

# History



It is known now beyond any doubt that skiing as a transport, hunting and warfare activity, has been around for thousands of years, and interesting things have been discovered; e.g. a ski preserved in a Swedish peat bog at Hoting has been accurately dated at 4500 years old. Another discovered at Kalvtrask in Finland is 4000 years old. They were primitive by our standards, but there was no technology available to these people to use anything other than the wood of the forests around them and the hide and fats of the animals they hunted.

Until recent times, the Lapps used a binding which was simply a hole burnt in the ski into which was driven a birch peg, and an extension of the leather sole of the boot with a hole in it was slipped over the peg. Maybe it didn't look the best or cost very much, but the Lapps would have developed a certain proficiency with it.

Nordic skiing is the "useful" activity, and because of that its history is seen in that of oversnow transport, hunting and warfare.

## Transport:

Right from times long blurred by history, and mostly unrecorded, oversnow transport has been that of skiing, it is well known now that heavier loads of birch wood could be towed by a man on skis if he wore skins on the soles, that visiting on a social plane was made easier by using skis, and that the mass migration of people either in pursuit of or fleeing from enemies, or simply moving to another place, was greatly facilitated by using skis. They are still used on the north American and Asian continents, but regular usage of skis for daily activities is largely restricted in Australia to the school children at Cabramurra and to the resort managers in the skiing resorts. The skis used originally for transport were of an unusual design; one ski often about eleven feet long was designed with a smooth sole - this was the "glider", the other ski was short and wide and made with a fur sole - this was the "pusher".

## Hunting:

In the old days - for thousands of years, nomads living in the icy washes of Siberia and other places lived on what game they tried to lope by in the snow. Clearly, speed of transport was important in catching that game, for it was their livelihood. Skis gave them the speed to be in the right position at the right time with bow or spear or noose. Hunting was their way of staying alive. Except for some fur trapping in Northern Canada and in Siberia, it is not usual now for a people to live solely by hunting. The Eskimo people still use skis for hunting, and they are probably the best known, but even they have found that the modern high velocity rifle and telescopic sight have largely reduced the necessity of, and certainly the dangers involved in being at the right place at the right time.

## Warfare:

Rock carvings of about 3000 years ago show skiers engaged in warfare in what is now Russia. Other evidence points to the use of skis in the times before the birth of Christ; from about 500 AD increasing evidence is available which is documented. In 1206 AD two "Birkebeiner" (i.e. members of the King's guard who wore birch bark leggings), carried their infant King to safety from rebels by skiing across the Dovre mountains. The little King's name was Haakon and he was to become one of Norway's greatest Kings. The event was belatedly preserved for posterity by the Birkebeiner race instituted in 1932 to commemorate the event.

In Sweden, Vasaloppet (which means "the Vasa Lope") has become a big international event. It commemorates the flight of King Vasa in 1521 in disgust towards Norway after he had tried and failed to unite the Darlarna peasants to rise in revolt against their Danish oppressors. After he had started from Mora some of the peasant leaders sent their fastest skiers to intercept him - they met the King in Sälen, 53 miles from Mora, and persuaded him to return and lead them against the Danes. History shows that he was successful.

Vasaloppet has been celebrated since 1922, but is now run from Sälen to Mora. It annually attracts about 10,000 competitors in a schemozzle start. Some well-known Australian cross country boys have competed in this event of 80 kilometers.

In the World War I of 1914-18 a battle on skis took place in 1914 at a place called Hilsenfirst in the Vosges mountains between a section of the French ski troop and the 1st Battalion of a Bavarian Alpine Regiment. During this war the Austrians and Italians both used skis as they fought each other in the mountainous border country.