

## Our English Page.

### The Vasa Ski Race

Sweden's Hardest Ski Runners  
Follow the Course of  
Gustaf Vasa.

By Sten Lindhagen.

When the chief ski event in Sweden has been called the "Vasalopp" it is not merely to honor the royal name of the Vasas. It commemorates a particular adventure in the life of the founder of the dynasty, Old King Gösta, when he was young and a fugitive. The course, between Sälen and Mora in Dalecarlia, is along the road actually followed by him on that occasion.

During the period when an absentee king in Copenhagen allowed his servants to persecute the people of Sweden, it was always the sturdy Dalecarlian peasants and miners who offered the most vigorous resistance. A miner from southern Dalecarlia, Engelbrekt Engelbreksson, organized a revolt which unhappily terminated with the murder of the leader, in 1436. Later the work of liberation was carried on by men of the Sture families, with the Dalecarlians as the backbone of their fighting force. After the death of Sten Sture the Younger, his kinsman, Gustaf Eriksson Vasa, dedicated himself to the cause. Some of his nearest relatives had been beheaded in the Blood Bath of Stockholm, and he himself had been held in a Danish prison, but had managed to escape.

The young nobleman — he was only twenty-three — decided to seek help where Engelbrekt and the Stures had found it. Travelling on secret paths to elude his pursuers, he came to Dalecarlia in November, 1520. Now here, now there, he suddenly appeared, spoke to the people in the parishes, and urged them to rise and free their country. But the peasants were not ready to follow him. The tyranny of the king had, after all, borne harder on the nobleman and the political leaders than on the common people, and besides they knew that a prize had been put on the head of Gustaf Vasa, so it was a risky matter to harbor him.

Constantly pursued by Danish troops and disappointed in his hope of support, the young nobleman arrived in Mora by Lake Siljan at Christmas time. Here too he made his plea, and was repulsed. Then, in his despair, he decided to leave his country forever. Shortly after new year's he set out on snowshoes intending to traverse the great primeval forests between the Eastern and the Western Dal River and to follow the course of the latter northward to the Norwegian border.

But a week after his departure more fugitives from the south arrived at Mora, and the tales they brought made the men of Mora change their minds. They sent two of their swiftest ski-runners after Gustaf Vasa to bring him back. The two men were named Lars and Engelbrekt and were from Kettilbo, then a part of Mora. It was not difficult to find the fugitive, as he was not familiar with the territory and did not know how to use skis, so he had to pick his way on snowshoes. At Sälen on the Western Dal River they caught up with him. They delivered their message, and the three returned.

Immediately upon his return to Mora, Gustaf Vasa was proclaimed the leader of the people, and the men of Mora promised to go with him against the foreign usurper. More and more armed men gathered round him, and by Midsummer Eve, 1523, the campaign was so far advanced that he could make his triumphant entry into Stockholm. It was not long after this before the whole country was liberated, and Gustaf Vasa, as a king, began the work of laying the foundation of the modern

Swedish State.

When the nation was preparing to celebrate the four hundredth anniversary of this gigantic work of liberation, a Riksdag member from Dalecarlia, Anders Pers, proposed that a suitable means of commemoration would be to hold an annual ski-race over the historic course where the Kettilbo men ran after Gustaf Vasa and where he returned to begin his task of leadership. The proposal was received with enthusiasm, and the very same year, in the spring of 1922, the first contest was held.

We do not know exactly what way Gustaf Vasa and the men from Kettilbo took, whether they passed through the more settled districts or kept to desolate forests. There are several varying traditions in the matter. When the course for the ski-race was to be laid out, it was possible therefore to choose the way that seemed best for the purpose. The track is now well marked and follows country roads or paths used by woodsmen, so that there shall be no danger of any contestant being lost or having to make tracks in the loose snow for the benefit of his competitors.

