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Dedication of two statues Oct. 4 to honor American Birkebeiner Trail designers

Former Olympic coaches Wiik, Hall mapped iconic Wisconsin route, beginning 50 years ago

HAYWARD, Wis. — The 50-kilometer American Birkebeiner Trail through the hilly northwoods of Wisconsin is regarded as one of the finest cross-country ski trails in the world.

Mapped in 1975, built in 1976 and first used in 1977 for the fifth annual American Birkebeiner race, the challenging route through Bayfield and Sawyer County forests is one reason the race has become the largest in North America and the third largest in the world.

On Saturday, Oct. 4, the two men who designed the trail, [Sven Wiik](#) and [Marty Hall](#), will be honored with statues at the race trailhead near Mt. Telemark Village, outside of Cable, Wis.

A statue unveiling ceremony, open to the public, will begin at 10 a.m.

The project was approved by the American Birkebeiner Ski Foundation, with fundraising coordinated by the families.

Family representatives, including Birgitta Wiik-Lindgren, Sven's daughter; Kajsa Wiik-Lindgren, Sven's granddaughter; Kathy Hall, Marty's wife, and other dignitaries plan to attend.

Wiik died in 2016, and Hall died in February 2025.

The life-size statues will be next to each other, separated by plaques highlighting their contributions to the project and to the sport. A third plaque chronicles trail history.

"These two gentlemen turned Tony Wise's vision into reality. They designed a trail that has helped define the Birkebeiner and has meant so much to generations of skiers," said Ben Popp, executive director of the American Birkebeiner Ski Foundation. "We're pleased to honor their historic contributions to the race and the sport of cross country skiing."

The statues were designed and sculpted by multimedia artist Tom Holleran of Milwaukee and cast at Vanguard Sculpture Services in Milwaukee. The families of both men contributed to the designs by working with Holleran and Vanguard to describe how they would like Wiik and Hall to be portrayed. Hall contributed to the design of his sculpture.



Telemark Lodge owner Tony Wise conceived the idea for the trail 50 years ago -- in 1975 -- when his young race began to grow. The early races were not on a designated ski trail.

Wise first hired Wiik, the 1960 U.S. Olympic coach in cross country skiing, in 1975 to mark a route through the forest between Hayward and Cable. Telemark employee Bob Treland, the race director, assisted Wiik.

A year later, in 1976, Wise asked Hall, then the U.S. Olympic coach, to review and suggest revisions to the trail Wiik had marked, in part because the race direction was switching from north to south. After funding and grants were secured, the approximately \$100,000 trail was built later that year.

Wiik, a native of Sweden who lived in Steamboat Springs, Colo., also designed the first cross country trails at Telemark Lodge starting in 1972 and skied in the first Birkebeiner in 1973, taking second place.

Hall, from New Hampshire, led U.S. teams to a breakthrough in 1976 when Bill Koch became the first American to medal in the Olympics in the sport. Hall also was consulted in 1979 when the trail was widened from 15 to 30 feet to accommodate more skiers. Like Wiik, Hall also designed other trails, including the World Cup Trail, at Telemark Lodge and skied in many Birkebeiners.

Fundraising is underway for a third statue, of Wise, to be placed at the site of the former Telemark Lodge. The lodge was razed in 2021, and the Birkebeiner Foundation began redeveloping the site now known as [Mt. Telemark Village](#).

Wiik, Hall and Wise are members of the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame.

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