



PATRON OF RACING
SKIP SHELDON

Skip Sheldon congratulates Reijo Puiras of Thunder Bay seconds after winning the 50km '79 Shell Cup race. Skip, Viking's President from 1973 to 1976, was the Chief of Course for the above race held at the Viking Racing Trails on the Jackson Road.

Jarl Omholt-Jensen

THE VIKINGS

by John M. Nolan

In 1929 a group of Norwegians who had emigrated to Canada joined together to form one of Canada's most enduring institutions in cross country skiing: the Viking Ski Club. The founding members were primarily ski jumpers, including Carl Boswick who was soon to become a Canadian national champion. In those days local and even national

skiing events were held in downtown Montreal. Like this year's Canadian Championships, the '83 Shell Cup, the site of major skiing events was Mount Royal and the old wooden ski jump on Côte des Neiges was used for the jumping and combined skiing events. The Viking Club was strong in both jumping and combined and dominated the local competition for many years.

The old Côte des Neiges ski jump was a popular spot for spectators as well as competitors. In fact, the three mountains on the island of Montreal, Mount Royal, Westmount and Outremont served as a large winter playground for local skiers in the thirties. Here is how the president of the Montreal Ski Club described the local scene for the 1931 yearbook of the Canadian Ski Association:

Never before in the history of North America has such interest been shown in amateur winter sports as is now being shown at the approach of the 1932 Olympics.

Lying as it does so close to Lake Placid, Montreal will undoubtedly see many of the competitors both before and after the games, when it is hoped they will avail themselves of the opportunity to sample our Canadian skiing. From the point of view of position, Montreal is unique in being the only place on the continent where good skiing can actually be enjoyed in the heart of a great city. Mount Royal, Outremont and Westmount, at the feet of which are clustered the homes of some million people, have on their sides approximately four square miles of woods and parks. Rome has its seven hills, we have our three, and it is these which form the nucleus of Montreal skiing.

JACKRABBIT

The president filing this report was none other than the Viking Club's most honored member and the father of cross country skiing in North America, Herman "Jackrabbit" Smith-Johannsen. Jackrabbit, besides being an effective administrator was also a competitive skier. When the club held its first Viking Veteran Ski Cup, Jackrabbit skied away with the first prize. The year was 1936 and the event was held in Shawbridge where the club had constructed a ski jump on the west side of the village. If you know where to look, you can still make out the outline of what remains of the jump today.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR

But for some reason, perhaps as someone has suggested the problem was with the profile of the Shawbridge ski jump, the Vikings moved to Ste. Marguerite. They rented a ski lodge in the area and constructed a ski jump on a hill near the Alpine Inn. The new ski jump must have pleased them because they remained in the area until the Second World War. The war put a stop to the club's activities for a few years.

After the war the club resumed activities in the Christieville area operating out of a rented cottage. Members were soon at work on the construction of yet another ski jump with the help of club president Alex Olson who was able to make a large contribution to its development.

JACK WAHLBERG

It was around this time, the mid-forties, when cross country skiing began to absorb the interest of the Viking skiers and they soon had a North

American champion among their ranks. He was a Swedish native who came to Canada when he was twenty-one years old. His name was Jack Wahlberg, a powerful competitor who at 76 years of age today continues one of the longest winning streaks in the world of sports. For the past 61 years he has won an award every year in either running or cross country skiing. Some of the highlights of Jack's remarkable career as an athlete include winning the 18km North American Championships race in New Hampshire in 1948 and representing Canada in the World Championships in 1950.

"I have a love of outdoor activity" he told writer Maureen Stern in a recent interview for The Gazette. "I like racing because you have light equipment, a mechanically prepared track and you can use your poles properly...but I also like touring because you see tracks of animals."

Jack Wahlberg's advice to the reporter was straight forward and sincere. He told her, "The older you get, the more important it is to keep active and out in the fresh air, and to watch your weight." They are not idle words. Last season Jack won the 15km race at the Canadian Masters Championships in the over 70 class.

He skis with such efficiency even seasoned skiers less than half his age have trouble keeping up with him. "I don't move like an old man and that's partly thanks to the exercise I do", says Jack, who skis about 1,500km every winter and paddles around in his racing kayak in the summer.

THE CLOVERLEAF TRAIL

Tour skiing became very popular with Vikings in the early fifties and you can still find some of the old trail markers in the woods. Ski jumping remained an important club activity and in 1953 the jump in Christieville was abandoned and a new jump was built near the Bellevue Hotel in Morin Heights. The Morin Heights Ski Club amalgamated with the Viking Ski Club and the members worked together to develop and maintain the Clover Leaf Trail. For many years the Clover Leaf Trail was the club's most important trail. Most of the club's races and tours were held on this trail. It was also the original site of one of the club's most enduring events, a 3x10km relay race. Next year the club will celebrate the twenty-fifth consecutive running of the Viking Annual Relay Races.

