



IMPORTED FROM NORWAY

A GENERAL HISTORY OF TELEMAR SKIING

The expression "telemark" not only refers to one of the roots of modern ski technique, but to a whole attitude: a fresh and exciting approach to mountain skiing with "free-heel" bindings.

Historically, Telemark is known as a province in Norway -- famous for its rugged mountains and narrow valleys. Since the Stone Age, natives of this region have used skis for transportation, hunting, and recreation. Equipment consisted of wooden skis attached by twine or leather straps to the toes of the skier's boots. This free-heel system gave early skiers the agility they needed to cover the varied terrain.

Norwegians of the Telemark province also gave us the word "slalom", meaning "a skier's track down the hill". The natives of Telemark were poor, and practicing "slaloms" was a popular activity. While skiing started as a basic means of transportation, it grew to be an integral part of Scandinavian custom, and by mid-nineteenth century, had become a sport of its own.

The Telemark "turn" was formally introduced at the Christiania, (Oslo) Norway winter games of 1868, by a Telemark native named Sondre Norheim. Norheim had a reputation as a dare-devil, and had been known for jumping over people and off cabin roofs with his skis. Not only did he win all events at the 1868 competition, but he travelled over 100 kilometers on skis from his home just to attend -- all at age 43. Norheim became a Norwegian folk hero, and his drop-knee telemark turn later became a standard for judging ski jumpers' landings.

With the advent of mechanical lifts, the sport of skiing evolved into more specialized "alpine" and "cross-country" disciplines. The "free heel" binding disappeared from alpine equipment, and new turns such as the "Christiania" (Stem Christie) and "parallel" replaced the telemark. The telemark technique was relegated to wilderness skiing and dropped from the limelight.

However, telemark did continue as the most versatile skiing style, and became a favorite of American wilderness enthusiasts throughout the 1960's and 70's. Telemark skiing offered new freedom to explore untracked winter terrain and provided a departure from the more specialized ski disciplines. By the early 1970's telemark skiers ventured even further and conquered the moguled and manicured slopes of alpine ski resorts. With chair lifts to do the work, emphasis on performance grew.

The "new" sport of telemark skiing developed even further in the 1980's, with telemark festivals and competitions throughout the world. Eleven countries now share America's interest in "reviving" telemark, and organizers are hopeful of future Olympic and World Cup affiliation.

The 1988 Vikin Fjord National Telemark Series has become the premier showcase for this "newest" ski frontier. Telemark and Vikin Fjord share a Norwegian heritage, and the latter has taken telemark racing to its greatest limits of competition and festivity. No other combination boasts such a blend of fun and performance so characteristic of our times. Vikin Fjord and Telemark are true fixtures of the '80's.