



The Greatest Adventure on Snow!

Canadian Birkie E-News:
March 2016



Super El Niño is apparently waning and, we trust, not making a return visit next winter! In this extremely anomalous winter, we received less than 40% of our normal annual snowfall. In February, 77% of days had a maximum temperature rounding off at 0°C or above and about a third of all winter season's days leading to Birkie day entered skiers' dreaded plus territory. The forecast had actually been on the cool side two weeks out from the big day. But then several sunny, double-digit warm days popped up in the week leading up to the Birkie. These warm days effectively stole the only snow available to snow farm our trails' thin spots, and, sadly, killed this year's Birkie.

We were in good company in the 'snow-challenged' category this winter in Western North America. The lower 48 in the US just smashed their previous record for the warmest winter on record, and looking north, it was no better. January temps in Alaska were 15°F above their long term average (that's an almost 10°C difference, but whether we think in Celsius or Fahrenheit, that's warm!). The ceremonial start day of the famed Iditarod dog sled race was abbreviated from 11 miles (17.6 km) to a token 3 miles (4.8 km), and the snow needed for even that short bit of track was hauled by an Alaska Railway freight train 365 miles (584 km) from the Fairbanks train yard.

Vikings' Feast & Birkie Boogie

While our hearts were heavy at the loss of our ski events, we held our chins up and in true Birkie spirit, came together for the Vikings' Feast. Why, you may ask. Here's why:

The Feast evening provides an opportunity for skiers, volunteers and sponsors to get together to celebrate Birkie spirit; which lives on



Vikings at the Vikings' Feast

whether we ski that day or not. Sustaining the event through difficult seasons like this one relies on people persevering through adversity and looking forward to next year together.

It gives us a chance to honour our sponsors, who are usually recognized and celebrated at our Opening Ceremonies (which, along with the Nordic Fair, were cancelled since the ski events were called off). We all greatly value and respect our sponsors, as without them, skier registration fees would be much higher. They are crucial to event sustainability.

It offers us the opportunity to celebrate major award winners of the year (e.g., Founders, Outstanding Contribution, Ole Hovind) so their awards are given in a timely way and next year's program does not get overloaded. Sharing the stories of award recipients at the Feast and in the spring e-newsletter helps inspire others to live their best Birkie lives.

Some of our sponsors provide draw prizes as part of their sponsorship and the Feast is the designated or best avenue to distribute these.

The Feast evening is largely funded by skiers purchasing tickets (which covers their own meal and share of room costs), by sponsor dollars and by one or two auctions held at the event. Very little of skier registration fees go to this event.

To see a gallery of photos from the Feast, please click [here](#).

Founders' Award

**Recipient:
Kaare Askildt**



Kaare Askildt; Finish Canadian Birkie 1994
(with skis)

Founders' Award

The Founders' Award is presented to an individual or group who worked to create the Canadian Birkebeiner Ski Festival and/or who was a key contributor to growing this event over the early years. To see a list of recipients, click [here](#).

Kaare was one of a small group of fellows who got together in 1984 with the notion of introducing the Canadian Birkebeiner Ski Festival. Kaare served on the Board of the Birkie Society for several years, and also enjoyed skiing some Birkies. Below are some excerpts from Kaare's acceptance speech:

Recipient: Kaare Askildt

Brian Peters had the vision and drive to create the Canadian Birkebeiner. I was part of the founding board and one of my functions was to contact the Norwegian Birkebeiner president and request permission to use the Birkebeiner name. Permission was granted, and confirmed in writing (English).



Kaare Askildt; Happy Farmer

The plan was for the Birkie to start at a golf course close to Devon, and finish at Fort Edmonton Park. Brian had been busy obtaining permission from various land owners to set a track and for the participants to ski across their land, sometimes navigating between various farm implements. The track crossed the North Saskatchewan River three times.

