dog with a Malamutish face and earset. Seppala Strain is stuck with SMOKEY OF SEPPALA, but his proportional contribution is not high in contemporary stock. More importantly, the SMOKEY type has virtually disappeared from the strain, whereas in the mainstream Seeley-derived strains, show-ring judging (and therefore breeding) over the years has consistently favoured the heavy-set, heavy-boned, short-legged type which tends to assort genetically in concert with other typically Malamute traits such as wide earset, aggressiveness, snap tails, etc.

The male side of the initial Seeley foundation litter, Leonhard Chapman's DUKE, a dog imported from Alaska, has had his breed origins called into question by at least one prominent New England sleddog personality who was around at the time. It is odd indeed that no photographs of so crucial a foundation dog as DUKE seem to exist, the more so as abundant photographic evidence has survived of practically all the other dogs involved in the early Chinook Kennels breeding.

Anyone who doubts the confusion surrounding early Seeley breeding need only turn to the pages of the SHCA Bible, "The New Complete Siberian Husky" by Michael Jennings. On pages 60-63 in the discussion of early Seeley breedings two different dams are given for CH.CHEENAH OF ALYESKA (CHEEAK OF ALYESKA in the text and TOSCA OF ALYESKA in the accompanying pedigree); this confusion is one which has been passed down from the 1930's!

LET US NOW RETURN to the subject of Seppala Strain and the circumstances which surrounded the MARKOVO undertaking. The late 1960's were the heyday of early show and pet-oriented Siberian breeding. In southern Ontario where I then lived, I saw many large, heavy-boned black and white show dogs up from the USA being 'campaigned' in Canada. Some handlers were unaware that the Canadian Standard of the day contained a weight disqualification (unlike the AKC Standard which disqualified by height only); several very famous US Working Group winners were 'weighed out' to the outrage of their owners or handlers. As a newcomer to the breed, hanging around dog shows I saw quite a few of these Malamutish monsters. But as I read bulletins, newsletters, books and pamphlets I began to discover occasional photographs of the original authentic Siberian dogs: dogs like John Johnson's leader KOLYMA and the Johnson team of Ramsay imports that won the 1910 Nome Sweepstakes, or the

early Leonhard Seppala teams. I was puzzled, because they were not at all the same dogs I saw in the show ring!

I gradually became convinced (although I already owned three Canadian Champion show dogs) that what I really wanted was the dog that won the All-Alaska Sweepstakes in 1910, not the dog that won the Working Group last weekend! But I had no idea where to find such a dog. My good friend Lorna Jackson, then one of the top pro handlers in Canada and a former Malamute breeder, suggested I visit the kennels of her friend 'Bunty' Goudreau (nee Ricker). It was at Bunty's SNOW RIDGE kennels in Chelmsford, Ontario, that I first saw DITKO OF SEPPALA and his progeny. Those were the first dogs I had seen that resembled the photos of KOLYMA, SCOTTY and other famous Siberians of the 1910 decade. A year later I was able to purchase DITKO and that was the real beginning of the 'MARKOVO rescue effort.'

Nobody other than my foolish self was then interested in the Seppala dogs. The McFaul kennel had sold out in 1963; the few McFaul dogs then remaining alive were seven to twelve years old in 1970. Of course the show people had no interest in them; I was told that DITKO had a 'dirty face' and an 'ugly brownish colour.' Neither was there much interest from the racing community. Most of the southern Ontario 'racers' that I knew were already committed to the perennial project of breeding the 'dual-purpose Siberian,' a 'good-looking dog that can also run.' Meanwhile the folks in the fast lane were getting rid of Siberians as fast as they could; even the renowned J. Malcolm McDougall was switching over to Alaskan Huskies as Roland Lombard and Keith Bryar had done before him.

There were very few Seppala dogs left, anyway, and fewer still were available to me. Nonetheless, I was delighted with my discovery. Not only did the McFaul stock closely resemble the original and authentic Siberian dogs, but subsequent digging in CKC Stud Books revealed two incandescent facts: first, these dogs owed nothing to the early Chinook Kennels breeding about which Larry Prado was learning such disturbing things and, second, they went straight back to the last (1930) Siberia imports in as little as four or five generations! Clearly I had found what I was looking for; not perhaps the dog that won the Nome Sweepstakes, but at least his very direct inheritors, untainted by show breeding or by the Chinook Kennels uncertainties.