The race is open only to amateurs, and there are only honorary prizes, no money rewards. In spite of that — or perhaps for that very reason — the event attracts the finest ski-runners in Sweden. A victory in the Vasa Race is regarded as being worth more than the Swedish championship and as being on a par with victory in the 50 kilometer run at Holmenkollen in Norway, although the latter still retains the moral prestige of world championship. Only a victory in the 50 kilometer ski race at the Olympic Games has greater luster in the eyes of a Swedish sportsman. In the Vasa Race only Swedes take part; no foreigners are admitted. The run is from Sälen to Mora, a distance of nine Swedish miles or 90 kilometers. A day or two before the race the contestants begin to assemble at Sälen. A few come on their skis, but more on the railway. The first year they had to drive in sleighs, as the railway was not ready yet. They are quartered in the homes of the people in Sälen, which is a hamlet of only a few hundred souls. The night before the race all the contestants meet for a festive but very simple meal. Nothing is allowed to interfere with the all-important fitness.

On the day of the start everybody is up betimes — before sunrise — to look at the weather and make careful preparations. As the race is sometimes held as late as in March, one must expect wet snow in the middle of the day, no matter how cold it is in the morning, and much depends on the condition of the skis. All eat a hearty breakfast to prepare themselves for the bout.

At seven the signal is given for the start, and as the shot is fired or the flag lowered, the long line of runners hurl themselves forward in a frantic attempt to gain the best place in the course. At a furious rate they push up the east bank of the river to the highway which they follow for ten kilometers before they plunge into the seventy kilometer wide forest.

The strain is tremendous; but all know it and have prepared for it through a winter of intensive training. And they are a strong race, chiefly woodsmen who spend a large part of their lives on skis while carrying on their daily work. To travel ninety kilometers on skis is nothing unusual, but the gruelling contest is quite another matter, and they use all the force of their sinewy arms to push themselves forward with their staves. No one who sees the line of ski-runners winding their way through the forest can doubt that they are a picked troop, men who have been hand-picked and trained by those who know the art.

wastes. The medical examination is obligatory — and severe. No one who shows the least symptom of illness or weakness is allowed to run.

Here and there along the course are control stations, where attendants are ready to care for those who for some reason fall by the wayside. Here are also groaning tables where the runners are invited to eat as much as they can. In the dressing-rooms at the goal still more luxurious tables await them. Meanwhile, their clothes and other baggage are sent ahead by special train.

At Mora the first spectators began to arrive the day before the race, and filled the hotels. Through the morning, special trains have been arriving all the way from Stockholm and Göteborg as well as from places nearby, and the quiet little town of two thousand people has been transformed into a seething caldron of perhaps twenty thousand. Festive excitement is everywhere. The last stretch of the course is edged with flags and roped off. For hours before the runners come in, people have been massed along the road trying to hold a vantage point from which they can see the last spurt. Stands for coffee, waffles, and hot dogs are everywhere, and the vendors of souvenirs do a lucrative business.

Meanwhile, radio reports from the control stations enliven the hours of waiting. The times of the runners are posted on huge bulletin boards, while the loud speaker is bellowing forth details and funny stories of the race. Interest is at the boiling point, and to the victorious runner the last few kilometers of a course lined with people form a veritable Via Triumphalis. The goal is at the foot of the bronze statue of Gustaf Vasa modeled by the painter Anders Zorn, himself a native of Mora where he lived and worked the greater part of his life. Here are also tribunals for the press and guests of honor.

In the race the contest has been terrific. In the beginning a few young hotspurs tried to take the lead, but soon had to slacken their furious speed as one by one the really big ski-runners glided past them. Gradually a select little troop has been formed within which we may be sure the winner will be found. One after another has had to give up because of fatigue or injury to hands or feet in the rough course, but the rest are pressing on.

The distances between the runners increase, and at last there is one in the lead straining toward the goal alone over the last gruelling miles and kilometers. Those who crowded around the goal begin to hear a murmur of voices from the distance as those farther out along the course catch sight of the runners. Then he himself comes into view on the ice of the Dal River. With every muscle tense he leans on his staves and pushes up the bank of the river, past Zorn's great house and studio, and along the highway. A few hundred meters more and he reaches the bend of the road between the beautiful white church of Mora and the old red belfry of rough-hewn timber. There he is met by a girl in the colorful festive dress of Mora. She holds a huge laurel wreath which she puts over his head, and with this around his neck he passes to the goal beneath a portal over which can be read the inscription:

IN THE FOOTPRINTS OF THE  
FATHERS FOR FUTURE  
VICTORIES

The winner of the Vasa Ski Race becomes a hero of the skis. His name belongs as few others to the history of Swedish sport, and his victory is recorded in a manner that falls to the lot of few. In Sälen a huge monolith is raised and on it the name of the winner each year is cut in the granite.

