genuine connection.

the ITI that bring them back together.

this experience with."

One for the Ages

of swirling snow, limiting visibility to only a few yards.

What Matters

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"We made a pact not to say anything out loud to bring any negativity to our journey," says Graham. "I did say I didn't think my knee would hold up if we have to walk to Nome. I can ride, I can't walk. Our bodies are an amazing piece of machinery. I think my body eventually gave up on trying to stop me and realized I wasn't going to stop, so it stopped sending pain." "We do these races to test ourselves, I definitely had to go deeper into my pain reserves."

jagged Alaska Range rising up from a frozen and snow-covered marshland, listening to a pack of wolves howl outside of the tent in the morning, riding onto the stunningly immense mile-wide Yukon River, and following sled dog teams with the shared goal of reaching the same destination hundreds of miles ahead. When George and Graham arrived in Ruby, a 200-mile distance and 4-night journey from their last major checkpoint in McGrath, they hit a big goal in powering through one of the most isolated sections of the race. Here, they could take a deep breath and rest before moving along early the next day. The race started to buzz with energy. "The dog teams arrived and the trail was alive," shares Graham. "I followed one team for a while into the sunset and it really hit home what we were doing. There may or may not have

been a tear rolling down my cheek, maybe it was dust from the trail."

Awe-struck by Alaska

Giving Back

next village.

The Unakaleet Eight With sheer determination and unrelenting resiliency, George and Graham reached the coast. Through the Alaskan interior, they had intermittently traveled with a group of athletes from Italy, Denmark, Finland and Switzerland—quickly bonding over a shared vision. They powered through so much together—standoffs with moose, mechanical issues, pushing and postholing for hundreds of miles, heavy fatigue and aching bodies, unexpected closures related to COVID-19, and Alaska's unforgiving landscape—to reach Unalakleet and the Bering Sea. They were met with tough news.

A Pandemic Impacts the Race

Out of Options

village because of COVID-19 concerns.

physically," shares George.

comradery keep us going.

hardship, people along the trail extend a helping hand, offer a warm meal, and remind us that true human connection exists in even the remotest of places.

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Next: Fast and Light in Romania

After racing 350 miles to McGrath in the 2019 ITI, George and Graham followed their hearts back to Alaska to fat bike the iconic sled dog route once again—across frozen rivers, mountain passes, native villages and along the coast—this time, with the goal of riding 1,000 miles to Nome. The ITI is the world's longest winter ultra-race. You discover your breaking point on this trail. Extreme winds and plummeting temperatures require every ounce of mental and physical strength. But when you strip everything away—the smartphones, the meetings, the to-do lists, the stresses and conveniences of 21st-century life—you'll discover the most

A Human-Powered Journey Across Alaska

Most people don't travel to Alaska to fat bike 350 miles in the dead of winter, and most don't return the next winter to ride 1,000 miles more.

But childhood friends George Adams and Graham Muir are two tough ex-rugby players from New Zealand with tenacity, passion, drive, and

spirit—and they hope to inspire others with their journey.

Guided by the Māori proverb, "kia kaha, kia toa", "be strong, be brave", Graham and George are inspired to power through life's toughest challenges. This mindset led them through

months of intense training to take on the Iditarod Trail Invitational (ITI), a 350-mile or 1,000-mile race across the wild and frozen Alaskan landscape on foot, skis or bike.

Be Strong, Be Brave

George and Graham grew up in Taupō, New Zealand, a small lakeshore town on the North Island. Their friendship is one of mutual respect, built on trust, honesty, laughter, and a

sense of knowing that your mate has your back. While George now lives in Australia and Graham in Colorado, they've stayed close friends through the decades—and it's ultra-races like

"Graham has supported me through some tough times, listening and understanding, and pointing me in the right direction," shares George. "I couldn't ask for a better mate to share

"The physical challenge fires the mental side of me to adapt and overcome what life throws at me. With the ITI, I know what I signed up for so I've prepared the best I could. I'll never have all the right answers at the time, but the right attitude and being positive has helped me overcome

"It's grounding and humbling mentally, it keeps me present and focused on the task at hand," says George, explaining his desire to embark on the race.

major obstacles in life."

snow on the trail. Through it, there was always a strong bond between everyone in the same battle. Whether on bike, foot or skis, we all had the same goals: McGrath or Nome."

