

## Nikki's Adventure

First off, I'd just like to say this was really quite an experience. 14,500 skiers is a LOT of skiers.

Each wave had about 700+ people in it, and as Dan very aptly observed "The first 3 kilometers were deafening with the sound of swishing skis". It's at about the 3 kilometer mark that the four Detroit Lakes skiers stories start to vary. Dr. Bob (Koshnick) who went out in Wave One reported great snow conditions that stayed relatively constant for his whole race. Dan was in Wave 8, which went out one hour and forty minutes later in significantly warmer temps (we started out around freezing that morning and just got warmer from there). I went out in Wave 14 (4,200 skiers later) and Dr. Jonasson was in Wave 16- (or about 1,400 skiers later).

The course winds up and over two mountains, with fairly significant elevation changes- which means that temps and snow conditions were constantly changing during the race making for some \*cough cough\* super fun waxing conditions. Too cold and you would get no kick, too warm and you'll ice up.

For the first 3k everyone reported pretty good trails and proper waxing, but after that it started to fall apart. I had my first "ice up" at about 3.5 -4k. I had great kick and glide before that, but all of the sudden (literally in a matter of seconds) the snow changed and it felt like my skis each weighed 80 kilos and my glide came to a dead halt. I got off the track and pulled my skis off- to find about 2-3" of solid ice on my kick zone. Having never seen this before I didn't really know what to do with it, so I pulled my pole off and used it to chip the ice off the bottom of my ski. Having gotten most of it off I set off again... only to ice up again within about .5 k. Talk about frustrating! I found some other wax and put a little on which helped for a bit... until the trails went to mush. There wasn't much for tracks left for a bit when the trail narrowed, so it felt a little more like back country skiing. Oh, and have I mentioned the trail hasn't gone DOWN yet? It's almost 15k of up... and not so steep that you have to herringbone, you just have to stride the entire thing without stopping. The funny thing is you'd think you were at the top because you couldn't see anything higher, then you'd round a corner and magically be going up again!

So, I FINALLY got to the first feed station about 12k in. I thought I'd never get there, and quite frankly was NOT having a good time at that point. But it was only 3 more kilometers of up and then it was down. (Seriously, I would have ditched the baby by now)

And the first down hill you get (15k in) is a killer. Fairly steep, I think all 4 of us DL folks crashed on it. The other three had someone step in front of them and chose to fall rather than hit them and I iced up (again!) going down the hill. The tracks are also about 4-6" wide at this point so your skis would wobble in them and clatter all the way down. I've got some good bruises from this tumble. A ski patroller helped me de-ice... with a hatchet. I about peed my pants when he whipped out a hatchet and used it to scrape snow from my skis- turns out it's pretty effective.

Then there were some nice long gradual kilometers of down- a nice break. But the snow conditions completely changed yet again going down and I lost any kick that I had. (Yep, from iced up to no kick at all). But at least I could double pole so I was still moving. Then it flattened out between the mountains... and it was completely flat for what seemed like forever. Until it was up again. Up up up up and away- much steeper this time to the second peak. The Swix wax guys never did much to help, and when I asked what I should do with my wax I got a blank look. The best people who helped were some Norwegians who came out to watch the race and were sitting on the side- they asked if I needed help so I said yes. Immediately they started running out of their little snow dugout thing where they were sitting with wax, klister, scrapers ... and an 8" knife, which was used to peel the layers of incorrect wax off my skis. They did their best to get me on my way and offered me some doughnuts... but first I had to take a picture with

them (The picture below is one they emailed to me) Amazing how different the spectators are in Norway



from the American race.

Here is where my adventure splits from everyone else's. I started icing up again pretty badly going up (I couldn't win...it was ice or nothing), and a ski patroller stopped me and said I shouldn't keep going with my skis as bad as they were because I was going to get hurt. No no, I insisted I was OK and I was going to finish. (Stubborn Nikki, my alter-ego, made an appearance). Well, turns out the ski patroller was right. At about 35k I iced up on a hill and couldn't get down the other side. While trying to go down with ice on my skis I came to a dead halt, flipped over backwards and popped my left shoulder out of its socket. (Don't get alarmed, this happens a lot.) Due to the pack I had on and my pole and possibly a slightly worse dislocation than normal (ha ha) I had to have help to put it back in. But again... I wasn't going to quit. I could just use my right pole and I was going to be fine.

At this point I felt like I was reenacting the "Bring Out Your Dead" scene from Monty Python and the Holy Grail with the ski patrollers. "But I don't want to go on the cart!" "Nonsense, you'll be dead in a moment." "I feel happy... I feel happy..."

But at 40k they said no more and put me on a snowmobile to be hauled in. (The guy who picked me up was also the one who helped me fix my arm... he said I had more heart than he had ever seen out there, which I guess was some small consolation, but it doesn't replace being allowed to finish.) So they brought me to a feed station... and dropped me off.

The lady who dropped me off said "there's a bus waiting and the driver knows you're coming so he's waiting for you. It's over there" This was followed by some vague pointing down a hill. So I picked up my stuff and started walking down a slippery road down a hill.... Right into a residential area. (Only fell once, thankfully didn't get hurt again...) Only to find no bus. Thankfully some friendly (too friendly?) drunk Norwegians pointed me in the right direction. So I found the bus stop... and there's no bus. It's now about 5:30 PM and I was apparently the last person pulled from the course.

Again, thankfully Norwegians are the nicest people ever and I made a friend at the bus stop. He (I feel terrible, I couldn't pronounce his name and I have no idea how it would be spelled... so we'll call him Bus Friend.) helped me get my jacket on since it was starting to get cold, and then got me onto a city bus by

sweet talking the bus driver into letting me ride. Now, this was not the bus I was supposed to take but after waiting 20 minute I didn't think there would be another one and being stranded on the mountain above Lillehammer didn't sound fun.

Anyways Bus Friend was great- and we had a good laugh at my predicament. No phone, didn't know Martha's phone number, no money and don't speak Norwegian. (Really, at that point what else can you do but laugh?) He also skied so told me how my skis should have been waxed. He really wanted to try and call Martha to let her know where I was, but I had no idea what her number was. "Well" he said with a shrug "Shit happens". Either way, he got me to Lillehammer's city bus stop which was a lot better than being stranded in some village on the mountain.

He then pointed me up to Haakon's Hall and off I went, only to find Dan and Martha weren't there and there were no buses up to the finish line area a few kilometers away. They were frantically looking for me (it's almost 8 PM by this point) at the Birkebeiner Stadium where injured skiers were brought in or waiting to see if by some miracle I was still skiing and would come across the finish. The medics had no record of who was pulled off the course- and no idea that I wasn't in because my timing chip was still running. The bus driver who took off without me apparently never let anyone know I hadn't shown up at the bus stop. (Thankfully I didn't break a leg on my slip walking there, or I'd have been toast.) So basically no one had any idea where I was, or if I was dead on the side of the trail somewhere. I made another friend at Haakon's Hall who called all the stations at the Stadium to see if someone was looking for me (which they had talked to EVERYONE at the Stadium) but no one said there were two Americans looking for their third. He then went out and looked for our rental car in all the parking lots to no avail. Finally Dan and Martha decided to check Haakon's Hall back in Lillehammer proper... which I have never been so happy to see anyone in my life.

We all made it... though it was a little traumatic at the end! Dan said the last 14k of downhill was brutal- total mush and the tracks were totally chopped up. Dr. Bob also had issues with his binding coming down... so no one really had the race they wanted to. But either way, the people were wonderful and it is a very different event from the American Birkie. Will I go back? Absolutely! As our host said, I need to have my revenge on the course!

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