MUCH HAS BEEN MADE in the pages of "Racing Siberian Husky" and in various books and pamphlets by Willett and Petura of the supposed fact that the MARKOVO foundation stock were not sleddogs! Willett writes that "the strain was kept alive, although by breeding relatively untested animals in the working sense." The statement is misleading, as the majority of the MARKOVO foundation stock were working sleddogs. (SHANGO OF SEPPALA and DUSKA OF SEPPALA, both obtained from Earl Norris, were the exceptions but were certainly both superior dogs with no defects that might have cast their working ability in doubt; they were simply too old and in the case of DUSKA, not in my hands for long enough to be part of a team. In my opinion Norris was hardly likely to give kennel room to any dogs of questionable working ability, so I had considerable confidence in the working genes of SHANGO and DUSKA.)

Make no mistake about it — the MARKOVO project was an eleventh-hour rescue operation. I had very little to choose from. Despite the scarcity of stock, I did reject several McFaul and Gagnon dogs that were offered to me. But time was of the essence and I simply used the best animals that I could locate and obtain at that time. The whole thrust of the MARKOVO project was to produce from the aging broodstock I had found enough viable young stock that the strain might survive. Although the project was begun in 1970, it was not until spring of 1973 that I even became certain that it would really be possible to keep Seppala Strain alive and viable in pure form. Once its survival had been assured, then a performance-based standard could be applied to restore the Seppala dog to its rightful position in the sleddog world. As indeed was done by Doug Willett!

Anneliese Braun-Witschel writes, “As for the ‘Seppala dog’, the credit for what it is as a working dog today goes exclusively to Doug Willett.” (Perhaps Leonhard Seppala, Harry Wheeler, Bill Shearer, Donnie McFaul and a few others also deserve their share of the credit, Anneliese! But not, as she points out, Jeffrey Bragg.) I claim no credit whatever for the working ability of contemporary Seppalas. But I do feel that I can claim full responsibility for their continued existence! Had I waited for Doug and Anneliese to come along there would be no Seppala dog today. I must emphasise that in 1970 when the MARKOVO project was undertaken, nobody in the racing community had any interest whatever in the continued existence of the McFaul Seppala bloodline. Few cared any more about registered Siberians of whatever stripe! Of those among the racing fraternity who did own a few pure Seppala dogs at that time, such as Earl Norris, Verner Zoschke, Jimmy Orr, Earl Kellett, Gus and Johanna Wilson etc., to the best of my knowledge none produced a pure Seppala line that carried on to the present day. Norris alone deserves credit for at least being willing to cooperate to a certain extent with someone who was interested in seeing the strain continued.

One of the several factors which led me to terminate the MARKOVO project in 1975 was the recognition that my personal circumstances in Saskatchewan would not allow me to implement an adequate work-testing programme for the young stock. Realising that such testing had to be the next stage and feeling acutely the vulnerability of the Seppala Strain inherent in having all its broodstock in one place (where one idiot with a shotgun might wipe out the entire population), I decided to pass the torch on to other hands.

THE GOALS OF THE MARKOVO PROJECT seemed clear and simple to me at the time and still do today. Thus it causes me some consternation to read RSH Racing Editor Rick Petura’s description of me as “the person who conceptualized a pedigree-based view of the Seppala Siberian.” To me that sounds like mere gobbledygook written to obscure something that was and is quite simple. So let me now try to put the *raison d’être* of the MARKOVO stock — and Seppala Strain — into the simplest terms possible.

- The first Siberian Huskies that made a name for themselves in 1910 were simple native dogs imported from Siberia. They were not bred for dog shows, nor were they bred for races! They were just working sleddogs, the product of a harsh natural environment and naïve native breeding, yet in the Alaskan competitive scene they swept the field before them. Those dogs — the John Johnson and Leonhard Seppala team dogs — were the MARKOVO ideal.
- By 1970 the Siberian dog had been changed into something else, partly by degeneration through neglect and the absence of natural selection, still more by the efforts of show dog breeders. The McFaul Seppala stock was then the closest remaining link to the original Siberian dog, as far as I knew. It had never been bred for the show ring. It was still only four or five generations removed from the Siberia imports of the 1930's. And it was the sole authentic surviving remnant of the breed's rootstock. All other bloodlines carried substantial proportions of Seeley background, including the top racing bloodlines such as Earl Norris' ANADYR and Roland Lombard's IGLOO PAK.
- The Seeley lineage had been shown by Larry Prado's research to have major clouds hanging over its origins. Moreover, it was heavily based on the TOGO line which was known to be adulterated with Malamute blood. Its direct successors, the MONADNOCK-based show bloodlines, were producing a type of dog alien to the original Siberian mould.
- The simple and obvious solution was to implement a breeding programme using only the original breed rootstock, or what was still recoverable of it: the McFaul Seppala stock. Such a breeding programme would simply ignore the widely-distributed Seeley-based stock as if it did not exist, or as if it were another breed. And that was exactly what was done in the MARKOVO breeding.

