



## Sibley Ski Tour - News

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### Record turn out at Sibley

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The **24th Annual Sibley Ski Tour** goes into the books in record style. Along with plenty of fresh snow, a record number of entries graced the cross country ski event. 944 registered by the time the starters pistol was fired shortly after 10:00 a.m. Among those racing were an 85 year old and a five year old.

In the 50km race, Werner Schwar was first followed by Steve Bursby and Bernie Lacourciere.

### Sibley Ski Tour sets new record for participants

By Michael Onesi - [The Chronicle-Journal](http://TheChronicle-Journal)  
March 03, 2001

What started out as a chat over beers in 1976 by a few Lakehead University outdoor club members has turned into the biggest cross-country ski event in Northwestern Ontario.

The 24th annual Sibley Ski Tour is today and this year's event will break the old entry record of 832 skiers, set in 1997.

As of 10 p.m. last night, there were more than 938 participants registered. Tour director Diane Ambro said organizers are thrilled and expect a great ski for everyone.

Dean, who was the first Sibley tour co-ordinator, is pleased the event he helped create is now one of Thunder Bay's premiere sporting events.

"It's kind of nice to know that something you put a lot of work into is still going on," Dean said during a phone interview. He moved away from Thunder Bay in 1988 and now lives in the Ottawa area.

Sibley has its roots in the Canadian Ski Marathon in Ottawa in February of 1976.

Dean and some other LU outdoor club members competed in the two-day, 160-kilometre event.

During the race banquet, the skiers drank and talked about having their own marathon ski event in Thunder Bay. Fortunately the enthusiasm for the idea didn't die when the beer stopped flowing.

"On the way home in the van, we worked out some of the details and went from there," Dean said.

Dean, Judy Green and Rita Strobl formed the core organizing group for that first race.

"Once we got the idea, we knew that there was no reason it couldn't go. It turned out to be a lot of work. The hardest part was finding a place to hold it. Once that was there, there was no stopping it."

That place was Sleeping Giant Provincial Park.

There was 382 entries for the first race on March 1, 1978, then called Thunder Bay Ski Tour.

It took a lot of work to organize the event and after two years, Dean stepped down to allow





some fresh blood to take over the race.

"The first year really rocked it out of us. I was happy new people came in . . . I was tired and wiped out," Dean said.

Surprisingly, Sibley's first tour director never skied in the race he helped create.

The 50-year-old, who works for Compaq computers, has two artificial hips so he is no longer skiing 50-kilometre marathons. But he might comeback and do the 10 or 20 kilometre events.

"I don't know why I didn't do it. Maybe some year I will."

### **Sibley closing in on 1,000 skiers**

By Michael Onesi - [The Chronicle-Journal](#)

March 05, 2001

One thousand is a perfect number of skiers to have for a race. But Sibley Ski Tour coordinator Diane Ambro doesn't want to get much larger than that.

Saturday's cross-country ski race set a record for entries — 942 — breaking the previous mark of 832 in 1987. The original Sibley Ski Tour, held in 1978, attracted 382 skiers.

"We'd like to see 1,000. I don't know if we'd want to go much beyond that," Ambro said yesterday. "We don't want to get too big. I think that would change the whole dynamic of the race."

Ambro believes heavy promotion in the U.S. is a big reason for Saturday's record number. Over the past three years, Sibley volunteers have gone to major U.S. races to hand out brochures and convince people to come north. Ambro personally managed to convince three people to come to Thunder Bay while promoting Sibley in Grand Marais.

"Three young ladies came up to me and said we are here because you convinced us to come when you were at the Sawtooth race in Grand Marais."

Over the 24-year history of Sibley, the event has earned a great reputation in the ski community down south.

"Without fail, I'd say 90 per cent of the skiers that do come up that I've spoken too say 'We heard so many good things about your race that we decided to give it a try.'"

Also attracting American skiers is the low Canadian dollar, making hotel and travel costs cheaper. The entry fees for Sibley are much lower than the Birkebeiner, a major U.S. race in Wisconsin that attracts 6,000 athletes. The top price to get a Sibley bib is \$50 while the cheapest Birkebeiner fee is \$65 (US).

While Americans may like the low cost, Thunder Bay skiers like the mix of competition and fun. The event attracts everyone from national ski team members to people who travel the trails in Superman costumes. Organizers work hard to promote the not-so-serious aspect of the race so everyone, no matter what skill level, has a good time.

About a decade ago, organizers added a 10-kilometre distance to the usual 20- and 50-km events. The shorter category is a good way for children, seniors and less-physically fit people to get involved with Sibley.

At first, 10K racers weren't timed but now the category has its own route and every racer gets their finishing time recorded.

"The 10K is now every bit as important as the other distances," Ambro said.

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