

Paul Kovacs 2016/17 Overseas Report



*FIS Nordic World Championships
Lahti Finland*

2016 was the first time I didn't return home for the Australian winter. Instead I chose to stay in Alaska and train the entire summer. My plan was to focus only on the northern hemisphere winter and prepare for the World Championships.

My summer was fantastic and things were going really well and I was right on track. I did a large amount of training and got some great hours in, but I was also fortunate enough to go on a lot of adventures too. I spent 4 nights on the Alaskan coast sea kayaking, I did a lot of camping trips, and I spent many hours fly fishing which was quite amazing! Alaska in summer is perhaps even more beautiful and fun than in winter and I truly

loved it up here.

Autumn was a slightly different story. My preparations for winter were going very well and then in November I was struck down by a cold. For basically the month of November I was out sick, it was extremely frustrating and disappointing for me. I had to skip the first period of races in the US and I turned my focus to January and US nationals. Instead of the early season being my "warm-up" races and then hitting form for Nationals, the first race at Nationals was only my third race for the season. As it turned out the 15km skate was really solid for me and I was happy considering how sick I'd been. Then just to test my patience a little more, a stomach bug swept through the team and most of us were laid out, meaning I missed the last race of the championships there.

Flying home frustrated I headed down to Valdez, a town 6 hours south, for a weekend of racing. From here my season really started to turn. I won both races in Valdez that weekend and managed to put in a solid training block in Alaska before packing my bags once again and flying to Sweden.

To put in perspective how little racing I had done, I hadn't even done a classic distance race until I stepped up to the line in Falun, Sweden for a 30km mass start World Cup race. In Sweden I stayed with Callum Watson and his lovely partner, which was fantastic. I hadn't seen Cal or Tessa in a year so it was nice to catch up! For the races, Phil Bellingham and Valerio Leccardi both joined us so it was great to get the Aussie crew together!

Falun was solid racing but I was looking for more. So after flying all the way from Alaska to Sweden and dealing with a rather nasty case of jet lag we all packed our bags and headed to Asia. We flew to South Korea, via Beijing. Here I'd hoped to at least check out Beijing airport a little and peer through some

windows to the city but the security lines and procedures were so slow and so long that we didn't have a chance. Each individual person was patted down by security!



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In Korea we jumped on a bus and drove to PyongChang, site of the 2018 Winter Olympics! It was a fantastic experience for the team and everyone had some good races. I managed to have two really good races in a classic sprint and a 30km Skiathlon which I was really pleased about. My classic skiing felt really good considering I hadn't done much racing. It was a really positive week!

After only 6 days in Korea we packed our bags once again and flew to Estonia. By this stage I was wrecked. I had raced two 30km races in a week plus sprints plus travel and so I took few days off from skiing to really recharge my batteries

and recover. A week later was the Estonian World Cup and I had my best ever world cup race to date in the 15km Classic. In quite tough conditions with a lot of rain (think puddles of water on the course) I skied well and finished the best time behind the winner for me, which I was really pleased with.

That night we once again traveled, this time to **Lahti, Finland, for the 2017 World Championships**. I was really excited to race in Lahti. Firstly I was feeling in decent shape and eager to see what I could do, but secondly on a more personal level, my dad raced here at the Biathlon World Champs 30

years ago and I thought it was pretty amazing to be back here following his footsteps.

The championships were quite successful. In the classic team sprint Phil Bellingham and I raced quite well and we beat our rank by quite a few places moving up into 19th and my first ever top twenty at a World Championship. It was a great event and I was really excited to race there in front of such a wonderful crowd. The 15km Classic was again my standout race. It was my best World Championship race ever and my best major international race of any kind. So to walk away with a number of PB's from the season was quite satisfying.

Looking back on the winter it was basically short and sweet. I did not a lot of racing but it seems that the racing I did was in fact some of my best ever, and this year I managed to have 3 new personal bests which I'm very pleased with.

With all this traveling and racing comes a lot of big expenses and I could never do it without the support of the Birkebeiner Nordic Ski Club! I'm returning to Australia this year and I look forward to catching up with everyone! For more detailed information on what I get up to you can have a look at my blog at: www.pkovacsxc.wordpress.com

Thanks again to the club and all the support it offers!

Happy skiing

Paul Kovacs
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