

Event Report: Lutsen Training Camp

By Leif Lennie
NDC Member 2010-11



Fall is a time of year that is much anticipated in the lives of ski racers. It brings dark and brisk mornings, harder interval sets, beautiful runs through the woods, and inevitably, if you live in Ontario, tales of snowfall out west or in the Yukon or at the Forêt Montmorency that make you so excited you watch hours on end of World Cup videos on YouTube. Well, that's what it does to me. It is sometimes hard during the long summer months to associate training in 30-plus degrees with racing on snow, but the fall seems to put it all into perspective.



Last Thursday (November 4), our team traveled a couple of hours to Lutsen, Minnesota, for a quintessential fall camp: five days of what would prove to be one of the hardest training blocks of the year. We were joined by the Big Thunder and Lakehead University ski teams for the weekend. Or I should say, we joined them — this was originally their camp.

Thursday afternoon our recently appointed technical director, Timo Puiras, picked the team up in our big Ford E-350 passenger van dubbed, "The Meat Wagon," stuffed in typical fashion with nine skiers, Timo, and enough gear to fill any remaining space. Off we went toward Lutsen, a small downhill resort along the scenic northwest shore of Lake Superior. Half-way there, just over the border, we stopped for an afternoon workout: an arms-only roller-ski up Mount Josephine, a small mountain with a memorable view of Grand Portage Bay and Lake Superior beyond.



Generally our training camps lean towards either doing lots of volume and low intensity, or lots of intensity and low volume. This one featured both high volume and high intensity. Morning workouts were longer and usually hard, while in the afternoon we often did recovery runs on the trails along the mountain ridges, with autumn colours still bright below. Also vivid were men in bright orange bearing rifles, as our camp coincided with the middle of hunting season. Heading out into the woods on those afternoon runs made me feel occasionally uneasy, especially when every so often a gunshot would be heard not so far away.

Saturday was when training started to get tough. Joined by Big Thunder and Lakehead, we did a three stage roller-ski race, the first stage classic and the next two skating. Each stage was a hill climb from the highway up to the ski village, involving three sustained steep pitches separated by gradual uphill's — 10 minutes per stage was a very respectable time. Honorable mentions to Harry Seaton, Chris Hamilton and Michael Somppi, who seemed in a class of their own on this day.

Sunday was not any easier: a 7 x 6-minute interval set up one of the downhill runs, done at zone four pace (nearly the pace of a sprint race). In the afternoon we did an easy hour-long recovery roller-ski. Misjudging the effect of daylight savings, we ended up skiing in the dark — actually, a nice change from the routine of early morning and mid-afternoon workouts.



The paths in Lutsen provided for some great roller skiing.

We capped off the camp on Monday with a three-hour skate roller-ski and then, with everyone pretty depleted, a fairly quiet ride home.

It's now November 10th and snow should make an appearance in Thunder Bay any day. Racing season is just around the corner. The team is looking fitter and faster than I have ever seen it. I'm excited not only to race and to measure my own gains, but also to watch my team mates, who I know are going to be some of the fastest skiers in Canada this year.

Hope to see you on the trails!

Leif

I would like to thank my sponsors — GoodLife Fitness, EAL Construction (John Stephenson and Bruce Singer) and Robert and Jean Lennie — for providing me with the means to pursue my dreams.