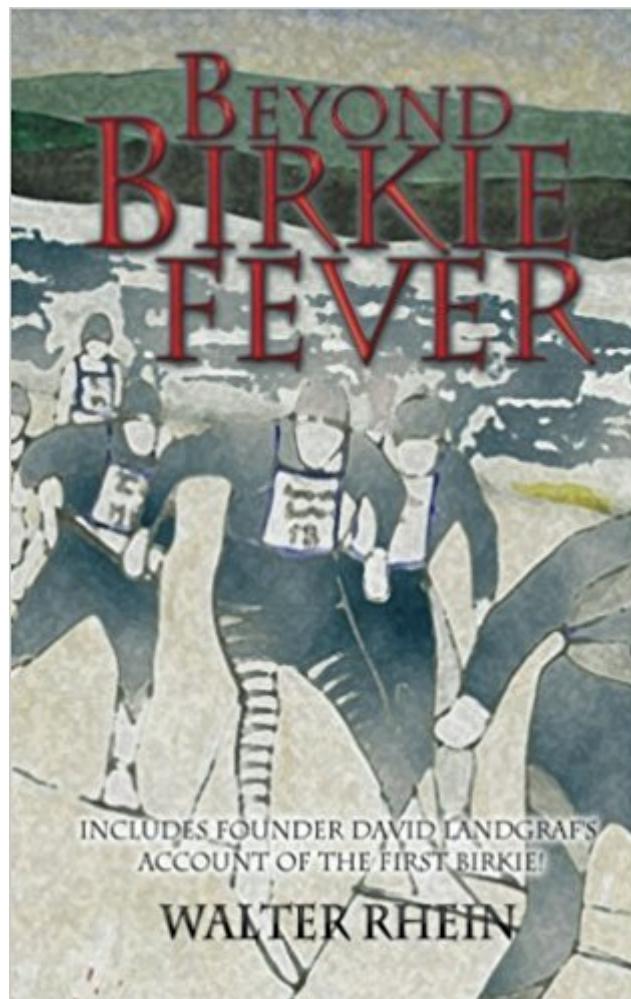


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Beyond Birkie Fever



Synopsis

Cross-country skiers are hearty folk. The compulsion to race marathon-length distances in subfreezing conditions requires an eternally optimistic and fiercely independent spirit. The fear of blinding snow or paralyzing cold does not deter them, and it has been said that skiers do not merely laugh at adversity; they are completely oblivious to its existence. America's greatest cross-country ski race is the American Birkebeiner or "Birkie" for short. Every year, thousands of people journey from all over the globe to Hayward, Wisconsin, for a world-class celebration of life, winter, and the competitive spirit. Prior to the race, local participants find themselves in the throes of a unique and natural euphoria. They thrill at the prospect of participating shoulder to shoulder with elite international competitors in a wild race through the great Northwoods wilderness. Beyond Birkie Fever is the story of how America's magnificent cross-country ski marathon can expand your horizons and be the gateway to experiences beyond anything you'd ever hoped to imagine!

Book Information

Paperback: 246 pages

Publisher: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform; 2 edition (October 1, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1492879347

ISBN-13: 978-1492879343

Product Dimensions: 5 x 0.6 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars 116 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #648,805 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #96 in Books > Sports & Outdoors > Outdoor Recreation > Skiing #437 in Books > Sports & Outdoors > Winter Sports #1160 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Greek & Roman

Customer Reviews

Walter Rhein was born in Wisconsin, but moved to Lima, Peru in his twenties. There, he supported himself by writing, teaching, translating and editing. He currently splits his time between Wisconsin and Peru.

It is amazing how a sporting event can influence the direction of your development as a human being. Beyond Birkie Fever follows the real life exploits of Walter Rhein. This autobiographical work tells both the story of the author as he grew up in the winter wonderland that is Wisconsin as well as the

story of the cross country skiing race that elevated his journey. I will be the first to admit that I don't know a thing about skiing but luckily I didn't have to. Walter's whimsical style of writing is often times like reading the script for a good sitcom. The catchy spirit of his adventures is coupled with lovable characters. All of these elements coalesce around a yearly race called the Birkie. This marathon on skis attracts thousands of powder junkies to take on a mammoth endeavor during the bleakest days of winter. I live in warm, sunny Florida so while I can't relate to the weather, I can relate to the desire to be a part of such epic events. I would recommend this book to anyone who enjoys endurance sports. Not only will you find yourself chuckling through the pages, you'll do so at breakneck speed. Despite a busy schedule, I read the book in only a couple days. Clearly the spirit of Birkie Fever is addictive no matter what sport you enjoy.