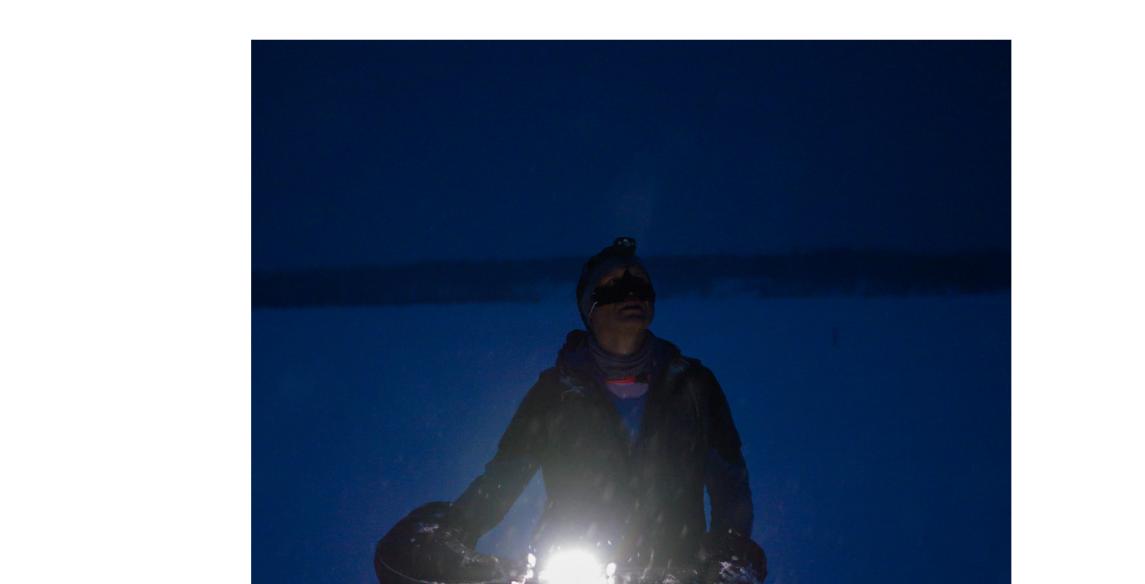
No year presented challenges quite like this one. As racers left the starting line an hour outside of Anchorage in Knik Lake—Alaska doled out the first of several biting storms, dumping

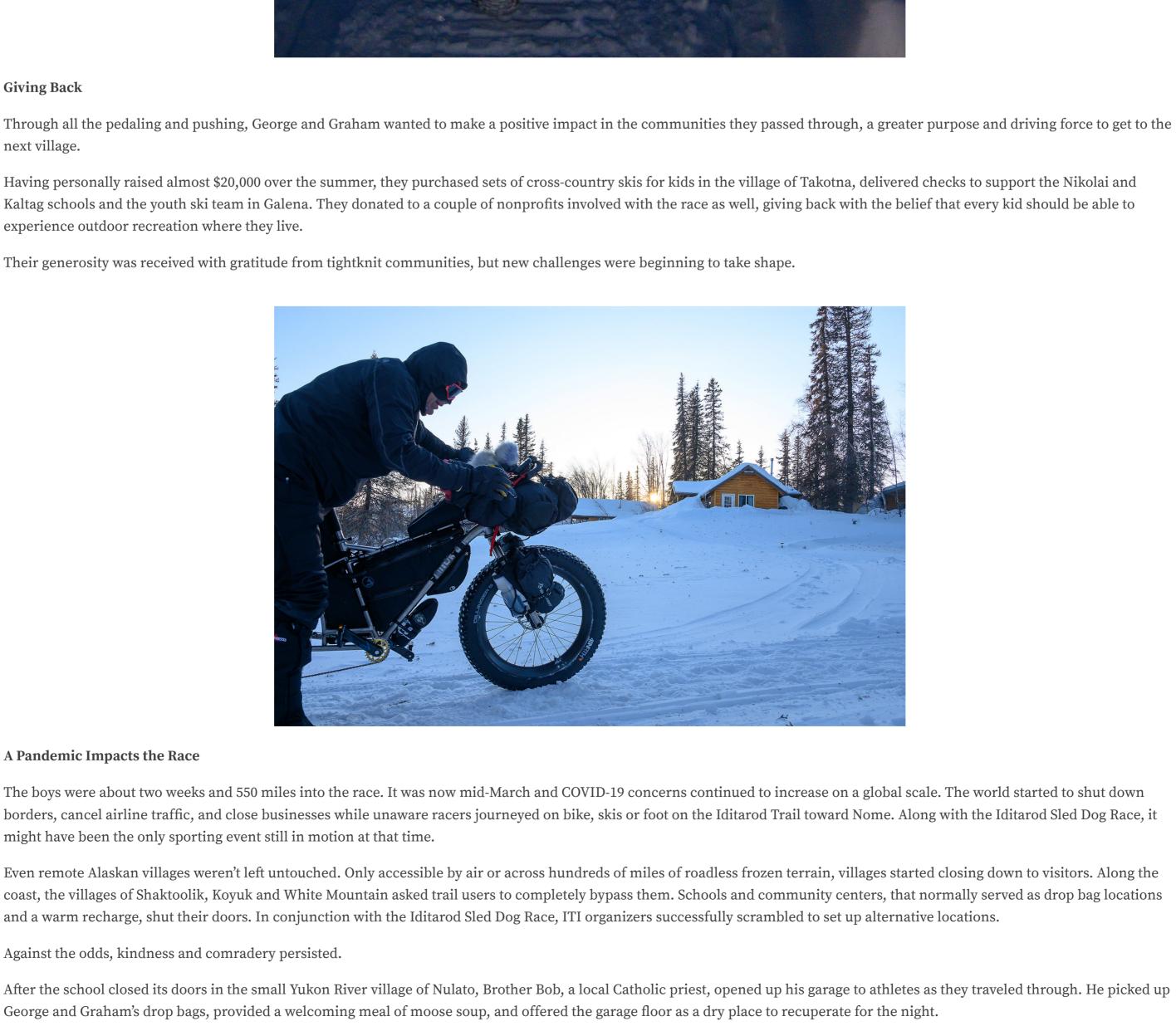
"The race turned into a test of survival straight from the start line," says Graham. "Not life or death, but if your systems are in place to cope with the incoming storm and the amount of

