

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Whilst many changes were taking place in the competitive arena, another great breakthrough came in the 1960s with the development of ski touring for recreational skiers. In 1965 the Munich Invitational Ski Meet launched recreational skiing on a major scale and enthusiasm for this aspect of the sport spread quickly throughout Europe and North America

In the mid-1970s a revolutionary change occurred in ski construction. Fiberglass skis appeared on the market and within a few years the increases that they gave in speed combined with the lightness and durability of the skis themselves had made wooden skis, which had served their purpose for 4,000 years, virtually obsolete. At more or less the same time there was a world-wide explosion of interest in competitive endurance events, reflecting itself in an enormous growth in the number of popular races, generally over marathon distances. This boom saw such well-known races as the 90 km Vasaloppet (Sweden), the 75 km Finlandia-hiihto, the Engadin Skimarathon (42 km) and other big races assemble anything from 10-15,000 racers on the starting line.

THE INTRODUCTION OF SKATING

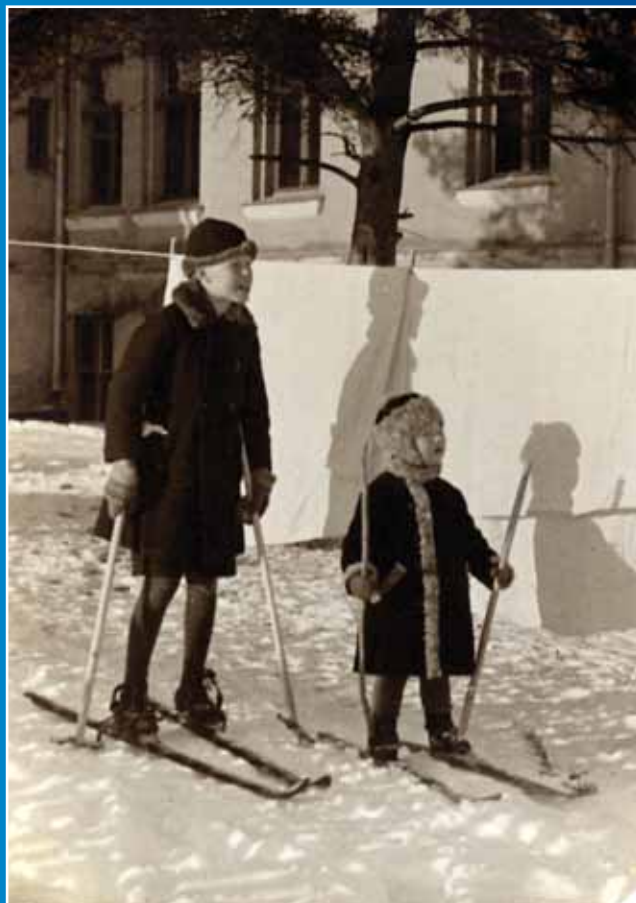
It was during these marathon races that a Finn, Pauli Siitonen, first brought the skating step to public notice. Although this technique had been used by Lapp hunters for centuries (hence the short and long skis of mediaeval Lapland), it had never been considered suitable for use in a wider context. Within a few years of its renaissance through Siitonen, followed by its introduction into international competition by Bill Koch of the USA, the skating steps were in widespread use and in 1985 the International Ski Federation was obliged to create two categories of races, those run in the traditional or classical style, and free technique events, in which skating was permitted. The development of modern and advanced methods of track grooming played a major part in the spread and popularity of skating, which was quickly adopted by recreational skiers, being particularly widely used in the Alps, where it is well suited to the valley terrain and to the variable temperature and snow conditions which can be encountered during the course of a single day.

In the same timeframe, Norheim's Telemark turn, which had fallen into disuse, began to re-emerge as a cross-country technique. Initially used mainly by back-country skiers, as its popularity has increased so it has become more often used on Alpine pistes, where a competitive Telemark circuit has developed. The specialisation of Telemark equipment, its general use on alpine slopes and specific development of the Telemark techniques led the FIS in 1994 to remove the discipline from the list of 'nordic' events and to re-classify it as an autonomous alpine discipline. The Alpine side of skiing continued to diversify with the growth of other sub-disciplines, such as Freestyle Skiing (Moguls, Aerials and Acrobatics), Speed Skiing and Snowboarding.

Meanwhile, all over the world millions of 'ordinary' cross-country skiers continue to enjoy the pleasure and benefits of skiing in much the same manner as their forebears have done for thousands of years. For them, little has changed. Skis may be lighter and made of different materials; they may use two poles instead of one; and their technical knowledge may be better developed. But the mountains and the forests remain the same and will continue to be available for skiers to practice their sport for as long as global warming leaves enough snow to cover the land.



Female skiers of Viljandi, Estonia in 1917



Children on skis in ca thirties

PHOTOS: ESTONIAN SPORTS MUSEUM