This story of a cross-country skier's experiences with the famous Birkebeiner race is a fascinating account of not only the history and trails on the course, but also of his trials and tribulations as an athlete. More than the sports aspect of the book, the human spirit aspects of the story are what make this book worth the time to read it. Rhein takes the reader through his own youth and how he got the inspiration to take up the sport early in the book. His mother was one of the participants in the first Birkebeiner (be sure to read the introduction for more great stories on this first races from other participants) and from there he gets the bug. The story doesn't read like the typical autobiography, nor is it one where unexpected wins or fantastic finishes are documented. Rhein's story reads much like other amateur participants of events like the Birkebeiner, marathons, or other endurance sports. It is an accomplishment just to finish, let alone win. Some of the stories are quite humorous. My favorite one was of the time Rhein and his friend Doug decided to train during the summer by using roller skies. Between the hilarious description of the equipment itself and the misadventures while using the equipment, it was a great read. So was Rhein's account of one particular marathon he was running when he was getting hungry and saw a partially opened energy bar package lying on the road. I won't give any more away about that story, but it is one that the reader won't soon forget. Overall, this is a very good memoir about an amateur cross country skier and his trials and tribulations while training for and competing in one of the biggest events in the sport. Even if a reader knows nothing about the sport, it is still worth the time to read this entertaining book.

Beyond Birkie Fever by Walter Rhein is just the antidote for reader burnout. Sometimes you have to

step back from the Doris Kearns Goodwins of the world and their 900 page award winning tomes, and let a book read itself to you. Beyond Birkie Fever is a story that refreshes. Written in the first person, it is the author's tale of growing up in Wisconsin and falling in love with cross-country skiing, and in particular with the world famous Wisconsin Birkebeiner, a ski event featuring races up to 32 miles long that attract the best skiers on the planet as well as 10,000 other participants who relish the beautiful scenery of the Chequamegon Forest and the chance to rub shoulders with the world's best. You can't get out on the field with Peyton Manning and play catch, but in the Wisconsin Birkebeiner you can ski in the tracks of Olympic champions. Beyond Birkie Fever is much more than a book about ski competition however. It's often said of good books that they have a sense of place. Beyond Birkie Fever has the sense of many places—the little town in southern Wisconsin where the author grew up, distant locales in Australia, Italy and Germany where similar races are held and most of all, the magical land in northwest Wisconsin that some call simply, north of highway 8. Although clearly accomplished in the sport, the author does not revel in his peak performances, but speaks to the reader of the progression from novice to expert amateur and the importance of knowing one's own limitations and finding joy in that knowledge. Humor abounds, as do tidbits of other silent sports such as cycling and distance running. The book also serves as an introduction to the beautiful land north of highway 8 in Wisconsin and the people you meet there.

As someone who has done some amateur cross country skiing, I was quite interested in checking out what a talented author like Walter Rhein could do with a novel based on the sport. Specifically, the story focuses on the Birkie cross-country marathon in Hayward, Wisconsin. A harsh 50 kilometer race, the Birkie is an annual tradition for amateur and expert cross country skiers alike. Many people make long-distance trips to try their hands at the marathon, coming from all parts of the globe. I love the casual nature of Rhein's style. It is similar to a sports bio, where the writer has an affinity or special tie to the subject. It allows for a smooth, very friendly narrative that moves you through the events of the marathon and its history with ease and wit. Plenty of fun vignettes, old time humor and good natured fun round out the experience. This book is a MUST for cross-country skiers looking for a casual, but very entertaining look into an obscure (to the general public) event that has been part of history for just over forty years. Witty and heartfelt, it is everything a good sports book should be!

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