soft, unrideable powder along the trail. It snowed from around the 8-mile mark and didn't let up for the next 12 hours. Temperatures dipped below zero and the wind kicked up drifts



FEEDBACK





Further down the trail, Joanna, a longtime trail angel in White Mountain, was under quarantine. Typically, she opens her home for racers to refuel and rest. Despite the

"I watched so many people working through hard times in different ways. In truly testing times, it was really amazing how everybody watched out for each other and made sure everybody was doing ok." - Graham

circumstances, she left a picnic of hearty moose chili and fresh-baked bread for three lead racers to warm up and recover.

Stranded less than 300 miles from Nome, they collectively became "The Unakaleet Eight".

A storm surge had wreaked havoc on the sea ice, tearing and breaking it up, and pushing 3 to 6 feet of water into Norton Bay and Golovin Bay. Locals called the race director warning of impassable conditions between the small coastal villages of Shaktoolik and Koyuk. With open water or overflow, there was no safe crossing over the 30 miles of sea ice. The three lead racers had luckily crossed a couple days prior in between storms. "My goal had always been to get to Nome. The goal changed a little from just me and George getting there. I wanted to get to Nome and also see my two Italiano buddies, my brother from Denmark on skis, the ever-present Swiss man on foot keeping us chugging along," shares Graham.

They waited for word from race organizers on next steps. An overland route didn't look promising. Mushers had already passed through. People were no longer traveling village to

"I have massive amounts of gratitude for Graham for sharing one of life's toughest nuts to crack, having the patience and passion to live life on the edge of what's possible mentally and

While it was disappointing, they understood. The cards were simply stacked against them this year. But Graham and George's pursuit isn't all about getting to Nome. It's also about

inspiring each of us to be better at who we are, to realize our bodies are capable of so much more than we believe, and that when everything seems to be falling apart-kindness and

"We had it in the tank to finish the job, unfortunately it wasn't to be."

"Eventually, our plan is to return to New Zealand and ride our bikes along maybe the Tour Aotearoa pathway-stopping at schools along the route to share our experiences of not only

the ITI, but our life journeys," shares George. "By giving back and sharing our stories, we may give a different perspective on life that may change the attitude of someone that's not in

The ITI honored "The Unakaleet Eight" by designating a "finished in Unakaleet" instead of a scratch. Despite this year's incredible series of obstacles, no racer was seriously injured

and all international athletes made it safely back to their home countries. The trail is empty and Alaska remains. Its wily spirit continues to test and enchant us. Yet in times of

"The Unakaleet Eight" remained cut off. Eighteen days and 700 miles in, with no feasible way forward, George and Graham's journey came to an abrupt end.

Although we're not placing any bets quite yet, this may not be George and Graham's last attempt to reach Nome.

the right headspace, or further fuel someone that is. We still plan to do that," he smiles, "but we'll have to get to Nome first."

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