

A HISTORY OF NORWEGIAN SKI

By Helge Refsum, D.C.L.

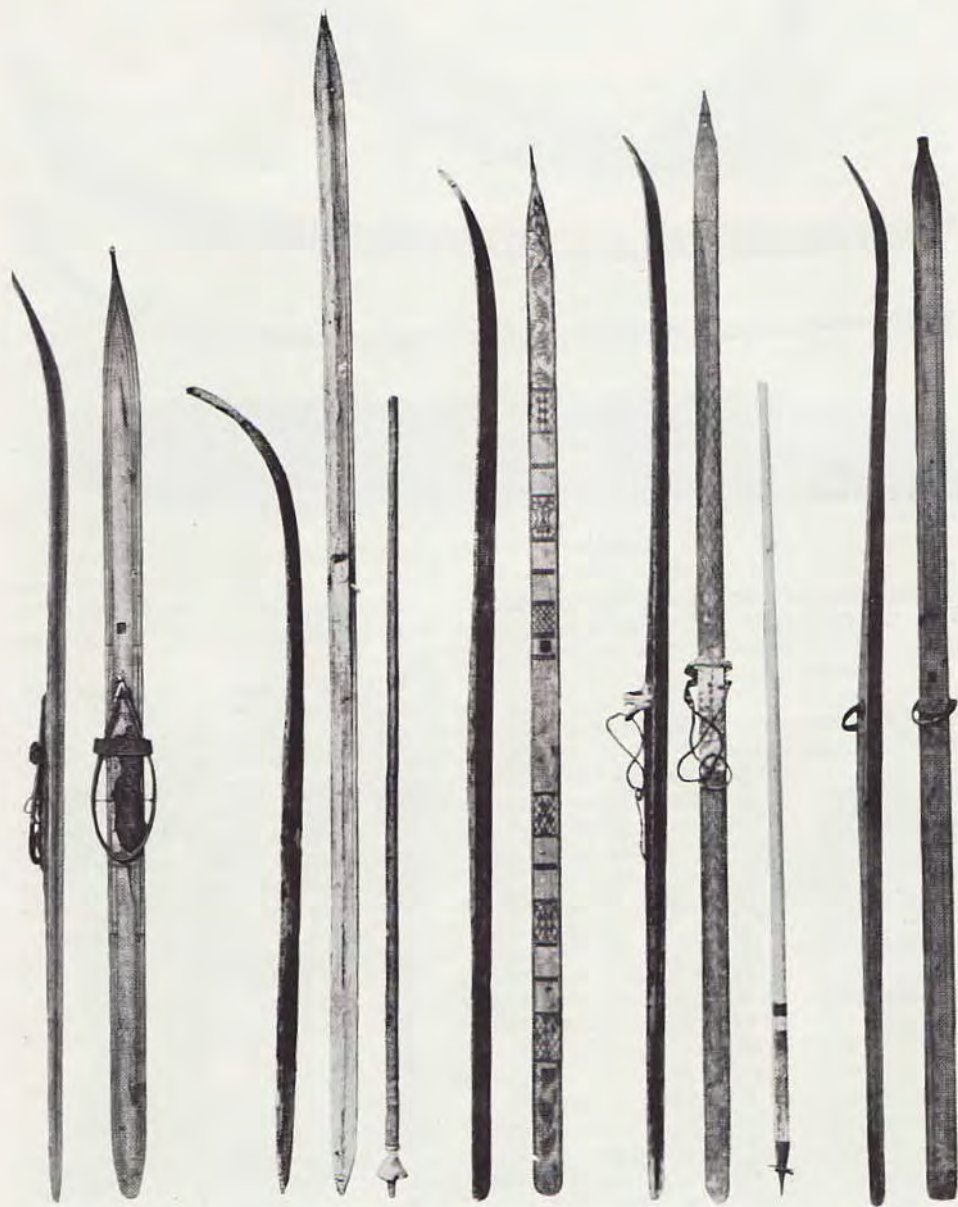
(A member of the Norwegian Permanent Committee for Scientific Research on Ski-ing.)

NORTHERN peoples have been using ski from prehistoric times, in a area stretching from the west coast of Norway to the Behring Straits and Sakhalin in the east. It appears that Norwegians introduced ski to Iceland and Greenland as late as the seventeenth century, while ski have come to America and Australia quite recently. Snow-shoes (truge), however, are common in pre-historic times, both to the Old World and to the American continent.

