

March 7, 2010:

Vertfest Alpental 2010

The state of randonnéé racing in the US is not exactly at a high ebb these days. Due to the economy, lack of demonstrated effectiveness in bringing in skier dollars, and the fact that most of the qualified organizers would prefer to actually race, the Crystal Mountain Vertfest that constituted 50% of our local rando circuit was cancelled this year, and there was a real possibility that there would be NO race at all in the Seattle area this year.

Fortunately Outdoor Research, Pro Guiding, and Summit-at-Snoqualmie, as well as a host of gear manufacturers and distributors, stepped up at the last minute to make Vertfest 2010 happen at Alpental on March 6th. The day dawned bright, warm and beautiful, looking like late May with this year's snowpack, and a record 105 people made the trip to Alpy to sign in for the race. There was no telemark division this year, but Men's and Women's Race (2 laps) and Recreational (1 lap), plus Men's and Women's 50-and-over.



A record number of participants checked in for this year's Vertfest, with the number topping 100 for the first time ever

They had groomed a nice patch of snow directly in front of the start, and the corduroy looked like deceptively easy skinning, but several of us went up further on the course to check the grip. With overnight temperatures in the 20's, the icy moguls looked a bit sketchy to Monika and myself, and we both decided to start the race with ski crampons in place. Lowell, who probably has the best feel for skinning of anyone I know, was "on the fence" - standing on the start line with 3 minutes to go, he finally took them off.

The race got off more or less on time, and the normal assortment of fast people including Andy and Mike Traslin from Vancouver ran off into the distance. As predicted, there were a number of falls more or less immediately on the icy bumps, with lots of people losing places and lots more switching to bootpack mode. Near the top of the second steep and icy pitch, I saw a group accident waiting to happen, and went looker's right without noticing the control gate at the left of the course. Fortunately Dan Tomko yelled, "Hey Greg, you missed that gate!" I hadn't even seen it, and asked where it was. "Right behind you!" Ooops. Time to sideslip back down and go through the gate, except with the ski crampons on, I couldn't sideslip. That meant sidestepping down the hill and then "jogging" through some troughs to get across the hill, then waiting while a group of three guys slipped their way through the control gate. Oh well, maybe only 30 seconds lost, but frustrating.

The rest of the way up Chair 1 was smooth, and I should have taken off the ski crampons off at the top of the chair because there was a long flat and with the cramps in place I had no glide at all. John Speiss gapped me even though I was jogging trying to keep up. I finally decided to remove them a little further up Chair 2, as the full sun was turning the top surface of the snow into spring corn, and the rest of the course looked like it was also warming up. I tried to catch up to John and Benj Wadsworth, the guys I had skied with pretty much the whole race last year, but they kept pulling away. Whether it was lack of skiing, older age, the beta blocker I started taking this year for blood pressure or a combination of factors, I never felt that great this year. I decided to stick to my plan of not getting too worked on the skin up and concentrating on breathing as I neared the top in the hope that I'd be able to ski better and make up time on the descents.



You might take these guys for a couple of long-haul truckers, but Mike and Andy Traslin are two of Canada's fastest rando racers. Silver and Gold to the Canucks!

I hit the top of Chair 2 just as Benj was getting set to ski, had a decent transition, and headed off toward Upper International. I hadn't skied 'Nash in a couple of weeks, but there were ugly icy bumps at the top and I wasn't surprised at all to find them. In the troughs were piles of grapefruit-sized ice balls. Nice. Combined with a heavy dose of "paying customer" traffic, it made for some challenging skiing until the control gate going out to Snakedance. The first turn after the cat track into Snakedance proper was a little scratchy, but sun had already begun to soften the snow and the moguls were big and rounded, making for some skiing that might have been pretty enjoyable had my legs not been quivering so badly. Still, much nicer skiing than I had expected through this section. The bottom was smooth and fast, allowing big GS turns into the finish area.

The course then headed back up through the woods above the beginner area. Benj had a speedier transition than me and had about a 200 ft.

lead as we headed back up, which he proceeded to build upon during the climb. I started having cramp problems in my right thigh, which forced me to slow down and breathe deeply periodically, but which kept coming back. I thought about DNF'ing several times, but the beautiful day and the fact that this was my only race of the year kept me going. So what if the guys I usually keep up with are leaving me behind, I'd most likely want to be out here skinning in the woods today even if this event wasn't happening, right?

I got to the top with a couple guys I didn't know, and had a better transition than them. Heading out to ski the Piss Pass traverse "backward" I figured it was pretty much in the bag, and I could just cruise to the finish trying to ski big, smooth turns quickly and efficiently, and trying to breathe deeply so as not to cramp up. Unfortunately, there were no other competitors around me and I missed some of the course markers (actually I'll admit to throwing in a few powder turns somewhere around Knoll 3 - just couldn't resist). By the time I picked up some markers, I was back down on the "up" track, a couple hundred feet below where I was supposed to be. A couple of course workers yelled at me that I needed to hike up and around a knoll, which I reluctantly did, costing me maybe five minutes. I saw a few people pass me on the traverse above, but couldn't do much about it.

I funnelled into the Snake Dance cat track feeling a little discouraged, but the legs were OK and I tried to ski the rest of the descent as quickly as possible. As I hit the top of the final face into the finish, I saw a guy near the bottom and gassed it trying to catch him, but couldn't quite do it. Still, it was exciting to ski that fast on my 171 Trabs and I ended up getting several compliments from the event staff for "coming in hot" at the finish. I have a feeling they were getting ready to bail in case I biffed and went into stands . . .

Standout performances included the Traslin bros, Andy and Mike, in first and second Men's Race, with 53 year-old Lowell Skoog in 4th. Monika Johnson took her traditional spot at the top of the Women's Race podium, and had little in the way of competition with Holly Davis in La Grave this week. Brandon from Hyak took second in Men's Rec (he was actually third fastest, but they somehow had the real #2 Jerry Sanchez winning the Women's Rec division. I think they worked out the prize situation themselves) and Greg Ireton in third. Melissa who I skied with last week took second in Women's Rec, with Brandon's wife Heather in third. The Hyak group also had the winning lottery ticket for a pair of K2 Backside skis, so they came out the clear

winners in the schwag category. Dan Larsen and Tobae McDuff took Men's and Women's 50-and-over. I don't really know any of the splitboard competitors, but the guy who won was really hauling ass!

Results here: [Men's 50+](#) [Women's 50+](#) [Men's Race](#) [Women's Race](#)
[Men's Rec](#) [Women's Rec](#) [Men's Split](#) [Women's Split](#)

Tim Tietjen has a great video that really captures the spirit of the event [here](#) on his Snow Troopers site.



Click on the image to go to [TheSnowTroopers.com](#), always a source of entertaining Internet fodder!