



January 10, 2006

## **New equipment set to groom cross-country ski trails for the 20<sup>th</sup> Canadian Birkebeiner**

*Edmonton...* Once Mother Nature cooperates and brings snow, participants in this year's Canadian Birkebeiner Ski Festival, set for one month from today, will benefit from ski tracks set by new grooming equipment.

With assistance from the province, the Canadian Birkebeiner Society purchased the new groomer for use at the Cooking-Lake Blackfoot Provincial Recreation Area. The equipment will make track setting more efficient.

The Canadian Birkebeiner Ski Festival takes place at the Cooking Lake-Blackfoot Provincial Recreation Area and the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village on February 10 and 11. This year commemorates the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Canadian Birkie and marks the 18<sup>th</sup> year the event has been held in partnership with Cooking Lake-Blackfoot. Celebrating the 800<sup>th</sup> year of the famous Birkebeiner legend, this year's event will hold a special wood ski category in addition to its regular line-up of cross-country ski events.

"The Birkie is an important part of Alberta's winter, and the only event of its kind in Canada," said Gary Mar, Minister of Community Development. "This year celebrates 20 years of the Birkie in Canada, and I encourage all cross-country skiers, young and old, beginners and seasoned competitors, to ski in this beautiful protected area."

"We at the Canadian Birkebeiner are extremely grateful the Alberta government has assisted with the purchase of the new grooming machine for the Cooking Lake-Blackfoot Provincial Recreation Area," said Brian Lucas, Marketing Director for the Canadian Birkebeiner. "Many Birkebeiner skiers are training hard now for this event and we are confident that snow will come. The new groomer will benefit over 2000 Birkie contestants as well as all cross-country ski enthusiasts who hit the trails this winter."

The Canadian Birkebeiner Ski Festival is Canada's premiere cross-country ski festival, held in remembrance of the historic legend of the original Birkebeiners on their quest to save the heir to the Norwegian throne. This is the only Birkebeiner in Canada, and one of three in the world. For more information on the festival, visit [www.canadianbirkie.com](http://www.canadianbirkie.com).

The 97 square kilometre Cooking Lake-Blackfoot Provincial Recreation Area contains forests, pastures and wetlands. Recreational opportunities include horseback riding, cross-country skiing, hiking, mountain biking and snowmobiling. The area provides excellent wildlife viewing opportunities along more than 170 km of equestrian and cross-country ski trails. Please visit

[www.cd.gov.ab.ca/parks](http://www.cd.gov.ab.ca/parks) for more information.

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To call toll-free within Alberta dial 310-0000.

## Backgrounder

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### About the Canadian Birkebeiner

The Canadian Birkebeiner Society hosts the annual Canadian Birkebeiner Ski Festival the second Saturday of February. Since 1985, thousands of skiers have relived the legend of the "Birchleg warriors," skiing 55 kilometres with a 5.5 kg pack, as a symbol of the Norwegian child prince who was brought to safety by the Birchlegs in the winter of 1206. The Canadian Birkebeiner recreates the legend annually at Cooking Lake-Blackfoot Provincial Recreation Area. Birkebeiners can ski 55 kilometres (with /without pack categories) or 31 kilometres starting at Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village, through Elk Island National Park, to the Cooking Lake-Blackfoot Provincial Recreation Area. It is a mass-start recreational loppet, and a wilderness "point-to-point" tour through rolling moraine that can *only* be skied Birkie Day as the course traverses three different parks. There are also shorter loop distances of 13.5 and 2.5 km starting and finishing in the Provincial Recreation Area. Ski trails are track-set at Cooking Lake-Blackfoot Provincial Recreation Area throughout the winter by Park staff and Birkebeiner volunteers.

#### Quick Facts:

- Largest "classic style" event in Canada (no skating allowed) based on number of skiers registered for any of the distances during the one-day event.
- First event held in 1985 with 127 skiers in -30 C weather.
- First year at Cooking Lake-Blackfoot Provincial Recreation Area was 1988; the park became the official and permanent home of the "Birkie" in 1990.
- Number of "red bib" skiers who have skied all Birkies - 6.
- Skiers who have skied all but one Birkies with a 5.5 kg pack - one (John Yardley Jones).
- Record number of skiers - 2,475 in 1999 (skiing in one of 5 classic events held on one day).
- Total distance skied in 2004 - 50,573 km.
- Total time skied - 5,351 hours, 17 minutes, 34 seconds (223 days!).
- Heaviest pack carried in 2004 - 9.5 kg (4 kg more than required!).

- Total kg of weight carried by "Birkie with pack" skiers - 1,134.3 kg.
- Youngest skier (on skis) - 2 years old (2.5 km distance).
- Oldest skier - 88 years old (15 km distance).
- "Haakon Haakonsson award" skiers who have completed the 58 km Norwegian Birkebeiner, 52 km American Birkebeiner and 55 km Canadian Birkebeiner - 57 skiers since 1994.

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