

160 2011



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FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE SKI
INTERNATIONAL SKI FEDERATION
INTERNATIONALER SKI VERBAND

Telemark 2011: “Winter Sports and Outdoor Life”

Dr. Karin Rase **Highlights of an international conference for academics with an interest in skiing and winter sports**

From 23rd to 26th February 2011 a total of 55 academics from 16 countries met in Bø, in the heart of Telemark, to discuss the results of their research into aspects of “Winter Sports and Outdoor Life”. This conference served as an academic prelude to the FIS Nordic World Ski Championships 2011. The conference’s inception and realisation are all down to the superb efforts of the Norwegian author, collector and ski researcher Halvor Kleppen, whilst we owe thanks to Kjærsti Skjeldal for the first-class organisation of the event.

In the country considered to be the birthplace of modern skiing, the focus of the event was naturally skiing, with some interesting exceptions such as the presentations “Mountain biking and snow: the race for speed, 1992-2002” by Frédéric Savre (Université de la Méditerranée) and “The role of sledging in the development of winter sports in Switzerland, 1864-1914” by Susan Barton (University of Leicester). All the lectures were excellent. Most dealt with aspects of Alpine and Nordic Skiing as high-performance sports and leisure activities and as cultural phenomena. Subjects under discussion included “The politics of winter games”, “National identities and ethnicity” and “Gender perspectives”.

As the conference was taking place, female ski jumpers in Oslo were being allowed to contest World Championship titles for only the second time ever, with a decision on including ladies’ ski jumping in the Olympic Games still pending. It was fitting, then, that the conference was opened by Annette Hofmann (Ludwigsburg University of Education) with her keynote address, “Female ski jum-



pers flying too high? – The never-ending fight for Olympic recognition”. Marianne Singaas (Telemark University College, Bø i Telemark) explored the question of the obstacles facing the first female skiers at the turn of the century, Suvi Kuisma (Lahti Ski Museum Finland) looked into evidence of the beginnings of ladies’ cross-country races in the Lahti Ski Games from 1923 to 1952, Gerd von der Lippe (Telemark University College, Bø i Telemark), took Johanne Kolstad as his example in investigating the topic of “How to enjoy ski jumping in the male world of the 1930s”, and Ingrid Wicken (California Ski Library) gave an account of the adventures of the 1930s German skiing pioneer Milana Jank in the mountains of the USA. Rather more fashionable than adventurous women on skis were being promoted in the lifestyle magazines of the Golden Twenties to the status of “New Woman”, as I demonstrated in my lecture, “The depiction of female skiers in art and design”.

Thanks to the Norwegian Ski Museum, (Norsk Skieventyr i Morgedal) there are plans to publish the conference paper This fantastic conference, characterised by its warm and welcoming atmosphere and lively exchanges of ideas, was further enhanced by a trip to the Holmenkollen to enjoy the arrival of the 30 km men’s Cross-Country pursuit.

Historical skiing

