



Birke Training Tips by Jan Gunther

Training suggestions for the questions:

“I would like to ski the Kortelopet this year but I have never skied before. How should I get started? “...or... “I would like to ski the Birke this year but I skied in high school a very long time ago and I am not sure how to train”

How to get started in XC skiing?

- 1) Research the sport. Find yourself a passionate XC ski store and talk to the employees who ski. Learn your community’s XC ski areas. Discover your local ski trails, man-made or natural. Google the closest XC skiing activities and find other skiing friends to plan ski goals and trips. Research the different types of skiing, classic and skate.  
Finally, learn about the equipment and which model best fits your needs, skill and fitness level and goals. Just like a wall of running shoes, a wall of skis can be narrowed down to just two or three models that would work best.  
Example: you first decide whether you desire to skate or classic. IF classic, learn the pros and cons of waxable and no-wax skis. Review your fitness, ski background and athletic goals next. If you are or aim to be really fit and race, purchase a ski package that best meets those needs now so you don’t have the expense of upgrading later. On a strict budget and just plan to ski under the lights of 00 on the Birke trail or the man-made xc ski areas at French Park or Hyland Hills (MN)? Then focus your attention on a mid-level or closeout (last years ) xc skis and boots. Be aware that skis need to be personally fit to you. Some work better for wet warm snow, others are best for cold hard conditions. Stiff skis fit BIG skiers and soft shorter ones work best on lighter women. By the time your ski sales person qualifies your interests, your options to buy will be a manageable, understandable number of items that will work for you.
- 2) Get started now! Assuming you have decided to either skate or classic and received good information regarding equipment and dress needed to have an enjoyable entry (or re-entry) into skiing, then either rent or purchase equipment to give it a try. If you have not skied for a while, or at all, I suggest going out by yourself first, just to focus on the feel of snow and skiing. Concentrate on balance, movement and coordination. As your understanding of the sport allows you to move reasonably coordinated, then spend the time and money to join a lesson program or hire an instructor. You progress further learning ski technique if you first practiced a bit of balance and movement.
- 3) Consider purchasing rollerskis. Using rollerskis (dryland training on ski simulated equipment) is the **only** way to best learn the technique of XC skiing before the snow flies. You can focus on all the ‘gears’ you will need for on-snow skiing AND you can build specific ski – upper and lower body- strength. There are several different models of rollerskis , skate, classic and combi, off and on-road etc.... Please discuss the options with a knowledgeable ski store. Or visit <http://xcski.gearwest.com/rollerski101> for more info.
- 4) Schedule lessons. As mentioned in #2, you will soon learn that lessons or guidance on how to ski, will be helpful. Just like swimming, good technique with tiny muscles will get your further

than bad technique and big muscles. Practicing incorrect technique is exhausting. If you learned **w a y** back in high school, consider refreshing as the ski technique has been refined and movements altered. Learn the sport and you will be rewarded in translating your fitness to forward progress up the trail. Stagger the lessons weekly and practice in-between.

Understanding how to switch among the movements of V-1, V2- and V2-alternate adds intellectual satisfaction to the sport of skiing and makes it way more fun. Learning the balance and subsequent speed of using “V-2” is like adding aero bars onto a racing tri bike; you will subtract minutes from your per/k time.

- 5) Build yourself a flexible training program with the Birkie as the primary goal. Some examples (assuming you have a base fitness) are listed below. For a specific training schedule, find a ski coach (or ask a knowledgeable XC ski store where to find a good coach) Training hours and training difficulty depends on your available time, fitness level and age.

#### **Suggested Simple Training guide: Sept- November – weekly hours 7-10**

Goals to include within your week of training:

- **Upper body strength workouts** (2-3 days/week). Should include at least one specific strength on rollerskis (upper body drills such as double pole, single stick on hills), one indoor / outdoor body weight strength including sit-ups, dips, lunges and other core body workouts, and one general strength (swimming, paddling, Nordic walking). Or double up on specific or core body strength if that is your forte. (2-3 hours total for week)
- **Hill and/or plyometric workout** (1-2x/week). A harder, shorter and faster workout with the intent to raise your heart-rate above “threshold” (learn about heart rate training) to strengthen your heart and muscles. Anywhere from 5-10 repeats doing 1-15 min of hill workouts roller skiing, running or even biking. The amount of fartlek’s and hill works should be built on a progression that involves some knowledge of creating a training program. But at the very least, increase your intensity intentionally, weekly. (1-2 hr/ week)
- **One over distance work-out** (1x/week or every 10 days) The goal here is to build aerobic endurance thru a long, easy distance run, roller ski, pole hike and/or mtn bike every week or 10 days. As the ski season draws closer, practicing movements that best simulate XC skiing is best, so a long rollerski in which you pay attention to technique is key. Add a few “pick ups “ within the longer workout just to keep your body fresh and alert.(3-4 hrs)

Read up on training programs and heart rate training and create your own plan. Even If it is simple, incorporating a basic workout structure that provides a purpose to your training vs just completing random hours of fitness activity, will help you achieve your Birkie goal with improved results.

#### **December- February – weekly hours 7-12**

Cross country ski on snow, as much as you can. Take lessons, group or private, to improve technique as you improve fitness. To ski the Birkie you should xc ski a **minimum** of 2x / week with one ski lasting at least 2+ hours, but you should TRAIN at least one hour 6 days/ week using a strength, speed and endurance plan. Again, apply the dryland training structure to your skiing either on skis or the closest you can come to skiing—to build correct movement for both your upper and lower body.

Suggestions: Roller ski. Sign up for a xc ski on snow clinics or weekly lessons taught thru local stores such as Gear West, or organizations such as the City of the Lakes Loppet , the Women’s

Wine, Chocolate and XC ski weekend in December (see Gearwest.com under activities) or Endurance United, both located in the Mpls area. Or CXC based out of Cable Wi (to name a few popular ones). At the very least, purchase a DVD and visually understand the XC ski techniques and apply them to your training or ask a skiing friend for help.

Drive up north and train on the Birkie trail to experience the 'real deal'. Sign up for the Birkie Trail Tour (see [www.birke.com](http://www.birke.com)) to ski most of the Birkie route with support (food and friends). Sign up for a few races such as the City of the Lakes Loppet, the Luninary Loppet!, the Mora Vasaloppet (check Skinnyski.com for up-to-date event listings) to experience the thrill (stress?) of racing and all the preparation that goes along with eating well, preparing your skis and getting to the race start organized and ready to go.

Lastly, enjoy the entire Birke preparation and skiing experience. It is a journey. Waiting for good snow, learning proper technique, dressing for the cold, finding the time since most of us cannot ski out of our back door, are all challenging hurdles to the sport. BUT, the beauty, the health benefits, the specialness of being part of an active group that appreciates the Minnesota/ Wisconsin winters and the comradery of the ski events make it the coolest sport ever. Money cannot buy the overall feeling of wellness that those who love skiing experience, so join us!

**Provided By:**

*Jan Guenther*

*Owner, Gear West XC Ski & Run Shop*

*Long Lake, MN*

*Jan has completed the Birkie 27 times and has finished as high as 2<sup>nd</sup> place overall for women! Jan learned to xc ski after college and it changed her life- causing her to leave the corporate work-world and start a ski/run store.*