

An Overview of the American Birkebeiner Ski Races By Cherie Morgan



History of the American Birkebeiner

The American Birkebeiner, also known as the Birkie, was launched in 1973 as a small race calling on skiers to challenge themselves against the Wisconsin northwoods. The race was patterned after the Birkebeiner Renneittin Lillehammer, Norway, an event which commemorates an historic event in that nation. During a civil war in the 13th century, an invading force was about to capture an infant prince and heir to the throne. Two Viking warriors, called "birkebeiners" for the birch bark leggings they wore, took the child and skied 55 kilometers to safety.

The baby went on to become a great Norwegian king, Haakon Hakonsson.

- ❖ The American Birkebeiner is the largest cross-country ski race in North America and part of the Worldloppet circuit of 15 international ski marathons held in Japan, Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, France, Estonia, Germany, Austria, Finland, Italy, Canada, Australia, Czech Republic, Poland and the United States.
- ❖ The Birkie is also part of the NorAm Super Tour a series of 14 races, part of the American Ski Marathon series of 13 races, and part of the lives of citizen skiers from around the world.
- ❖ The first Birkie attracted 35 people including 34 men and 1 woman. 19 skiers participated in the shorter 22K women's and junior's race.
- ❖ Skiers from approximately 48 states and 21 foreign countries gather every February to celebrate and ski the race which has become the most revered tradition in the cross country ski world.

- ❖ In 1984 wave placements were initiated to help alleviate bottlenecks and crowding at the start.
- ❖ Today there are 10 waves plus elite wave starts; 11 food stations with support personnel and medical, waxing, and repair stations; more than 2,000 volunteers, 56 chiefs, and a year 'round office staff.