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Special ride for special reasons

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The Northland 300 kicked off a busy snowmobile weekend on Jan. 22-24 in Ely as 88 sleds plus trailers with support crews pulled into the Grand Ely Lodge. One of those snow machines carried a special rider.

The ride marked the first time a Special Olympics athlete made the fundraising journey from Two Harbors to Ely and back.

Special Olympics athlete Steven Eull from Mahtomedi joined the trail riding adventure with his coach Jason Reinsch. This was Eull's first trip to Ely and he said the journey couldn't have been more perfect. The trails were smooth and the day was sunny.

Eull was born with Down syndrome and has been an athlete in Special Olympics Minnesota. He is also part of the Athlete Leadership program for which he has been trained as a Global Messenger to speak at public events.

Though the ride was fun, he said the main point of the journey was being part of a team that helps raise money for Special Olympics

Minnesota. The 24-year-old has been participating in Special Olympics since he was eight and he appreciates all that others do so he and his fellow athletes can continue to compete.

As the athletes' representative, Eull lighted the flame in Two Harbors at the start of the event. He said completing the trip with his Northland 300 team was important to him.

"I don't want to be stuck not finishing the ride," he said.

Eull added he didn't expect to be asked to go on the trip, but now that he has, he'd like to do more riding in the future. He didn't even mind when his team's lead sled took a trail turn too wide, got stuck in deep snow and seven members including himself helped haul it out.

Eull raised over \$3,700 in pledges during the ride, placing him eighth among the other sleds in the fundraiser.

This is the 21st anniversary for the Northland 300 that raises money to help support Special Olympics Minnesota. The ride has generated more than \$2.9 million throughout its history.