IT IS NO EXAGGERATION to state that the contemporary registered Siberian Husky really consists of two breeds: the pure-strain Seppala Siberian and the mixed-lineage Seeley/Seppala dog. It is rather difficult to consider both of these to be legitimate representatives of the original Siberian dog. They are too different, too disparate in type and appearance, in temperament and character, and in working capability overall. If one is truly a Siberian Husky, then the other must be something else. The contemporary Seppala dog is more different from a show Siberian than the same typical show dog is different from an Alaskan Malamute! If the 1910 Ramsay import dog is taken to be the ideal, then the modern Seeley-derived lines have strayed so far from that genome that they have forfeited any claim to represent it.

It is interesting to me that Michael Jennings, the Peturas and others keep insisting in one way and another that the 'pure Seppala' dog does not exist, or is a misnomer or a figment of someone's imagination. Actually it is the 'pure Seeley' dog which does not exist. All current bloodlines of AKC/CKC Siberians are found to be either pure Seppala strain (a small minority) or a mixture of Seeley and Seppala breeding (the vast majority) when one subjects

their background to analysis. The Seppala Strain is demonstrably distinct in every way that counts from all other Siberian bloodlines and is in no way a fantasy!

To write that someone “conceptualized a pedigree-based view of the Seppala Siberian”, as if the MARKOVO concept were only a silly bit of vain pedigree snobbism without relevance to the concept of ‘the racing Siberian Husky’, implies a complete failure to comprehend not only what the MARKOVO project was all about, but what principles had governed Seppala Strain breeding for three decades prior to the MARKOVO breeding.

For one instance, the Wheeler SEPPALA bloodline was perpetuated entirely as a closed strain. Harry Wheeler did not go along through the years buying new breeding stock from one kennel or another as the whim seized him. He acquired a group of foundation animals from the Leonhard Seppala/Elizabeth Ricker kennel operation in Poland Spring, Maine, a group which included the three Siberia imports KREE VANKA, TSEKO and VOLCHOK, plus three dogs bred by Seppala in Alaska (BONZO, TOSCA and MOLINKA), and three bred in Maine by the Ricker kennel (KINGEAK, DUSHKA and PEARL). To this group he added one additional female bred by Alex Belford from Poland Spring stock — NANNA. Thereafter his strain and its breeding programme were closed. Stock from the Seeley kennel was certainly available to Wheeler as it was to others in the 1930's. He chose not to acquire any.

For another instance, William L. Shearer III (FOXSTAND) acquired foundation stock from the Poland Spring kennel. In addition to his Poland Spring stock he also bought one animal from the celebrated Seeley foundation litter of DUKE ex TANTA OF ALYESKA, a bitch named SITKA OF FOXSTAND. In the late 1930's he bred at least one litter from his Seeley bitch; stock containing this breeding was later sold to Donnie McFaul when he began his GATINEAU breeding. Yet later FOXSTAND breeding fails to show any lines to SITKA OF FOXSTAND and subsequent contributions to the Shearer bloodline are confined to Wheeler-bred stock such as N'YA N'YA OF SEPPALA or to Wheeler-derived stock such as JEUAHNEE OF COLD RIVER. Apparently Shearer deliberately purged the Seeley stock from his bloodline!

The parameters of closed breeding which governed the Wheeler and Shearer kennels were later subscribed to by J. D. McFaul when he acquired the remnant Wheeler stock in 1950 along with the SEPPALA kennel name, for instead of merely adding the new Wheeler dogs to the breeding stock he already had in his GATINEAU kennel, he closed out the GATINEAU breeding, keeping only the FOXSTAND and Wheeler dogs that he already had prior to the 1950 buyout.

