

## Cross Country Skiing Around the World

By Solveig Olson

Did you know there are cross country ski marathons similar to the American Birkebeiner in Australia, Austria, Canada, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany Italy, Japan, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland, and over 2,000 people from around the world have skied at least ten of these races? They are the Worldloppet Masters. A total of almost 9,000 skiers are getting their Worldloppet Passports stamped for additional races. Some go for the competition and the personal challenge of one day achieving the title of Worldloppet Master. Others are taking the opportunity to travel to places they otherwise might not have thought of visiting while enjoying their favorite sport at the same time.



*Photo by Jim Cooper*

### **Skiing the Jura Mountains**

This year our group of thirty-one skiers from Minnesota, Iowa and Wisconsin joined in on a thirteen-day ski trip to the Jura Mountains of France. The main attraction was to ski the Transjurassienne - one of the races on the Worldloppet circuit. An added bonus was discovering this beautiful part of eastern France - on the border to Switzerland – mostly forgotten or passed by in guide books. What a Mecca for cross country skiing! Within the Jura there are more than a dozen

regions each with their own extensive trail system and picturesque small villages.



*Photo by Jim Cooper*

In addition there is the GTJ - Les Grandes Traversees du Jura – 250km of groomed ski through trails traversing and connecting the various regions and villages at an altitude of 3500-4500 feet.



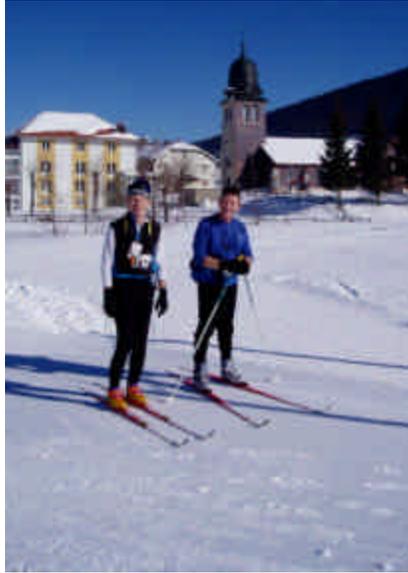
*Photo by Jim Cooper*

From deep valleys with picturesque old farms to dense pine and spruce forests and steep climbs to the higher mountain areas the trails offered lots of variety



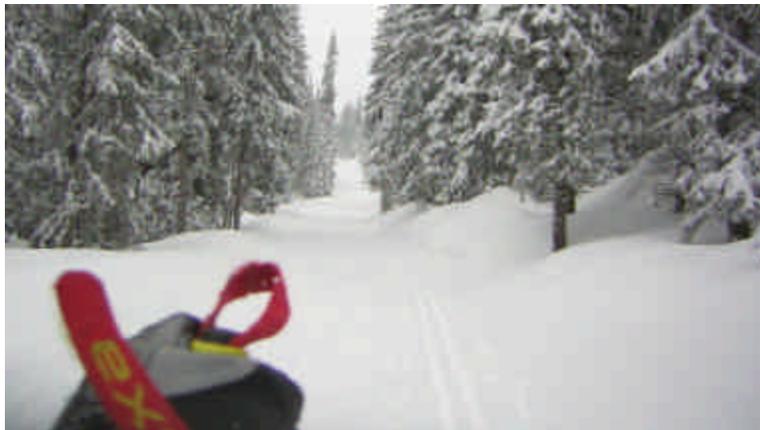
*Photo by Jeri Neal*

Typically people formed small groups for skiing to another village or to a Mountain Chalet for lunch. We arrived in Les Rousses to beautiful sunny weather and great conditions but rain was in the forecast for the end of the first week.



*Photo by John Olson*

*Photo by Jeri Neal*



*Photo by John Olson*

We escaped one day of sleet by going to La Vattay in Monts Jura. At an altitude of over 4200 feet it was snowing and we had a day of the best skiing we can remember.



Photo by John Olson

**La Vattay Ski Center** with its excellent trail system, situated on a plateau 4200-4500 feet above Geneva, has been the site of many international ski events.

### **Local points of interest**

We did endure one day of heavy rain when we all switched from skiing to sight seeing. Part of the group took the opportunity to visit Geneva - about one hour by train and others explored Le Rousses with its many local craft shops and a visit to the Fort Le Rousses. In addition to being a museum the fort is now used as a facility for ripening and curing cheeses produced in the region.



*Photos by Jim Cooper.*

Wheels of cheese ripening in the Fort's Cellars and old fashioned cheese making.

