



FÉDÉRATION INTERNATIONALE DE SKI
INTERNATIONAL SKI FEDERATION
INTERNATIONALER SKI VERBAND



The Sub-Committee for Ladies Cross-Country Short History and Purpose

History

Women in Cross-Country Ski races did not for a long time gain any international recognition or support. "It looks unfeminine" was the opinion of many men.

So it took a long time of fighting before at long last a new period of women's cross-country skiing started. A big help in this step came from women's alpine skiing. The "Alpine Women" received more interest and support at international level. In 1936 they were already allowed to start at the Olympic Winter Games.

After the first post-war Congress at Pau (FRA) in 1946, the council formed four technical committees: Downhill/Slalom, Jumping, Cross-Country, Women's skiing

Under the cover of the "Alpine Women" some representatives from cross-country were also able to take part in this new committee for "Women's skiing". Chairwoman of this first committee was Elsa Roth from Switzerland, who had an alpine background. The Vice-Chairwomen, Heika Ristolainen from Finland, was an instructor for both alpine and cross-country, but gave precedence to cross-country in the committee. The work was concentrated more or less on alpine questions. Cooperation inside the committee was not easy as the members actually represented two different disciplines.

In 1965, at the Congress in Mamaia (ROM), Elsa Roth resigned as chairman. The Committee for Women's Skiing was divided into "Women's Alpine Committee" and "Women's Cross-Country Committee". Inga Löwdin from Sweden was appointed as chairwoman from the Women's Cross-Country Committee.

With the reorganisation of FIS in 1983, the "Women's Cross-Country Committee" became the "Sub-Committee for Ladies Cross-Country". Chairwoman of this Sub-Committee was still Inga Löwdin. She kept this duty until the 1990 Congress in Montreux (SUI) when she resigned and was replaced by Gloria Chadwick from the United States. Unfortunately she was forced by ill-health to give up her office in the spring of 1995. Barbara Broger from Switzerland ran the sub-committee as a temporary arrangement and was confirmed as chairwoman at the 1996 Congress in Christchurch (NZL). She resigned in 2006. New chairwoman appointed at the congress 2006 in Vilamoura (POR) is Midori Koyama Poppe from Japan.

Purpose

The purpose of the Committee for Women's Skiing and the subsequent Women's Cross-Country Committee as well as the present Sub-Committee for ladies Cross-Country Skiing was and is in principle the same: to undertake work on all matters and special questions concerning Ladies Cross-Country. This covers ladies cross-country skiing in general; women's participation in the sport as athletes, trainers and leaders, technical questions.

To develop women in cross-country ski sport at all levels in all countries where skiing is possible...that's the goal!

To carry out this task, close contact with athletes, competitions and other committees is necessary.

In 1996 some of the members decided to produce booklets concerning "ladies development in Cross-Country Skiing", in order to help national federations and other interested persons in their work with women in cross-country ski sport. The first booklet was distributed in 1998, the second in 2003.

Activities examples

- meetings with female athletes at world championships and world cup races
- mixed relay (women/men)
- distances for women
- changing room in finish area
- abolition of sex testing
- booklet "ladies development in cross-country skiing"
- booklet "the role of adequate nutrition for performance and health for female cross-country skiers"
- seminar "development of ladies cross-country" for media people
- seminar for female coaches and coaches who work with female athletes in Salt Lake City (USA) 2001

History of women's cross-country competitions

Cross-Country skiing is an old sport with a long tradition. Skis were first used by both men and women as a means of winter travel and were also used in war and hunting. This is proven by Norwegian pictures carved in stone which date from around 2000 BC and shows two men on skis, hunting an elk. Later the movement on skis started to be a sort of social amusement. Only in the last decade of the 19th century did cross-country skiing become a competitive sport.

According to the available evidence, women first participated in a ski race in 1879, when two women started in a race held in Stockholm SWE and two others in a race in Tymävä FIN. Since there were no women's classifications at the time, they had to race with the men. The world first cross-country competition exclusively for women was held in Namsos NOR in 1888.

Skiing was also popular in the Russian Empire, where four girls took part in a competition in 1886. Ten years later, in 1896, a race for ladies was organized in Germany.

In the 1920s and 30s, cross-country races for women were also held in Poland (1922), Yugoslavia (1926), Japan (1929), Rumania (1936) and Denmark (1938).

It was to take a long time before women's cross-country racing gained international recognition. Many men were of the view that the sport was only for them. Women, arriving at the finish line in a state of exhaustion, were considered to look unfeminine. Conventional medical opinion also held that cross-country racing could prove to be too dangerous for females and that women were not physically suited for competitions.

The following key dates are milestones in the development of women's cross-country skiing:

- 1924 first Olympic Winter Games (OWG) with cross-country competition for men held in Chamonix FRA
- 1936 first OWG with alpine ladies competition in Garmisch Patenkirchen GER
- 1937 first World Championships (WSC) with cross-country competition for men in Chamonix FRA
- 1952 first OWG with cross-country competitions for ladies (10 km) in Oslo NOR**
- 1954 first WSC with ladies competitions (10 km, 3x5 km) in Falun SWE
- 1974 first WSC with ladies 4x5 km relay in Falun SWE
- 1978 first WSC with ladies long distance race (20 km) in Lahti FIN
- 1989 first WSC with ladies 30 km race in Lahti FIN

The history of women's sport in general and cross-country in particular, has many parallels with other social spheres. Women's sports were and are strongly influenced by cultural, educational and social standards.

Today, women's cross-country has gained a long-standing recognition. But it is still true that girls are not always given the same support as boys.

If more women are to take part in cross-country racing, they need better access to development programs aimed specifically at women, in terms of physical and psychological training, coaches who are knowledgeable about women's sport and so on. A better consciousness of the history and traditions of women's skiing will help to build a culture in which our wonderful sport can thrive.

Short History of FIS Sub-Committee for Ladies Cross-Country

1946 FIS Congress Pau (FRA)

4 Technical Committees: Downhill / Slalom
Jumping
Cross-Country
Women's skiing

1965 FIS Congress Mamaia (ROM)

Committee Women's Skiing divided in
Women's Alpine Committee and Women's Cross-Country Committee

1983 FIS Congress Sidney (AUS)

Women's Cross-Country Committee becomes
Sub-Committee for Ladies Cross-Country

Personal thoughts

After twenty years membership of the ladies committee (or sub committee) I can look back on an interesting but hard working time. To reach female acceptance in a big federation like FIS, hard work, consequences and strategies are necessary.

As well as we have done some important projects (sex test/ booklets / seminars...) we are still fighting on the same platform get more acceptance for women in our sport, in the federations, in FIS. I have the feeling it will be a never ending fight!

It's trough that women must engage themselves more, but first of all they must get signs and possibilities from the federations!

If I look back how we have been working, I recognise that it depended always on Persons who showed big engagement. Therefore I would prefer to build a working group for ladies cross-country. Just a view women (and men?) who work hard on our goal. Women who show interest in our matters and not with national thoughts. To build this group it would be important that FIS gives financial support. Otherwise it depends again on federation's goodwill.

Barbara Broger/Switzerland