Brian and I had been busy negotiating with Sun Life Insurance, who became the initial sponsor. The inaugural race had to go, or we could risk Sun Life cancelling the sponsorship. February 9, 1985 was a very, very cold day with minus 30 degrees, sunshine and no wind. I was skiing in the event along with 126 other skiers. The start was delayed, waiting for the temperature to warm up to minus 20, so we would still maintain our Cross Country Alberta sanction. At noon the starter Les Finch went out to check the temperature, and called the technical delegate over to show him the reading of minus 20. Les took his thumb off the bottom of the temp gauge just before the TD got there.

The race started with a shortened distance, and at one point my friend Verner Steinbru was stopping the skiers and advising us to take our skis off and walk down to the river. I didn't heed his instruction, and just skied down. Oops! I had to jump down over a large cement culvert, and landed on the flat frozen river surface, but I was still in one piece.

The event was cancelled in 1987, and moved to Cooking Lake Blackfoot in 1988, as there was not enough snow in the river valley. It was a very good move, and the Birkie has been there ever since.

A lot of effort and sweat by dedicated members goes in planning, managing and to lay out the various courses and maintain them. Kudos to all the Birkie members and volunteers!

I thank you all for this award, and thank you all for carrying on the Birkie spirit.

Ole Hovind Award

**Recipient:
Ana Lucas Osma**

Ole Hovind Award

The Ole Hovind Award was created in memory of Ole Hovind, who is recognized by most as the Father of Nordic skiing in the Edmonton region. The award is presented annually to the skier who best represents the spirit of the Birkebeiner and the things which Ole valued – skiing for the sheer joy of it, having fun, joking around, achieving something and just getting out there and doing it. For more about the award and previous recipients, click [here](#).

This award is generally presented to an individual who has skied in several Birkies and the recipient is decided upon by the Awards



Ana Lucas Osma



Ana Lucas Osma enthusing about skiing the Birkie

Committee weeks in advance of the Birkie. For these reasons, the Award was presented this year, despite the curtailment of the ski events.

Recipient: Ana Lucas Osma

When Ana Lucas Osma discovered cross-country skiing, it allowed her to feel just like everyone else who has ever tried the sport - free and independent.

Ana, age 36, is a Para-Nordic skier; she sits on a sled over her skis, crunched into a custom-made metal chair. She's belted in at her waist and across her pink down booties, so she becomes one with the sit-ski. "In a sit-ski, you get to go where you can't in a wheelchair," she says. "You don't feel like you have a disability."

In the four years she's been cross-country skiing, she's learned how to manoeuvre and tame the apparatus so it rarely flips or careens off the ski tracks. She uses her ski poles and strong upper body to steer and brake.

Originally from Madrid, Ana was only 18 when her school bus swerved off a road and rolled down a hill, leaving her with a broken spine. She was the only one of her classmates who was seriously injured and she remained in hospital for about seven months. She cannot use her legs or lower abdominal muscles; muscles most skiers rely upon heavily, especially for climbing hills.

But none of that stopped her. Ana went on to play wheelchair basketball with Spain's National team and completed an undergraduate degree in Veterinary studies at a time when universities and most other institutions were barely accessible to wheelchairs. While university officials didn't expect her to stick around, she proved them wrong, and finished ranking first in her class.

After completing a PhD in neuroscience, she moved to Canada in 2011 to do spinal cord research at the University of Alberta, where she currently works. She was only planning to stay for three years, but then she fell in love — with an Edmontonian and with cross country skiing.

Two weeks after her first sit-ski attempt at Gold Bar Park with Mike Neary's Para-Nordic learn-to program, she signed up for the 13-kilometre Birkie. After crossing the finish line that February in 2012, about three hours after she'd begun, her first thought was, "Wow, I'm alive?!"