P. E. Hedlund, whose name is engraved opposite the two dates 1922 and 1923, and whose time of 5:33.23 is the shortest on record, distinguished himself also in the Olympiad at St. Moritz in 1928, where he won the bronze medal in the 50 kilometer race. He is a native of Mora in no

border, at a latitude of only 62 degrees. All the other winners have been from upper Norrland, some from the very edge of Lappland, and one is a Lapp, Ernst Alm and Oscar Lindberg, winners in the first two races, are both from the little inland village Norrsjö at a latitude of about 65 degrees. John Lindgren, winner in 1924, represents the coast city of Umeå at a latitude of 64 degrees. At Cortina d'Ampezzo in the Italian Alps he won the long distance race over the best men on the Continent.

Sven Utterström won the Vasa race in 1925 and the Holmenkollen race in 1929 and 1930, defeating the best men of Norway and Finland. 1928 he made as good time as Hedlund, but the victory was awarded to the latter. Utterström is from Boden, the fortress city near the northernmost tip of the Baltic at 66 degrees latitude. Konrad Pettersen, the victor of 1927, is from the coast city Luleå, not far from Boden. He is blond giant who stands two meters in height. A contrast to him is the winner in 1929, J. A. Persson, a little Lapp who lives alone in a kaja and subsists on hunting and fishing in the primeval forests north of Arjeplog, at 66 degrees latitude. Werner Lundström, the winner of 1930, is from Arvidsjaur, also far up in the northern forests.

It should be noted that all the places mentioned are on the same latitude as Baffin's Land and central Alaska, although the climate is much warmer.

Skiing is practised by almost everybody in Sweden, and the output on skis may be as much as 100,000 in one year. When, nevertheless, the Vasa Ski Race draws only a hundred participants, it is because of the elimination of the unfit. In this race there is a chance of victory only for the strongest. And this is as it should be. A great occasion should be commemorated by a great achievement.

### Vår civilisations huvudfigurer.

(Forts. fr. sid 9.)

förpesta av småttverk, cementfabriker och andra anläggningar.

William M. Burton, vilkens uppfinningar på distilleringsområdet möjliggjort vår moderna oljeförädlingsindustri.

Charles Parsons. Den brittiske ingenjören, som uppfunnit den revolutionerande turbinen med hans namn.

Robert A. Hadfield, den engelske metallurgen, som uppfunnit viktiga stållegeringar.

H. P. Cady och en grupp vetenskapsmän vid Kansas-universitetet, som under världskriget lyckades utdraga helium från naturgas.

C. Francis Jenkins, som gjort betydelsefulla uppfinningar inom filmtekniken och radiovisionen.

Robert M. Yerkes, intelligens- och metaltetsprovets fader.

Clifford W. Beers, vars rön under uppehåll på en sinnessvaganstalt ligger till grund för den omfattande "menjaghygiene"-rörelsen.

L. O. Howard, entomologen vars arbete räddat många miljoner dollar för det amerikanska lanbruket.

George H. Shull, botanisten och majs förädlaren.

John Mohler, mul- och klövsjukdoms Marion Dorset, kemisten, som uppfunnit en metod för immunisering av svin mot kolera.

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Pengarna sutto hårt inne.  
Vaktmästaren: — Nu har ni hållit på att telefonera i två timmar. Den glade studenten: — Ja, men jag håller på att telefonera till min far för att få pengar att betala min skuld till er med.

På konstutställningen.  
Har du sålt någonting den här veckan?  
— Ja, två sommarkostymer och min väckardocka.

Upp: — Är ni lycklig i ert äktenskap?  
— Ja, för det mesta på det för säk-rhets skull.