

## 2007 American Birkebeiner Race Report

by: Joe Bouscaren

The bronze to the right hangs over the big fireplace in Telemark Lodge and depicts the legend of the Birkie.

Birkebeiner skiers, so called for their protective birch bark leggings, skied through the treacherous mountains and rugged forests of Norway's Osterdalen valley during the winter of 1206, smuggling the son of King Sverresson and Inga of Vartieg to safety.



The lodge's entryway is pictured to the left is a holdover from the grand and large lodges of simpler times. Enormous central gathering places, big wide hallways and a meandering floor plan. It is THE place to stay for proximity to the start of the racecourse.

The story of the race this year was very little snow, a shortened course, a "time trial" except for those in the top 200 from last year (elite wave), and a near cancellation the day before the race.

The trip started off well with an inexpensive round trip on MidWest Air (the Milwaukee Bucks "charter" plane!) See the legroom I had!



My fortunes took a nosedive upon arriving in Milwaukee when my friend Mike called to say the race would probably be cancelled, and that a final decision would not be forthcoming until the night before the race! All this after the Birkie web site touted for two weeks how great it was that they could run a full course this year...



The view out of the hotel clearly shows the lack of snow; driving to the race one could hardly believe there was any snow on the trail. Warm temps in the 50's and rain Thursday before the race delivered a near fatal blow to this year's Birkie.

Race day temps were in the mid 20's with a cloudy sky and a brisk wind. There had been a trace of new snow overnight.

Humidity was expected to be in the 70-80% range, and with the dirty, trucked-in snow at the start (as brown as a farmers cow field, from where it probably came!!) I felt a high flouro top layer or two was indicated. I have accumulated many waxes over the years (TOO MANY). Which of these flouros would you have chosen?



Prior to and after the race we ate out at a variety of typical mid-west lodges, all adorned with trappings of an outdoor lifestyle. Fellow Silver Star coach Mike and his wife Jane are pictured to the right below.



At Telemark Lodge there is a wall of photos showing previous Birkie winners. My old friend and roommate Todd Boonstra from Norwich, VT in 1987 is pictured here:



I am sure it was the rowing lessons I gave him that allowed him to win in 1992!!

This year I found myself duking it out (by time) with the top elite women who started 15 minutes ahead of me.

My goal next year is to be more competitive with the elite women who have stomped me at Silver Star, the Boulder Mountain Tour and the Birkie..

This is a great event despite being difficult logistically due to the high number of skiers. One has to run about 100 meters in a big "wave" to claim a spot on the front line of the wave. My time would have put me solidly in the elite wave for next year, but our times were not formally recorded. I guess I'll have to try again. I saw fellow CSU skiers Terry and Sue McNatt at the start. I have yet to debrief them about their experiences and their reaction to the 5 inch deep brown-black sugar snow that was the first few kms !

To quote a report by Ian Harvey: **"we hit about 1 inch of fresh new snow (on top of ice) at about 3kms where my skis hit the brakes and never released. I was going "over the bars the entire race"** Ian goes on to say that despite the warm temps and high humidity, a colder lower flouro wax might have worked better than a straight powder. He thinks a colder wax would have stayed cleaner and that the new snow had been dried out by the wind. **Can a humid wind dry out snow?** It seemed SO the day of the race.

I had a Dominator anti-static layer, Swix HFBD-7 covered with a mix of Solda HPO5 and TOKO Jet Stream Moly. Maybe HF-6 covered with Jet Stream Moly, with a finer grind for the new snow would have run better. I had tested skis the day before on old large crystal snow, and chose my Q1 over my ZR-1 grind. I have some good training ideas for this off-season and am looking forward to continuing the good progress I made this year.

Good training,

Joe