
Rural Cult-ivation

of Pat Morrow

The second World Telemark Festival featured good friends, bad snow, and duty-free booze

Pat Morrow è un famosissimo fotografo di telemark, primo salitore delle montagne più alte dei sette continenti.

L'anno scorso è stato nostro ospite e ci ha fatto la cortesia di pubblicare questo articolo sulla Skieda su Powder la famosa rivista americana

Pat Morrow is awell known photographer of telemark. Last year he has been our guest with wife Baiba. This is an article written by Pat for Powder the famous american magazine

In the late '70s in the remote Colorado town of Crested Butte, the telemark turn enjoyed a rebirth far from its Norwegian homeland. Now, nearly 20 years later and approaching the new millenium, another telemark revival is under way, this time in the equally remote town of Livigno, in northern Italy.

In the mid '70s Livigno was the breeding ground for famous freestylers Martinelli and the Mottini brothers, Rudy, Damiano and Mauro. When these renegade spirits turned to telemarking for the freedom from rules and regulations it offered, Livigno became ground zero for an Alps-centered Euro tele-movement. So perhaps not surprisingly, when the second annual World Telemark Festival - La Skieda - convened in Livigno last winter, several notable ex-freestylers turned up to genuflect with the hundreds of other free-heelers. Clambinite Falkiner from Verbier, Switzerland, who competed against Livigno's "bad boys" in the mid '70s, and Sarah Ferguson who wooed the British women's title in '78 both drove in from the northern side of the Alps.

Organized by ski-instructor and "closet" party animal ("I am not normally like this.....") Luca Gasparini, in conjunction with the hyperactive 80-member Telemark Club of Livigno, the festival was dedicated to the notion of international camaraderie among pin-heads. It began appropriately enough with an overnight ski approach to the valley. Falkiner led one group of skiers up from the Swiss village of Poschiavo, while celebrated Italian climber and recent tele convert Manolo accompanied another.

It wasn't a heavy snow year, so after tucking into an early brekkie of chewy bread, formaggio locale, and bresaola ham soaked in wine and then cured on the basement rafters - we carried skis for the first half-mile from the Swiss village of Valchava. Several hours and 3.300 vertical feet later, we ripped our skins for the descent into Val Mora in the Park Nazionale dello Stelvio. Tele-brotherhood was in full flush by the time we arrived at Luigi's Rifugio Val Fraele beside La go Cancanno, with every one on a first name basis (partly because neither side could pronounce each other's surnames). Friendships were further fermented over rich glasses of vino rosso, poured with zest by Luigi's brother Giacomo. "This is the best way for a telemark festival to begin," exhorted the always effervescent ex-freestyler. "By the time we reach Livigno we will all know each other and can ski and party together until the end of the week". Tele-guru Morten Aass, girlfriend Jannicke, and a boisterous contingent from the Norwegian national demo team had come down from a bare winter in Oslo, craving snow, not to mention duty-free booze. Luca Gasparini's description of the Norwegians ("If we are the guys of spaghetti, then they are the guys of telemark.") only told half the story. Depending on your perspective, the Norwegians skied as hard as the partyed as hard as they skied.

The festival more than lived up to Luca Gasparini's brochure delivering "excursionism and skiing off the tracked slopes, competition, style, aerials, classic, parties, lessons, films, slide shows, and gadgets". Even if you weren't normally drawn to competition of any nature, it was fun to watch talented skiers, both on the slopes and on the dance floor. It was, however, beyond anyone how the Italians could set the race courses, run fun events, ski on -and off- piste all day, and party hard into the wee hours every night. Then again, maybe it wasn't.. you can tell what the night life of a town is like when happy hour only starts at 10 p.m.

Unlike the physical carnage of a World Telemark Championships, the only festival casualty occurred at two a.m. one morning when Morten Aass tried building on the rockwork outside one of the bars. He lost his grip and plummeted to the sidewalk, fracturing his wrist. Apart from the organized chaos of endless parties, one evening was dedicated to an artwork and photographic display of the history of skiing, another to ski films, and another to a slide show on adventure skiing.

For a few of us however the best day was the last. Luca fared away a posse of a 40 minutes hike from the terminus of the Carosello 3000 gondola to the top of 9,500 foot Mt. Cantone. A nasty freeze-thaw cycle had hardened the snow; however, despite a biting cold wind, the radiance of the bright sun penetrated a few millimeters into the snowpack, and we glided thousands of feet down a silky-smooth rollercoaster. Near a shepherd's hut a treeline, a summer track veered off into a stand of larches, and we snowplowed along the narrow path before making a few more turns in crud to a waiting bus at a road's end. The rest of us were bushes but the smile on Luca's deeply tanned face said he was ready for another La Skieda night reminded me of what he'd related only minutes before. As we'd neared the summit of Mt. Cantone, he'd pointed to the Bernina Spires towering over St. Moritz and told us about an early ski mountaineer who completed a circumski at the Bernina in one long day, and was dancing in the ballroom by 10 p.m. that night.

In the Italian free-heel world, some things never change.

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