

Arctic Man

2008



PHOTO'S & STORY
BY MEGAN PETERS, PIO

It was 11:00 in the morning on the 12th of April—day four of Arctic Man 2008. Sgt. Brian Wassman was out patrolling through the thin morning crowd keeping an eye out for the die-hard snowmachiners who hadn't sobered up from the hard drinking the night before. Most of the Arctic Man crowd was still tucked inside their campers after partying late into the night.

Only a few groups of people had ventured out into the day. Cody Tims, of Eagle River was standing next to a fire pit with a group of friends. He lifted his can of Coors Light to Wassman and cheerfully slurred a good morning greeting as Wassman walked up to the fire.

After some small talk, Wassman decided to turn the chat into an education session. Wassman used Tims to demonstrate to the group of twenty-something year olds the standard field sobriety tests given to people suspected of driving under the influence. Tims hadn't been driving, but he had been drinking.



Sgt. Brian Wassman gave a field sobriety test and a breathalyzer test to Cody Tims, of Eagle River as a proactive enforcement measure. Wassman showed the group of 20-somethings how alcohol impairs their ability to function.

After showing the young Arctic Man fans how Tims' eyes twitched, he pulled a Portable Breathalyzer out from the back of his patrol Expedition.

“.128. See, that is exactly why you shouldn't drive—you should probably quit drinking, too.” Tims easily shrugged off the ‘no more drinking’ suggestion, but promised not to drive.

This was the 22nd annual Arctic Man. For years, the Alaska State Troopers responded up to Summit Lake to keep the event in check.



AST pilot Mel Nading and Trooper Charles Taylor load into Helo 1 to conduct surveillance through the avalanche-prone mountain passes at Arctic Man.

Planning for the event takes months. Troopers are pulled in from all over Alaska to assist. This year, AST dedicated 22 troopers, two trooper recruits, two CSOs and a pilot to Arctic Man. A District Attorney also came to Arctic Man to be on hand if troopers had a need for him.



Trooper Howie Peterson helps an Arctic Man attendee with a repair to his snowmachine.

Helo 1, snowmachines, ATVs and marked patrol vehicles were also deployed to the event to utilize during search and rescue operations and patrols.

Much of the focus was on proactive enforcement. Troopers stopped to talk with snowmachiners and Arctic Man fans to let them know DUI laws and to gather information on what was happening around the event.

Helo 1 pilot Mel Nading used the A-Star multiple times a day to check the avalanche situation on the many peaks surrounding the race course. Nading assisted in several search and rescue operations which required transporting injured snowmachiners to awaiting EMS. One SAR victim came by the command center the day following his rescue to leave a message of thanks to Nading and to the Troopers for being on hand.

During the days of the races, troopers took snowmachines up to the course to mingle with fans.

When not on the mountain, troopers patrolled through the sea of RVs and campers. On one such patrol, Trooper Howie Peterson was able to assist one man with fixing his snowmachine and even help to stand up a few tipped outhouses.

Numerous news organizations were present at the event which included news papers from Anchorage, Fairbanks and local television stations. Alaska Magazine sent a reporter to write a story about the event. The reporter said she felt welcomed by the troopers and believed it was a very positive and informative experience.

To those uneducated in the ways of Arctic Man, it wouldn't be obvious that this was a mild year. While the crowd numbered into the thousands, poor snow conditions, high winds and cold temperatures kept the curious bystanders away; only the diehard racers and fans showed. This year people also seemed more aware of troopers' efforts to curb impaired driving.

Over the past few years, as the event grows and the number of participants increase, the troopers involvement and concern for safety has grown as well. It has gotten to the point where people are glad to see troopers. While patrolling through the crowds, troopers are welcomed to join small groups around the fire pits. Some Arctic Man fans even offered to feed troopers making the rounds.

Overall, Arctic Man 2008 was a success for AST. Most importantly, there were no fatalities at, or associated with, the event.

