

THE SAMOYED

HISTORY

For very many centuries reindeer herders in western Siberia used dogs to run freely keeping the herds together, giving warning of predatory bears and wolves by loud barking, and sometimes to pull sledges - though this work was usually done by the reindeer. There were various tribes of people, each with distinctive names, but by the late 19th century the name "Samoyed" was used rather vaguely to refer to many ethnic groups. It carries the meaning 'self-sufficient', which is certainly what these people were because their homelands were vast and very thinly populated.



Photo: B & C Alexander

A single family group would have its herd in the southern forests in winter feeding on moss then migrate some 600 miles to the north of the Yamal



Photo: B & C Alexander

penninsular for the short summer. Here the reindeer grazed the protein rich grasses that grow rapidly as the temperature rises. Then they returned southwards. Each migratory journey lasted about three months so people, herds and dogs spent half their lives on the move. Their

homes were robust double skinned tents of reindeer hide that were transported on substantial reindeer sledges together with furniture, tools and possessions. People were most unlikely to meet other families except at annual celebrations, for otherwise their reindeer would soon demolish the meagre food supply. So their lifestyle was one of almost complete isolation in exceptionally harsh conditions.

In these circumstances it is not surprising that the dogs "lived in" with the people - just as ours do! Countless generations of dogs and humans have shared home and hearth (cooking was done inside the tents). And, no doubt, countless generations of children played with the puppies, and fell asleep cuddling them...for they are delightfully warm in cold weather!

When you understand this background you can appreciate, just a hundred years or so since these dogs came to Britain, why they are so friendly, why

they love human companionship, why they are intelligent with a fair streak of independence, why some will try to herd sheep or cattle together if they have the chance - and why they have such a strong sense of fun. Humans in Siberia made them that way! Some tribes had quite a mixture of dogs, but a few possessed a strain which was more or less white. When early polar explorers used some of these they were given the name 'Samoyeds'. Today the people are called 'Nenets' and recent pictures show they still have some white dogs.

TEMPERAMENT

The Breed Standard says: 'Displays affection to all mankind'. For this to be true, obviously, they need human company and should not be left alone for very long periods, otherwise they will try to make the best of the situation - in their terms! This means finding something interesting to do....with teeth or paws - and they are great diggers! They have bright minds and expect to



be regarded as one of the family, taking part in domestic fun and games, sharing joys and sorrows. They seem always ready for play, always ready for a walk or run - even if they were doing such things only half an hour before!



They are *reasonably* obedient. They will not train mindlessly; a Samoyed will do many things because he enjoys doing them with you.

Then, occasionally, he'll do what he wants to do on his own. This independent streak, even mischievousness, is part of their 'all-but-human' nature. If you don't like that in a dog, don't have a Samoyed!

COAT CARE

They carry a 'double coat', a thick, close soft and short undercoat with harsh hair growing through it forming the outer coat which should stand straight away from the body and be free from curl. Ideally these hairs should carry silver tips which may be seen gleaming in sunlight. Dogs have a longer coat than bitches. Regular grooming is important to keep the coat free of dead hair, though a fairly quick daily brush will keep it looking remarkably clean with a more thorough and deep combing once a week. When walking in wet and dirty conditions the underside can soon look black - but if the coat is of good quality this drops off easily as it dries. But you'll need to sweep the floor!

In Siberia the dogs shed their undercoat in the summer. Here they do just the same, usually once a year, though the onset of winter can fool nature because we switch on the central heating! So dogs may shed some coat twice a year. When it is loose it *does* tend to get everywhere, and thorough grooming is essential. The good news is that when the coat is not loose a Samoyed does not shed hairs. With this breed it's all or nothing!

EXERCISE

Samoyeds require a reasonable amount of exercise, preferably with some free running in a safe, open space. They have a natural tendency to pull when first on the lead and move best when walking ahead of you on a longish lead.



That way they'll walk correctly and not pull - after the first hundred metres or so - provided you walk at their natural pace, which provides good aerobic exercise for you! Of course train them to walk beside you on occasions as well.

GENERAL

They make good watch dogs and will bark at the slightest thing. At times they can be very vocal. Puppies have a high pitched yap which must be discouraged at a very early age. Because of their friendly temperament they are not classed as good 'guard' dogs.

BUYING A PUPPY

DO NOT buy from pet shops or puppy farms. The reason for this advice lies in the fact that indiscriminate



breeding can and does produce poor quality stock. Only buy from reputable

breeders, who can be contacted via one of the Breed Clubs listed below. Always visit the breeder and see the puppies with their mother; you are strongly advised to see the father also though this may mean a visit elsewhere. Find out as much as you can about the four grandparents as well. Most breeders will want to help you as much as possible because this reflects well on their kennels.

HEALTH MATTERS

The Samoyed is lucky in that it is generally a hardy, healthy animal and indeed looking at the old pictures is still very much akin to the original dogs. The Samoyed Breed Council (all four breed clubs) have instigated a "Health Survey" on more than one occasion, and has also agreed on a "Code of Ethics" relating to the breed and it is a condition of membership for these clubs that members abide by these.

All breed clubs actively encourage their members to have their dogs x-rayed and scored for Hip Dysplasia. Indeed the Samoyed breed was one of the first along with German Shepherds to take part in the hip scoring process. Hip Scores are published in at least two clubs' magazines

All four clubs have web sites with extensive information on the breed including training, grooming and general health and well being, also the Legal Responsibilities of the dog owner.

There are very few health issues which can be described as "breed specific", however, there are incidents reported of Diabetes, Pancreatitis and Juvenile Nephropathy.

This leaflet has been produced by The Samoyed Breed Council with the cooperation and agreement of all four clubs listed below.

BREED CLUBS

The Samoyed Association

Secretary: Miss. Avis Haffenden, 6 Wetherby Gardens, Bletchley, Milton Keynes, MK3 5NP. Tel: 01908 379624

The British Samoyed Club

Secretary: Mr. Colin Brooks, 8 Maunview Gardens, Sutton in Ashfield, Notts, NG17 5HL. Tel: 01623 552625

The Northern Samoyed Society

Secretary: Mr. G. Fremlin, 1 Harecross Park, Longframlington, Northumberland, NE65 8SW. Tel: 01665 570560

The Samoyed Breeders & Owners League

Secretary: Mrs. P. Lepley, "Merrimoles", Tattershall Road, Woodhall Spa, Lincs, LN10 6TP. Tel: 01526 351494