JACKSON ROAD

Toward the end of the '50's the club's involvement in ski jumping diminished until finally in the '61/'62 season it was dropped as a club activity. It didn't stop Ulf Kvendbo from successfully representing the club in ski jumping between

1965 and 1972. His successes included winning a Canadian Championships event and several international meets.

Sam Stallard, Rolf Ellingsen and Robert Weiler purchased property in the Morin Heights area around this time and began cutting cross country ski trails. Gradually, the club's activities were transferred from the Clover Leaf Trails to these new trails on the Jackson Road.

VIKINGS SELL SKIS

The late fifties was also the period when the Viking Ski Club began importing and selling cross country skiing equipment. The venture was started by Sam Stallard, Robert Weiler and Gosta Edvardsson to fill the needs of members who found it difficult to purchase good equipment locally. The Vikings imported the equipment from Finland and Sweden and eventually began selling to the general public. The business grew each year until it became the club's main source of income.

By 1963 the club was sufficiently well off to purchase nine acres of land on the Jackson Road next to the existing cross country trails. The next year the original A-frame club house was started and by 1966 it was completed. As more and more sporting goods stores started to stock good cross country equipment the club no longer felt the need to continue importing it and sales were discontinued in 1964.

RACING TRAILS

In 1966 under club president Robert Weiler a racing trail was laid out. It was a successful trail and two years later with Jan Nordstrom at the head, the club organized the Canadian Cross Country and Nordic Championships on this trail. Viking's Irene Jensen won the ladies 10km event and Leo Lehtonen won the 15km and 30km veteran championships. Over the years development has continued on the Viking Racing Trails and at the beginning of this season the entire 10km network was expanded and bulldozed to accommodate double tracking. This work was done in anticipation of the '83 Shell Cup and under the watchful eye of Racing Events director, Jan Eisenloeffel. The club can now boast the finest network of racing trails in the country.

CANADIAN SKI MARATHON

To celebrate Canada's birthday in 1967 the Centennial Marathon Ski Tour was staged. It was a three day touring race from Pointe Claire to Ottawa. Four hundred skiers participated and the event was won by Viking's Gunter Vesser. This event has become the Canadian Ski Marathon, a two-day event on a 160km trail between Lachute and Ottawa which attracts over 4,000 skiers from

around the world. Leo Lehtonen scored a string of victories in the CSM by winning in '68, '70, '71, and '72. Viking members have continued to dominate the event. Last season Vikings skied away with a total of 56 medals, 31 of which were Coureur de Bois awards. Viking's Bill Pollack was awarded his second Gold Bar but the club's top performance came from a 10-year old. Chris Blanchard became the youngest skier in Marathon history to ski the full 160km (100 mile) distance to earn his Coureur de Bois award.

SMITH-JOHANNSEN LOPPET

Jan Hansen initiated the club's most popular citizen's race in 1972, the Smith-Johannsen Loppet. Named in honor of Herman "Jackrabbit" Smith-Johannsen who has been the traditional starter of the race, it has consistently attracted the best citizen racers from Quebec and Ontario.

LAURENTIAN LOPPET

One of the longest races in the world the Laurentian Loppet, a 75km event was started in 1979 under Jan Nordstrom. Aided by club president Malcolm Adams and Smith-Johannsen Loppet's race director, Judy Adams, Jan staged the longest one-day cross country race in Canada. It has since become an annual event but this year it will be shortened to 46km. This has been done to allow the club to concentrate its energy on running the Canadian Championships.

SKIP SHELDON

The most potent force in the Viking Ski Club's involvement in cross country racing has come from the initiative of Viking's President, Skip Sheldon (1973-1976). Skip, a well-known and respected figure in cross country skiing across Canada, besides promoting racing locally, was also involved at the national level. He was Chairman of the Canadian Ski Association's Cross Country section for many years. In 1974 he took Bert Bullock, Sue Holloway and Esther Miller to France for the European Junior Championships.

Skip Sheldon was responsible for starting the Junior Racing Program in the early seventies and the Racing Team has continued to grow under its present coach Aare Oljemark and now numbers sixteen racers.

It was Skip who positioned the club squarely in the forefront of cross country racing. Under his leadership the Viking Club held its first Shell Cup race in 1976 and when it held its second Shell Cup in 1979, Skip served as the Chief of Course. This year, as the Viking Club once again hosts the Shell Cup Canadian Championships, they follow a tradition which originated with Skip. Through his continued support the club remains an important force in Canada's cross country racing scene.



JACK RABBIT



“Get your skis on and hit the trail!”

At 107 years of age, Herman “Jackrabbit” Smith-Johannsen speaks with the convictions of a man who has thought deeply about the human experience.

Jackrabbit, the father of cross country skiing in North America, is not only a champion in the art of survival. He is the spiritual champion, as well as the most convincing example, of the value of seeking out a life of vigorous activity.

“Take advantage of all the good things in life but in moderation. Be it eating, smoking, drinking, or exercise. Be natural. Be thankful for all your blessings. Don’t dwell on negative matters. Be happy with yourself.!”