

## FOUNDING & HISTORICAL FACTS

### The Beginnings of the Kangaroo Hoppet

In 1977 a group of cross country skiers in Mount Beauty, a small mountain valley town in north east Victoria, decided to form a cross country ski club. Some of them had skied in Norway and taken part in the Birkebeiner Ski Race and thought that Birkebeiner would be a good name for their club. Two years later, in 1979, the Birkebeiner Nordic Ski Club decided to hold their own version of the famous Birkebeiner race and the 21km Australian Birkebeiner was held with some 80 participants, all carrying a 5kg pack. The course started and finished at the alpine ski village of Falls Creek, and took participants out into the wilderness area of the adjacent Bogong High Plains.

The Club ran this event for ten years to 1988, and in early 1989, in a decision that seemed very simple at the time, it was decided that since they had the best ski race in Australia there was no reason why it should not become part of that Worldloppet series of ski races that a small but growing number of Australians had travelled overseas to take part in.

Could a small local ski club conduct a 42km event? The easiest way to answer the question was to do it. In 1989 a 42km event named the Birkebeiner Marathon was held and the organisers also included a half distance of 21km and a 7km event. While the 42km was in free technique, the 21km was held in the classical style because that was the tradition of the race over that distance. Following the success of this event it was 'all systems go' to work towards becoming a member of Worldloppet.

After a lot of communication, mainly by fax (remember those good old days before email?) representatives from the Birkebeiner Nordic Ski Club and the Australian Ski Federation headed off to a Worldloppet Annual Meeting in Hämeenlinna (FIN) in June 1989 to put the case for a southern hemisphere race in the series. Their main task was convincing the assembled northern hemisphere folk that there really was snow in Australia.

The meeting decided that before being admitted the club had to demonstrate to Worldloppet that Australia could conduct a world class citizens cross country ski event. So another trial event had to be held. In 1990 the 42km The Australian International Ski Marathon with a half distance of 21km called the Australian Birkebeiner and a 7km race called the Birkebeiner Lite, all events in the free technique. The organisation, course layout, local infrastructure and participants were assessed by a delegation made up of Rolf Kjaernsli (NOR), Robert Steiner (AUT) and Tom Duffy (USA) and their report was discussed three months later at a special Worldloppet Meeting in Munich. The result was that Australia became the 12th member of Worldloppet ... but with one important proviso – a new name. Worldloppet already had two Birkebeiner events (Norway and USA) and two Ski Marathons (SUI and JAP). Australian Birkebeiner or Australian International Ski Marathon were definitely not on.

### A new name!

Such an important decision definitely needed a committee meeting, no minutes were kept, but it went something like this. We need something Australian. Something to do with skiing. 'Too hard ... let's have a drink'. Kangaroos are Australian. Kangaroos hop. Hopp is a word in Scandinavia mean-



1993: A.Jungen (SUI), A.Aukland (NOR), A.Vanek (CZE)