The thick walls of the arched cellars provide for constant cool temperatures needed for the cheese ripening process which can take two months or more. Regional cheeses included Morbier, Comte, Blue Gex and various goat cheeses.



*Photo by Jim Cooper*  
Jeri Neal enjoys the snow

Then came the snow and it snowed every day for a week. With most of us coming from the snow depleted Twin Cities area we did not dare to complain. It made the landscapes, forests, and small villages into a winter wonderland.

### **Accommodations**

We made Les Rousses our base of operation and settled in at **Hotel de France**, a third generation family owned hotel in the center of this village.



*Photos by John Olson*

A bright special event room just down the hall from our block of rooms was turned into a waxing room specifically for our group – utilizing some of our personal waxing equipment.



*Photo by John Olson*

### **The Food**

The hotel's pride, their Four-Star restaurant, proved to be French cooking at its best. Each night we sat down to a 5-course dinner. Despite spending thirteen days in the same hotel none of the courses were ever repeated. We learned to savor every bite while sipping wines from the Jura region and became quite accustomed to the 2½ -hour relaxed evening meal and socializing with our fellow travelers. By the time we left we could understand why the French insist on their cheese course to finish off their main meal – and there was still a dessert after the cheese course. We learned the reason French women are not fat is the smaller portions and the savoring of the meal. The average French family sits down for at least 1½ hour family supper every night. They also take two hours for lunch which is their main meal of the day. We did not see much fast food or people eating and drinking on the run.

## The Races

The original 76K Transjurassienne has been in existence for 25 years. Along the way a 50K women's race was added as well as the 25K and 10K Mini Trans. This year the 50K was also open for men and a new 42K Classic race was added. It is a two day event with the shorter races on Saturday and the 76K and 50K on Sunday. The addition of shorter races and multi-day events are following a trend of many of the Worldloppet races. Twelve people skied the 42K and 25K races on Saturday and another twelve people the 76K and 50K on Sunday. The rest of our group enjoyed the ski vacation and were our most appreciated support group. Several people who did not consider themselves racers decided to enter one of the shorter races and may now be bitten by the Worldloppet bug. It continued to snow both race days making for tough and slow conditions.



*Photo by Jim Cooper*

Racers coming down the main street of Les Rousses in front of our hotel. Les Rousses is one of twelve villages along the race course. The Transjurassienne is cooperative efforts of the villages, their ski clubs and volunteers, along with various sports organizations.

## Happy 50K Finishers



**Karin Grossman (left) and Bonnie Palmquist**



**Skip Soleim**

*Photos by Solveig Olson*



*Photos by Solveig Olson*

**“Birchleggers” Ladd Conrad** (30 Birkies) and **Don Eddy** (26 Birkies) are adding Worldloppet marathons to their list of Cross Country skiing adventures.

## Worldloppet Masters



*Photos by Solveig Olson*

Congratulations to **Deanna Wilkens** and **Robert MacCarty** for completing the requirements for the **Worldloppet Gold Master** this year. They have been traveling with our group every year since 1996 and 1997 respectively, with the goal of completing at least ten long races

What do people do when they have earned their Worldloppet Masters? They keep going for multiple masters! **Arne Lagus** who has been on several of our trips is one of those people who will fly to Europe for a weekend just to ski another race. He is now well on his way to his second master.



*Photo by Solveig Olson  
One more down for Arne Lagus*

## The Trans Organization

We are very appreciative to the organizer of the Transjurassienne - for all their help and hospitality. Worldloppet Coordinator Annette Lamy Chappuis – a volunteer at the Trans Organization - helped us with registrations, transport arrangements and language challenges. She had race material translated into English and brought to our hotel and even arranged for the Worldloppet Party to be held in Les Rousses for the convenience of our group. The entire organization made us feel very welcome. What a better way for international relations.



*Photo by John Olson*

Worldloppet Coordinator **Amy Lamy Chappuis** and Hotel de France's proprietary **Madame Petit-Radix** welcome **John Leighton** to Les Rousses. John completed the grueling 76K Transjurassienne during a heavy snow fall.

For more information about the Transjurassienne see [www.transjurassienne.com](http://www.transjurassienne.com)  
For more information about Worldloppet see [www.worldloppet.com](http://www.worldloppet.com)

## Worldloppet Trips

If you like to learn about future Worldloppet trips see [www.peergyntworldventures.com](http://www.peergyntworldventures.com) or contact us at [peergyntwv@aol.com](mailto:peergyntwv@aol.com)

