



Birkie Basics

The Birkie Then and Now...

- In 1973, thirty-four men and one lone woman stood on the starting line of the American Birkebeiner cross-country ski race.
- Forty-five years later, an estimated 13,500 skiers will participate in Birkie week events.
- The American Birkebeiner, the "Birkie," is North America's largest cross-country ski race.
- The Birkie Spans from Cable to Hayward, Wisconsin - 50K for skate and 55K for Classic Skiers.
- The Kortelopet is the second largest cross-country ski race in North America at 29K.
- An estimated 40,000 spectators and skiers gather in and around the Hayward area for the annual Nordic sports festivities. Spectators join in the celebration on Hayward's Main Street by ringing cowbells and cheering on skiers
- Over 250,000 skiers have finished Birkie ski events since the races began.
- Today, the Birkie has grown into much more than just a race. Today the Birkie represents a year-round, healthy, active lifestyle that provides events for thousands of outdoor fitness enthusiasts of all ages and abilities.
- From the iconic Birkie race that started it all, to the Birkie Trail Run Festival and the Fat Bike Birkie (the world's largest fat bike race), the Birkie Trail has become a mecca for outdoor enthusiasts year-round. In fact, an estimated over 100,000 visitors utilize the 100+ kilometer Birkie Trail each year.



The History of the American Birkebeiner

- Founded in 1973 by Tony Wise who patterned the ski marathon after the Birkebeiner Rennet, which has been held in Norway since 1932.
- Both the American and Norwegian Birkebeiner races honor and re-create a historic Norwegian event. In 1206, two warrior soldiers, called “Birkebeiners” because of the birch-bark leggings they wore, skied infant Prince Haakon 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
- Tony Wise’s vision also shaped cross-country skiing when he brought the world together with the founding of the Worldloppet an international sports federation of cross-country skiing marathons. The Birkie is part of the Worldloppet circuit of international ski marathons. Since the Worldloppet’s inception in 1978, 2.5 million skiers have finished Worldloppet races

History Comes to Life! Birkebeiner Warriors, Inga & Prince Haakon

- In honor of the Birkie’s roots, each year three skiers and an infant dress as the original Birkebeiner warriors: Torstein and Skervald; Inga (mother of Prince Haakon); and Prince Haakon.
- The warriors and Inga ski the entire 55K American Birkebeiner Classic course from Cable to Hayward, WI, on traditional wooden skis and in full-period costume.
- A baby doll is carried along the trail to symbolize wee Prince Haakon.
- In the final stretch of the race, a real infant “Prince” joins Inga and the Warriors for the race to the finish line in downtown Hayward, WI.
- This recreation is a true celebration of the roots, legacy and traditions of the race.

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