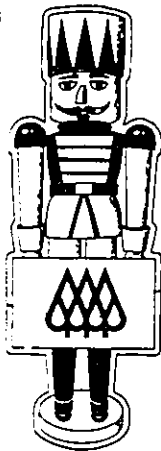


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Donder, Blitzen are up to the task

When Santa selected reindeer to lead his sleigh, he made an excellent choice. They're ideally suited for travel on snow and ice.

And although their noses may not really glow, they're invaluable for reindeer navigation, communication and even survival.

Donder and Blitzen's modern-day counterparts don't leap from rooftop to rooftop, but they probably could. Reindeer are small and fleet — and their hoofs are engineering marvels.

The hoof's broad surfaces function as snowshoes in deep snow and are surrounded by sharp, horny rims that grip rocks, hard snow, and ice securely. The centers are padded and concave, providing traction for running down rocky hills and leaping over icy terrain.

Even the tiniest reindeer is undaunted by the difficult.

"I've seen reindeer only a few hours old running breakneck speed over the sheer ice of a frozen lake, then jumping in vertical leaps up a steep slope with rocks and bushes taller than the calf itself," reported Dr. Dietland Muller-Schwarze, animal behaviorist at the State University of New York at Syracuse.

Muller-Schwarze has observed reindeer in their native territory of Scandinavia, where they are herded by the Saami people — widely known as the Lapps. Recently he joined a family of Saami and their reindeer for the spring migration from Sweden's forested coastline to the moun-

tainous interior — some 120 miles on cross country skis.

THE SAAMI LEAD their reindeer into the mountains above the timber line each April to bear calves and to save the food supply in the forests for the harsh winters.

Reindeer thrive in the arctic; most of the world's reindeer live in icy Siberia. Along with North America's caribou, reindeer are the only animals able to survive with lichen as their main food supply, and they can smell it through several feet of loose snow. They don't get cold: Long, hollow guard hairs together with fine, short underfur keep them warm in the bitter winters of the north.

Like that of other arctic animals, the nose of the reindeer is an insulator for its respiratory system — a nasal air conditioner. It allows reindeer to retain both moisture and heat and avoid becoming dehydrated and exhausted in the cold.

In the arid frozen arctic, reindeer can survive on less than a tenth-liter of water a day, explained Dr. Vaughan Langman, animal physiologist at Wellesley College, Wellesley, Mass. Both Langman and Muller-Schwarze have conducted field work on large mammals with the support of the National Geographic Society.

The animals' noses serve them in many other ways. Through scents, reindeer recognize their offspring, communicate alarm

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