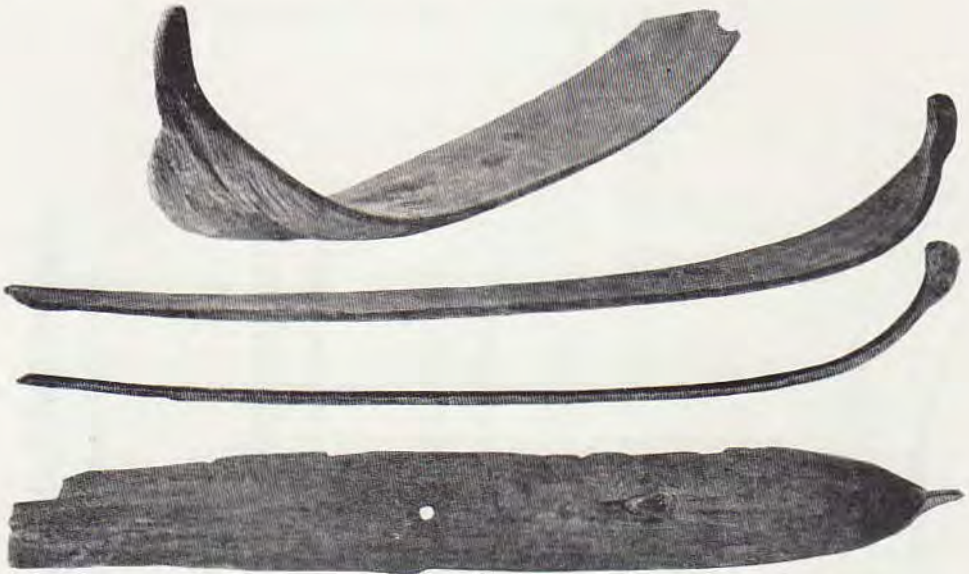
The earliest known Norwegian sign of ski-ing is a Flint Age carving on rock at Roedoe, in Northern Norway (see Figure 1). Marshes and bogs provide the earliest examples of ski available to us. A ski tip found in a marsh at Mushom, in West Agder, in Southern Norway, comes from the Bronze Age—about 2,500 years ago. Portions of ski have also been found in bogs in other northern countries, and date from prehistoric times. (See Dr. Nils Lid, "The Ski found at Oevreboe", 1932.) The Norse sagas refer frequently to ski-ing, especially in the eastern and northern districts of Norway. They occasionally mention the Lapps as the leading ski-runners of that time; in fact, however, Norwegians were using ski long before the Lapps immigrated to Norway, and the frequent references to Lapps and ski in early Icelandic literature may be attributed to a mistake made by the non-ski-ing Icelanders as to the real situation on the Continent. The Norse ancestors of the Icelanders came mostly from the villages of the Norwegian west coast, which, to this day, have a primitive ski-ing technique. Many words in the Lapponian ski vocabulary show Nordic influence. The Lapp name of the groove ("oales") is obviously a word derived from the ancient Norse word, "ala".



Military Ski Training, 1790.



From Trondheim Ski Museum, L. to R.: Nordland Ski, Langski, Andor and Stick from Snaasa, Ski from Leksvik, Ski from Selbu with Stick, Ski from Nord-Moere.



The Prehistoric Ski-tip from Oevreboe.

This has been shown by the Swedish historian of ski-ing, the late Professor K. B. Wiklund, of Upsala. The Lapps learned to make grooves in ski at least fifteen hundred years ago from Scandinavian peoples.

The Norse god of ski-running was Ull, or Ullr. In a song dating from 800 A.D., the scald tells also of the ski goddess, Skade, wife of the god, Njord. Ski-ing in the sagas and early Norse literature would, however, fill a chapter in itself, and the subject must be left to others. In the later Middle Ages we hear little of ski-ing in historical sources. We may, however, be sure that Norwegians still continued the use of ski and there is an occasional reference in chronicles of the time. In the seventeenth century there are references in edicts to the "Post Farmers" or "Royal Ski Runners", who took round letters in the country districts. They used one long ski and one short, the latter skin-covered, very much as the people of Oesterdal do to this day. Military ski-runners also only used this type of ski. In a letter from the Chief of the Ski Battalions to the General in command in Norway, in 1733, is the following passage: "In some countries they use two long ski, but, if they knew better, they would soon give up this form and use, as we do, one long ski, and one short, covered with skin; for military purposes, two long ski of equal length are useless". The short ski, with its skin covering, is referred to as the "andor".