Thus a consistent pattern emerges in which the principal figures of Seppala Strain breeding in the 1940's and 1950's deliberately maintained the strain free of the influence of Eva B. Seeley stock.

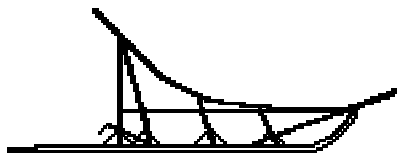
Let it then be clearly understood that, no matter what Rick Petura writes, I did not “conceptualize a pedigree-based view” of Seppala Strain to govern the MARKOVO breeding programme. The MARKOVO programme related exclusively to the preservation of an existing closed bloodline. The parameters of Seppala Strain breeding had already been set by Wheeler and Shearer; they were carried forward by McFaul. I conceptualised nothing — I merely accepted those pre-existing parameters.

IN 1970 IT WAS FELT that if the degeneration of the Siberian Husky towards the status of a has-been — a useless exhibition dog incapable of performing its original function (like so many other purebreds) — was to be halted, if the Malamutisation of the Siberian dog was to be undone, the simplest way of going about it was to eliminate questionable bloodlines as far as possible and to return to that broodstock which was fewest generations removed from the original Siberian dog and which was phenotypically most like it. Once a new base of purified stock had been made sure of, it would then be a straightforward task to implement a performance-based selection and breeding programme whose aim was the restoration of the breed to its original function. That done, the degeneration would be halted and we would once again have a real working sleddog of the original type. The kennel name itself really says it all: I wanted simply to get back to the original form and type of Siberian dog that came out of the east-Siberian trading villages such as Markovo in the 1910 decade.

The subsequent performance of the MARKOVO lineage in the hands of Doug Willett is testimony to the soundness of the MARKOVO concept and proves that the basis upon which the broodstock was selected was much more than silly pedigree snobbism. If the MARKOVO foundation stock had been unproven animals “from varied breeding programs” (as Barb Petura once wrote) with no work-testing involved — as the current mythology has it — then what Doug Willett has achieved in 18 years and one to three canine generations would scarcely have been possible. If the McFaul strain had been genetically “played out” (as Rick Petura speculates in his booklet *Untold Tales*), Willett would never have made it out of the back of the pack. Doug Willett deserves full credit, top marks and high praise for what he has achieved with his SEPP-ALTA dogs in head-to-head competition with top Alaskan Husky teams. But the SEPP-ALTA dogs did not come out of thin air by spontaneous generation! The genetic basis for their performance was present in Willett’s MARKOVO foundation stock, as it had been in the McFaul stock from which it derived.

It is perhaps inevitable that most of the commentary upon the MARKOVO project published in the last decade should fall wide of the mark, since it was without exception written by people who were not there at the time, who never saw the original McFaul-bred foundation stock, who did not know me personally and whose interactions with me were limited to one or two letters and the purchase of a single dog. Thus most of the writing about the MARKOVO years consists largely of uninformed speculation with little grounding in the historical facts of the era. Willett’s 1986 volume *The Seppala Siberian* fails to convey an objective and coherent history of both the MARKOVO period of 1970-1975 and the post-MARKOVO years. The full story of the 1970 decade and the involvement of Jeffrey Bragg, Betsy Bush, Larry Prado, Gary Egelston, Johanna Wilson, Barbara Bailey, Curt Stuckey, Bruce Morrow and others in the history of the revived Seppala Strain remains an ‘untold tale’ so far. That is unfortunate, since it was an interesting, eventful and crucial period for the breed.

IN CLOSING PERHAPS I should state that the original MARKOVO agenda remains as yet unfulfilled in its totality. We do not yet have the dog that won the 1910 Nome Sweepstakes running in harness in modern long-distance races. The fullness of the 1910 Ramsay import genome has yet to be restored. The potential and the possibility still exist, but the right persons to bring that potential to fruition have yet to come along. Doug Willett has carried the effort a long way towards ultimate reality. If and when the thing finally does happen and a Seppala Siberian team wins a major long-distance race (equaling or bettering the John Johnson Sweepstakes record in the process), the person who does the deed will stand upon the shoulders of giants whose names are Leonhard Seppala, Harry Wheeler, Bill Shearer, Donnie McFaul — and Doug Willett.