She's skied in every Birkie since and has twice competed in the 31-km race. Like many skiers, the feeling at the finish line is a rush of rapture and relief. Any who skied last year's Birkie, where we received an unbelievable 13 cm of snow Birkie morning, can

appreciate how incredibly tough Ana was to persevere, with true Birkebeiner spirit, to finish the 31 km event. She had the added challenge of pushing herself back up through the soft snow and righting her sled after it tipped for the umpteenth time.

Last year Ana's hard training, including: skiing, roller skiing on her sit-ski mounted skateboard, and swimming daily) paid off as she picked up two bronze medals in sit-skiing at the Canada Winter Games in Prince George. Now she has her sights set on joining Canada's Para-Nordic team. This month, she is going to Ski Nationals in Whitehorse, her first time that far north.

This year's Ole Hovind Award winner, Ana Lucas Osma, is truly a shining 'spirit of the Birkebeiner'.

Outstanding Contribution Award

Recipient: UCHV



Vice President & Chief of Loppet Cam McGregor presenting award to Arnold Grandt and Mike Murray of UCHV

The Outstanding Contribution Award is presented to an individual or group who is or has been a key contributor to the Birkie over the years, or in a unique, exceptional way over a shorter period of time. For recipients click [here](#).

The Canadian Birkebeiner Ski Festival is pleased to recognize the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village as the recipient of an Outstanding Contribution Award.

Since 1992, the Canadian Birkebeiner Ski Festival's long start races have started at the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village, an outdoor living history museum located 25 minutes east of Edmonton, next to Elk Island National Park. We are very proud of our 24-year association with the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village and the Government of Alberta, which owns and operates this award-winning museum.

It indeed is a treat for skiers participating in the 55 km, 31 km and other long start races to begin their day with the picturesque backdrop of this beautiful museum, which today has more than 35 historical buildings wonderfully restored to their early 20th century appearance. The place is amazing in the winter, and spectacular in the summer when costumed role-players bring history to life daily on-site.

In recognizing the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village today, we also wish to thank all of the community partners who dedicate their time and resources to support the Birkie and its long start area. The following partners work collaboratively to remove snow for the race start area on Goose Lake, and to create enough parking spaces for all of the skiers to safely arrive and park on race day:

Elk Island National Park
Lamont County

SNC Lavalin O&M and Alberta Infrastructure
Carillion Canada Inc.

We also wish to thank the Friends of the Ukrainian Village Society, whose Red Barn serves as the long start warm-up area.

Finally, we wish to thank the staff at Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village, who are such terrific supporters of the Birkie.

Prior to the race, their restoration officers coordinate the set-up of the scaffolding for our start line and staff prepare the Red Barn staging area.

The staff and volunteers from the UCHV are also volunteer parkers; outside before the sun rises and standing directing skiers safely into parking spots.

After the race, staff at the UCHV take down the start line area.

We are also grateful that the Chief of Long Start has traditionally been a UCHV staff member to serve as a liaison with the Birkie office.

This year, their commitment to the Canadian Birkebeiner Ski Festival was elevated when we were exploring options to change the race route with the diminishing snow conditions. Ultimately, Mother Nature did not cooperate with us; however, we appreciate their efforts to support us.

On behalf of the Canadian Birkebeiner Society and Birkie skiers, we acknowledge and celebrate the tremendous contributions of the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village over the years, and especially this year as their staff and volunteers rolled up their sleeves and worked hard with us to save the 2016 Birkie. We look forward to continuing our much-treasured partnership.

Haakon Haakonsson Award



CANBi Shield with Phil Dunn
(previous recipient)

This award is presented to skiers who complete all three international Birkebeiner events; Norway, the USA and Canada. To see more about the award and previous recipients, click [here](#).

While our Canadian event was not held this year, we have three recipients who had skied at least one previous Canadian Birkie and so are welcomed to the 2016 recipient list. They will be presented their commemorative steins at the 2017 Birkie Vikings' Feast, but their names will be added to the CANBi ceremonial shields and our recipients' list now. With the addition of these three skiers, the total number of recipients who have earned this award since 1985 is 146.

