

History of Skiing

Skiing is a popular outdoor pastime anywhere in the world there is snow. However, skiing hasn't always just been about having fun or winning races. Originally, skis were invented as a way to get from one place to another in snowy regions.

The oldest ski ever found, dating from about eight thousand years ago, was dug up by archeologists in Russia. The ski is fairly short. The front comes to a pointed tip, while the back end has a carving of an elk head on it that might have been used as a brake.

In China, very long skis were used for transportation. Chinese wall paintings from 5000 BCE appear to show people on skis. Skis are also painted on ancient walls in Norway, which are believed to date from over five thousand years ago. Some of those paintings show people traveling on skis, while others illustrate men hunting while skiing.

Norway contains a lot of bogs, which are areas of drenched, dead plant life. When items get submerged in a bog, they tend to be preserved very well for a long time. A total of twenty skis dating from ancient times have been excavated from bogs all over Norway. Archeologists have also unearthed skis in ancient graves in various regions of Scandinavia. These finds reveal details about the history of skiing.

There seem to have been three basic types of skis, identified by archeologists as arctic, southern, and central Nordic. Short arctic skis have a layer of animal fur covering their wooden structure. An interesting characteristic of southern and central Nordic skis is the fact that the skis in each pair are two different lengths. This is presumed to help skiers control their speed and allow them to stop quickly or navigate tough terrain.

The only indigenous people of Scandinavia are known as the Sami, who also happen to be the earliest people who definitely skied. There is evidence that they hunted moose by shooting a bow and arrow from skis. Later, documents show how their king sent officers out on skis to collect taxes from the area villages.

By the Middle Ages, skiing was very common in Scandinavia. Whole armies traversed snowy mountains and fields by skiing over them. Today there's a ski marathon in Norway inspired by a medieval skiing legend: A troop of soldiers carried their infant king, Haakon IV, across hills to bring him to safety in the next valley.

Skis came to America thanks to Norwegian immigrants. In the 1800s, a Norwegian known as "Snowshoe Thompson" delivered mail throughout the Sierra Nevada mountains by skiing from one area to the next. It was also in the 1800s that skiing started to become recognized as a sport. Probably there were unofficial impromptu ski competitions much longer ago, but no one bothered to keep records of them.