Fifty-four years ago the Norwegian Society for the Promotion of Ski-ing began its research work. Before this, we know very little about ski-ing, especially in the years between 1830 and 1883. During that period, ski-ing was a sport only for farmers, and almost unknown to the cities. The military ski battalions were abolished in 1830 (see L. Lloyd, "Field Sports of the North of Europe", London, 1830, Vol. 2, pages 281 and 309; and A. de C. Brooke, "A Winter in Lapland and Sweden", 1828, page 327—"A few observations respecting the regiment of skaters which existed in Norway under the title of, 'Skilobere', may not be superfluous. The ski are snow shoes which consist of two thin, narrow pieces of fir of unequal length, the foremost part being pointed and turned upwards".) Ski-ing in the 1830's was, as we have said, a country sport. In the outer districts they were

used by every class of society. In 1845, however, a ski-running championship was arranged in the city of Tromsø, where Dr. J. Steen, later the Prime Minister of Norway, won first prize. In 1863 an exhibition of ski was held in Trondheim. Asbjørnsen, the well-known authority on folk lore, and Moe, the Bishop and Poet Laureate of the 1840's, were among those who were interested in skiing.

But it is to the people of Telemark that we owe the introduction of skiing as a sport in Norway, and we must remember always such names as Sondre Nordheim, Aslak Smedal, Mikkel and Torjus Hemnestveit. The Telemark men brought with them to Oslo their ski for downhill racing, the primitive slalom and jumping, and created a new interest in skiing among the people of Oslo.

To come now to the various types of ski and their variations as between districts. In the various wapentakes (districts) the local types have been preserved. First, we must mention the Oesterdalski (the long ski and "andor"), which is also known as the Central Nordic type, since it is not found in countries other than Norway, Sweden and Finland. The "andor" is covered with skin, the long ski is commonly made of the "tennar", of pine or spruce, that is, the wood which has an abnormal cellular evolution, and therefore does not clog in wet snow. The pitch in the "tennar" of a tree lies eccentric, the year circles of the tree on the "tennarside" being much broader than on the opposite side of the tree. The runner stood on the longer ski and pushed with the "andor". The "andor" never clogged and was used also for turning. The technique for such ski was, of course, entirely different from the modern manner derived from the Telemark area. Before the era of waxing, many long-distance races were won by skiers using this type, which has now almost disappeared. The long ski was from 2.20 to 3.20 metres long, and 4.5 to 7 centimetres broad. The "andor" was 1.60 to 1.90 metres long, and 7 centimetres broad. The ski had generally parallel edges, instead of the narrow-waisted shape of the Telemark ski.



Telemark Ski, 1883.

Variations of conditions in each area determine the local type of ski, together with the variation of materials and tools available. The wood used differed according to districts, being pine, oak, ash, willow, birch, maple, rowan, beech or elm. In one district, according to the local soil, the willow may be the best; in another, elm or maple. In some districts the wood was very carefully prepared by soaking it in ferruginous water or fen. This was a common feature in the eastern valleys of Norway. Pinewood so prepared was called "furulaag" or "laagred". The standard of the various ski is closely related to the standard of craftsmanship in each district, while the types of ski correspond with the ethnological and linguistic variations between the areas.

(To be Continued.)



Stone-Age Rock Carving from Roedoe.

AUSTRALIAN CHAMPIONSHIPS, 1938

By J. A. Lang

OWING to the loss of the Chalet at Charlotte's Pass the races for the Australian Championship of 1938 were held on courses chosen on the Perisher on 1st and 2nd October, 1938. Although there was some scarcity of snow on the lower slopes, a sufficiency of good spring snow lay on the southern slopes of the Perisher Range. A Downhill course in the nature of a giant slalom, with three controls, was set by Friedl Pfeiffer. Although the snow was very easy, rough bumps at the start of the course provided a good test of technique and steadiness. The Slalom was also set by Pfeiffer and provided a vertical descent approximately the same as that of the Downhill.

After some difficulty a Jump was built which, though adequate, was hardly up to championship standard and which involved a very crooked in-run. Owing