THE MARKOVO EXPLANATION

The use of a Siberian's AKC/CKC pedigree, taken back to foundation stock, as the critical determining factor for membership of the 'Seppala Strain' within the general category of 'sleddogs' becomes easy to understand once the overall view of sleddog history which guided the MARKOVO effort has been explained. Here is an explanation of the MARKOVO historical interpretation, which is quite distinct from the mythical history of the Siberian dog usually included in breed propaganda.

- Just prior to 1908, two kinds of sleddogs existed in Alaska: Alaskan native dogs bred by Indians and Eskimos, and the various 'white man's breeds' imported from the south — foxhounds, staghounds, pointers, setters, Saint Bernards and other breeds, along with many, many mongrels. Dogs from both groups were routinely used in Alaska to pull dogsleds. Cross-breeding between these two groups was a widespread and general practice.
- At that same point in time, an overall category of sleddogs also existed in eastern Siberia; it was composed of various tribal and regional varieties of sleddogs, hunting dogs and general-purpose canines. Native travel and trade brought about a constant mixing and intermingling of those canine varieties, producing a vast pan-Siberian heterotypic gene pool.
- In the year 1908 and thereafter, dogs from the pan-Siberian gene pool were funneled out of Siberia via the east-Siberian trading villages into Alaska, creating a third sleddog group there. The crossbreeding of course continued, merely adding the new group to the general Alaskan melting pot.

- As the Gold Rush drew to its conclusion, surplus-to-requirements sleddogs made their way out of Alaska to other parts of North America on the strength of Gold Rush publicity and attendant public romanticism fostered by the popular press. Two canine groups emerged to win AKC purebred status in the 1930's. From the predominantly Alaskan native dog group the purebred Alaskan Malamute was developed and from the experimental crossbreeding of Alaskan native dog and Siberian native dog, by and large, came the AKC Siberian Husky.

- That dogs were selected from the crossbred group to represent the Siberian came about for two reasons. Partly it was due to the scarcity of unmixed 'thoroughbred' Siberians at the time of the first registrations (some two decades after the original mass importations from Siberia). The Alaskans' mania for indiscriminate breed crossing had probably left relatively little pure Siberian stock available by that time. Perhaps even more it was owing to the desire of the New England breeders who gained control of the new breed to produce a dog of a different physical type and more striking appearance of colour and markings, that crossbred stock was found acceptable.

- One small breeding group of predominantly pure Siberian descent made its way into Canada directly from the hands of Leonhard Seppala. This group, though not entirely of pure Siberian origins, was still relatively purer than most of the AKC breed foundation stock used by New England breeders such as the Seeley CHINOOK Kennels. Moreover, the same Canadian group contained three of the last Siberia imports to leave Chukotka in 1929. These dogs, owned by Harry Wheeler, were registered with the Canadian Kennel Club in 1939 as the CKC 'Siberian Huskie' and constituted a distinct foundation group in its own right, independent from the AKC foundation of the early 1930's.

- The bulk of the imported Siberian native dog population introduced into Alaska in the 1910 era remained there, unregistered and progressively more and more crossbred, its descendants gradually amalgamating with the other two groups to form the sleddog population that is now known collectively as the 'Alaskan Husky.'

- Thus the Gold Rush era gave rise to four distinct present-day varieties of sleddogs, although only three of the four are popularly recognised and regarded as distinct breeds:

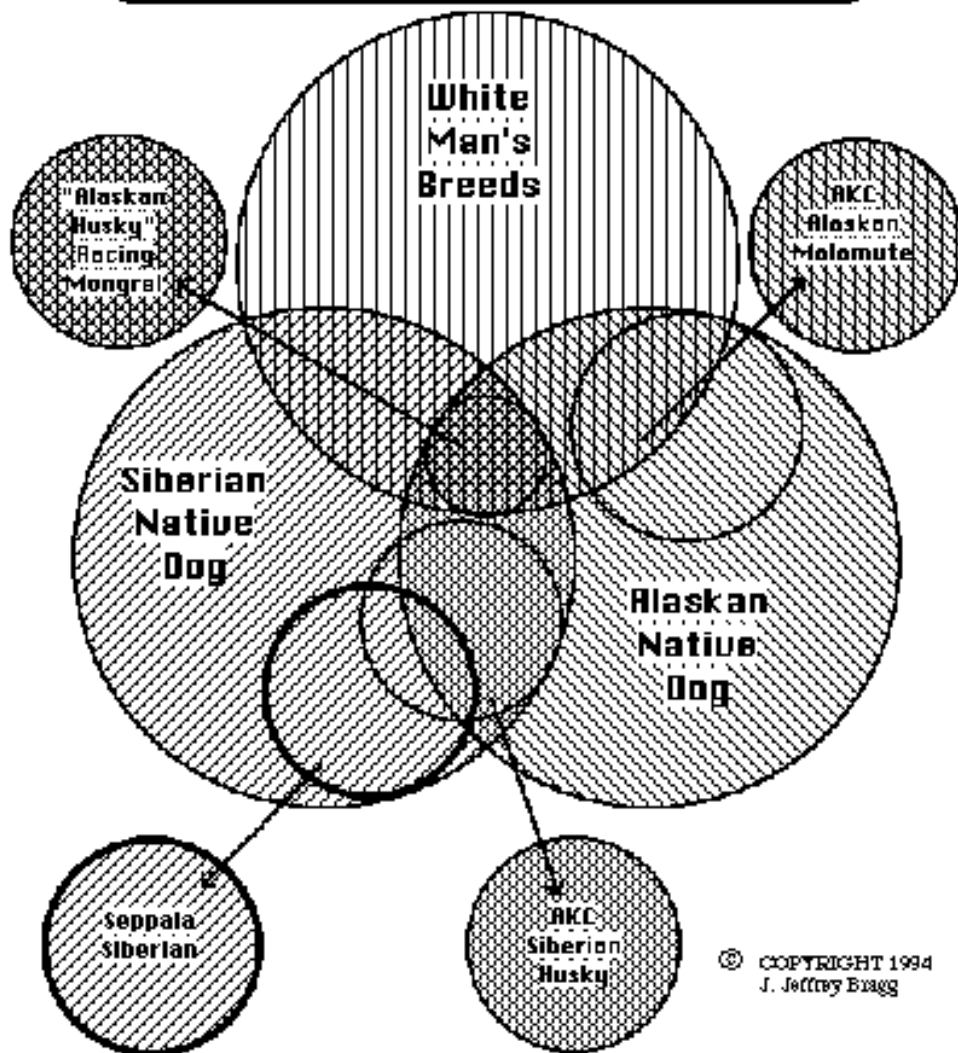
- (1) The AKC Alaskan Malamute (representing part of the original Alaskan native dog genome, plus crossbreeding with large 'white man's breeds');

- (2) The AKC Siberian Husky (descended partly from the early Alaskan and New England experimental blending of the Siberian and Alaskan gene pools and partly from the same or similar dogs that formed the foundation of Seppala Strain);

(3) The unregistered 'Alaskan Husky' or Alaskan racing mongrel (representing the sleddog population that remained in Alaska, with contributions from Siberian native dogs, Alaskan native dogs and white man's breeds);

(4) The numerically tiny group now regarded as part of the AKC/CKC Siberian Husky but distinct from that breed in its history, genetics, type, temperament and working ability — the 'Seppala Strain' descended from the CKC 'Siberian Huskie' registered by the Harry Wheeler kennels in Canada in 1939.

THE MARKOOD EXPLANATION



- The Seppala Strain, so-called, still represents the most direct and genetically pure connection to the original Siberian native dog (other than stock still remaining in Siberia). For that reason it was thought by the instigators and collaborators of the MARKOVO rescue effort (and is still thought now) to be worth preserving as a entity distinct from the general population of Seeley-derived AKC Siberian Husky stock, even though it is not regarded by AKC or CKC as a separate breed.

- It should be understood that the genetic purity of Seppala Strain is a relative matter, not an absolute one. No claim is made that it stems solely and uniquely from “purebred Chukchi sleddogs” (which were never pure within the western concept of the term ‘purebred’, in the sense of being genetically isolated from the dogs of other Siberian tribes). The claims that are made are that:

- (1) Its origins are probably relatively purer than those of most of the AKC Siberian Husky breed foundation animals;

- (2) It has never been subjected to cosmetic breeding for exhibition purposes nor has any attempt ever been made to alter its original physique and type;

- (3) Its breeding programmes have historically been oriented towards conservation of the strain and preservation of its original qualities rather than ‘development’ of a faster, or more short-coupled, or more flashily-marked dog;

- (4) It has remained exclusively a working sleddog throughout its 64-year history, always bred and selected for sleddog mentality, physique, metabolism and endurance.