The 2016 Haakon Haakonsson Award recipients are:

Victor Anderson, Regina, Saskatchewan
Patrick McKenna, Calgary, Alberta

Jens Stemo, Calgary, Alberta

Congratulations Victor, Patrick and Jens!

Birkie Programs

Despite the snow challenges faced by all skiers in the region this winter, our Birkie Training Groups (Dryland, Winter and Mid-week) and our Birkie Learn to Loppet program all proceeded successfully and over 85 skiers used these opportunities to improve their technique and their fitness and to make new ski friends. Thanks to the program coordinators, coaches and instructors for your leadership in these awesome programs.

New Social Media Campaign a Wonderful Success



With the help of Ricka Ortiz, the Birkie's keen and committed Social Media intern, we worked to provide digital real-time updates to engage the Birkie community through Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. With the community's support and participation, we were able to improve our fanbase on two platforms; Facebook – 29%; Twitter – 30% and establish a new connection through Instagram. By working with you and using your feedback, the Birkie will better able to tailor content to update our followers on Birkie-related news. We would love to be tagged in your experiences as you live your Birkie life year-round.

Your Birkie Needs You!

We know that volunteers are absolutely the heart and soul of the Birkie. Spring is the period of renewal of the Board and Loppet Committee. Normal rotations lead to opportunities for new folks to step into engaging, rewarding and fun positions. To explore the opportunities available that best fit your interests, skills and experience, please contact our Human Resources Director, Brian Lucas, at jblucas@telus.net or sign up on our [volunteer page](#). Please join us.

Casino June 4-5, 2016

As a not-for-profit organization, the Society runs the event on a break-even basis. Any surpluses that the Society generates are used to improve facilities at Cooking Lake-Blackfoot, unexpected expenses, and to improve the ski festival in subsequent years. Casino funds help to offset the operating expenses to run the loppet, and help to keep entry fees affordable. For more about how casino funds are used, click [here](#).

The society holds a casino every two years. We require many

volunteers to staff the various positions, most of which require no prior casino experience.

The Canadian Birkebeiner Society's casino coming up in June provides another opportunity for skiers and others who love the Birkie to give back some time. If you are able to work a shift or two at the casino contact our Casino Chair, Ken Bagnall, at kayjaybee23@gmail.com or please sign up [here](#).

MS Bike Partnership



In 2014, the Canadian Birkebeiner Society and Multiple Sclerosis Society - Alberta and NWT Division - partnered up to create a unique award opportunity; the Bike 'n Ski Award. The award encourages cross training and celebrates individuals who complete both a long-course Canadian Birkie cross country ski event (55, 40 or 31 km) and a MS Bike Tour - either the Leduc-Camrose road bike Tour, or **new in 2015/2016**, the Hinton Mountain Bike Tour.

Interested in a MS Bike Tour? Call the MS Society office at 780-463-1190 to receive \$10 off your registration for the Leduc to Camrose Tour or the Hinton Mountain Bike Tour. Click [here](#) to see more information or register for a MS bike tour.

Birkie Swag



Take a piece of the Birkie home with you with Canadian Birkebeiner Merchandise!



Birkie merchandise is available for sale until the end of March only. We have shirts, mitts, caps, scarves, Tuberz (buffs) and selfie sticks. We have a Birkebeiner book and prints, and even some merchandise on sale from previous years.

Check out what is available [here](#), and order your merchandise [here](#).

The office will be closing for the season on March 31st. So, if you want to order any Birkie merchandise items, you'll need to do it this month. The Birkie store will re-open in September.

Thanks Skiers!

Finally, thanks to the many skiers who wrote or called for their kind words of support for all who worked hard to provide a great Birkie this winter. We were ready and know you were too. Congrats to everyone who persevered to train through a challenging winter; you are Birkebeiners.

See you out on the trails!



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