

Birkie Fever!

The residents of Detroit Lakes have caught Birkie Fever.

A total of twelve Detroit Lakes area skiers made their way to Hayward, Wisconsin for the 36th American Birkebeiner, the largest cross country ski marathon in the country. Considered by many skiers to be one of the most difficult courses in the world, the American “Birkie” turns out over 7,000 skiers each year for its major events: The full 51/54 kilometer Birkebeiner and the half-marathon 22 kilometer Kortelopet. The race, founded in 1973, is patterned after the ski marathon Birkebeiner Rennet, which has been held in Norway since 1932. Both events honor and re-create a historic Norwegian event when in 1206 two warrior soldiers and one woman, called “Birkebeiners” because of the birch-bark leggings they wore, skied infant Prince Haakon (Hō-ken) to safety during the Norwegian civil war. Prince Haakon subsequently became King of Norway, and the Birkebeiner soldiers became a Norwegian symbol of courage, perseverance and character in the face of adversity.

This year Bob Koshnick, Glen Gifford, Dan Josephson, and Knute Thorsgard all skied the 54 kilometer Classic technique Birkebeiner and were joined by David Gifford and Nikki Caulfield who skied in the 51 kilometer Freestyle technique Birkebeiner. Local high school students Dylan Ramstad-Skoyles, Ricky Quam and Shannon Goetz all skied in the Kortelopet, with Ramstad-Skoyles placing an impressive 9th overall in the Classic technique race. Also at the races were local Ski Patrollers Don Goetz, Jeff Quam and Dave Squires to help keep the skiers safe. While many of these skiers have participated in the Birkebeiner events many times, it was the first time that the group from Detroit Lakes was this large.

“It was a lot of fun. I got to ski against many good racers,” said Ramstad-Skoyles of his first Kortelopet experience. Caulfield agrees; “The challenge of the whole event makes it so exciting that even though it’s a tough course you can’t wait for the next year to get lined up at the start again.” Birkie Fever, as it’s called, has set in so much with three of these skiers that Koshnick, Josephson, Caulfield as well as Neil Jonasson are headed to Norway in March to race in the Birkebeiner Rennet there as well. Ramstad-Skoyles summed the whole experience up nicely: “Skiing in the Kortelopet really helped me gain a lot of confidence, and I am hopeful that I can do even better next year.”

So while many people are thinking about spring starting, this group of skiers is already looking forward to the snow flying next February so they can again join the 7,000 or more skiers at the starting line of the next American Birkebeiner.