

## ❖ *Olaf the Ski Maker* ❖

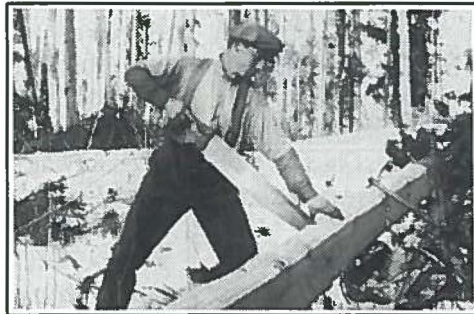
Out of B.C.'s North comes the story of Olaf Hagberg, a man who not only loved the sport of cross country skiing, but also took the time to make a contribution to it's development.

Olaf was born in Sweden in 1904, and came to Finmore, a settlement outside of Vanderhoof, in 1927. His journey west included a long trip via train from Halifax, Nova Scotia. This early experience was to have some impact on him, as he began to make his living in this country hacking ties for the railroad.

Olaf had been an avid cross country and downhill skier and spent many years as a carpenter, excelling in creativity and craftsmanship. In the early 1930's he

introduced and made cross country skis for the people of his community. "I learned to ski in Sweden as a child and that is where I learned about making skis," said Olaf, "I figured out a lot in my head, but I learned a lot from my Grandfather and from snooping around shops where skis were being made".

Olaf would select birch trees from the Fort St. James area and dry the wood for two years. "I marked the north side of the tree and split it from that side, as that was the side that made the best skis". After hand-planing them using the tools of Thomas Mitchell of Vanderhoof, Olaf would steam the skis to curve the tips. "They were six to eight feet long and wider



than today's skis. When I skied into town, all the young people wanted a pair!"

Olaf made a total of 41 pairs, each tree yielding only one pair. To complete a set, he applied pine tar to the grooved bases, installed leather harnesses and outfitted ski poles, also made from birch wood. It was on a pair of these handcrafted skis that Kaare Engstad skied at the 1932 Olympics.


For Olaf, skiing was a way of life. Recalling some of his early ski exploits, Olaf commented, "I used to ski to town on the railway tracks. On the weekend when I finished working at about four o'clock, I got changed and skied about 20 miles to town. Then I had to change again and after that, I went to the dance. I danced till about three am, took my girlfriend home and then skied 20 miles home".

Olaf now resides in the Omineca Lodge.

- Paul Collard in Vanderhoof

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