

ACROSS NORWAY ON SKIES

by G. Daidola

Giorgio Daidola

è conosciutissimo in Italia, sia come telemarker che come giornalista. Qui il resoconto di un suo viaggio in Norvegia

Giorgio Daidola

is a well known journalist and telemarker. Here his memories of a trip to Norway last year

Crossing undulating masses of ice that contrast with the blue of the fjords and the green of the flowering meadows. A group of famous mountaineers from different countries meet up for two crossings with telemark skis which should take about ten days (if the weather is good): The Folgefonna and Jostedalbreen glaciers. With some information on the materials they used.

The Southwest of Norway is a land of long fjords surrounded by the largest icecaps in continental Europe.

To reach these icecaps you start from the bottom of the fjords and pass through wild valleys and steep slopes, climbing more than 2,000 metres. When you reach the peaks that border the endless icecaps, like the crenellations of an ice castle, you can sense the attraction of long journeys in white deserts. Journeys that are never monotonous, interspersed with brief ascents to peaks that seem to beckon to wandering skiers, with equally brief but enjoyable descents.

A number of days spent in complete self-sufficiency in these undulating frozen wastes bring back the former pleasure of skiing, in expectation of the one final descent, like a steep dive into the fjord below.

Last Spring a group of Italians, Giorgio Daidola, Leonardo Bizzaro, Luca Gasparini and Maurizio Zanolla, known as "Manolo", an American, Bernie Bernthal, and an Australian, John Falkiner, were invited to Norway by two Norwegian friends, Morten Aass and Gunnar Grosvold, to cross the Folgefonna and the Jostedalbreen, the largest glaciers in the Southwest of the country.

They are two very different, almost complementary itineraries. The first is in wild and off the beaten track, the second is a centre for Norwegian cross-country skiing, with thousands of visitors at Spring weekends. Both crossings, although on ice, and therefore objectively dangerous, are within the reach of the average skier and ideal for different categories, from cross-country skiers to ski tourers. One problem that must be borne in mind is sudden weather changes which call for skilful orientation and adaptation to weather conditions that can be extremely bad. If weather conditions are good, two crossings can be completed in about ten days. It takes a ten hour ride by car or bus from Oslo to arrive below the glaciers, along some of Norway's most panoramic roads, a sweeping route that passes the Hardanger fjord, the town of Bergen and the Sogne fjord. Along the way, about 180 km from Oslo, lovers of Telemark skiing are sure to want to make a brief stop at Morgedal to visit the house and slopes that were the home of Sondre Norheim, the Norwegian who made this technique famous in the middle of the last century, the first technique to curve on skis, named after this region with its gentle slopes where it was born.

Crossing the Folgefonna glacier

The crossing starts comfortably at the Summer ski resort on the glacier, reached from Jondal on the North slopes of the glacier, reached from Jondal on the Hardanger fjord along a tortuous private road about 14 km long. Having reached the high part of the glacier you travel southwards as far as the welcoming Holmaskjera refuge. Fairly light backpacks can be used for the excursion, which takes two days, because it is not strictly necessary to take a sleeping bag, tent or cooking equipment. The Holmaskjera refuge was built on the only rock spur that emerges close to the centre of the glacier, and in good weather it is visible from a distance, like a mirage in the white desert.

The most extraordinary part of the crossing starts after the refuge, when you can experience the phenomenon of the circular horizon, like crossing the pole: A compass, a detailed map and possibly a GPS are the instruments needed to find your way in this lunar landscape, until you reach the Southwest edge of the icecap. At this point you start a long descent to Rosendal, a town with hundreds of flowering gardens overlooking the sea. All around the fjord rise up mountains that are still snow-topped in late Spring, the best period to take this trip. A two-hour cruise along the fjord by motorboat lets you admire the scenery as it takes you back to your starting point, Jondal.

Crossing the Jostedalbreen

Many Norwegian skiers make this crossing more than once in their life, receiving a special badge each time to wear on their hats. The adventure lasts at least four days and requires good training and a considerable gift for adaptation, as you will be travelling quite autonomously, carrying a backpack of 20-25 kg with all the necessary equipment: tent, cooker, fuel, sleeping bag, food, safety equipment, to mention just a few essential items. However in May you are never alone; endless lines of skiers move in groups of 20-30, one behind the other, transforming the crossing into a sort of collective pilgrimage. Most people spend the night in the same places, resting in the same spots and climbing the same peaks along the way. The crossing, which extends more than 70 km (usually from Northeast to Southwest) thus becomes a great holiday on skis, skiing for the masses which bears no relation to skiing in an Italian ski resort. It is a demonstration of the pleasure of skiing together, of sliding along on these long feet which for the Norwegians are something much more important than equipment for a sport. They are



Telemark Club
Livigno
C.P. 109
23030 Livigno
(So)
Italy