



SCIJ Event 2007



FONT ROMEU NEIGES CATALANES



◀ The most important lady on the pre-tour - manager of the Pyrenees-orientales Departemental Tourism Comity with Antonio Marin ▲ Perpignan – on the top of the Rois de Majorque Palace Antonio, guidess, guide, Aliza, Liana, Eliya, Tatjana, Merike, Livia, Barry and Isabel.

NEIGES CATALANES CANON SENT SNOW

JAN 25 - FEB 3 2007
FONT ROMEU
CATALONIA

Text: Rauli Storm. Photo: Merike Viilup, Marius Danci, Rauli Storm • Patrick Kinsella proofread and filled gaps.

Ladies and gentlemen, captain speaking. We'll have to wait another hour. Because of heavy snowfall the only open runway is being used by both arriving and departing airplanes. In a few minutes we'll start serving free drinks. Yes, you read right. Still in 2007 an airline company serves free drinks.

26.01.2007 FRIDAY MORNING AT FOUR O'CLOCK AS THE DAY BEGINS...

At four AM Friday morning I dragged my suitcase, ski boot bag and ski bag with alpine skis and Nordic skis to the bus stop of the long-distance line. Light snow was falling upon the empty streets as I waited for the bus that would take me to the Helsinki airport. It hadn't been snowing since the last week of November when an inch of that canonized water brightened the polar night of Finland. Winter seems to mock me every year the day I leave Finland for the yearly SCIJ winter meeting. During my 3-hour bus trip southern Finland turned into a winter wonderland where I passed a few car wrecks and trailer lorries in ditches and reached the belated check-up, belated departure and belated arrival to - by Finnish standards - autumnal Barcelona. This year we were wise enough to come a day earlier and enjoy the fabulous capital of Catalonia for half a day.

▲ Unforgettable medieval Villefranche de Conflent ▲▲ The Vermeille Coast - the windy view from the Collioure Royal Castle to the city of Collioure.

▲ "SCIJ disco danders" statue erected after our previous meeting.



▲▲ The Grand Opening
▲ Merike Viilup and Montse Campana ready for GS.

One way to get ready for the races. ▲▲
Another way, Peter Weissensteiner from Austria. ▲

27.01.2007 SATURDAY – “OH! ARE YOU STILL ALIVE.” (A salutation in Turku, Finland, when one sees a friend after a long time)

The next day at the airport repeated the same 50-year old manuscript filled with hugs, handshakes, kisses on cheeks, hellos, ça vas, ciao and ahois; that is meeting friends and fighting over the seats in the first bus leaving.

The usually most boring part of the trip – the flight – had been brightened up with the free champagne. Now the champagne hammering in the temples and the uninteresting scenery made dozing off desirable.

After the 4-hour drive we finally arrived in the snow-wise spotless Font-Romeu and the Act 2 of hugs, handshakes, kisses on cheeks, hellos, ça vas, ciao and ahois was played. Even men changed kisses on cheeks! What a cultural shock to us reserved Scandinavians!

After taking up our lodgings the buffet dinner in a large tent excellently heralded what we had expected with from our last SCIJ visit to the Pyrenees in '96: overwhelming gourmet hospitality for us gluttons.

28.01.2007 SUNDAY - GRAND OPENING

Free skiing in Font-Romeu's own slopes. The resort seems to be popular among families especially on weekends, but a few slopes for experts can be found, too. I only wish the kids with snowboards would stick to the slopes suitable to their skills and wouldn't scrape the loose snow from the harder base.

Also the unpredictable changes of course with the boards with two front ends caused constant dangerous situations. One could never foresee which way and how wide they were going to turn.

As the night's darkness fell on Sunday we tried to form something one could call a line for a festive procession. Only the local children carrying the flags and nameboards of the participating countries kept our line in order. Two stone-faced 3-meter giants and a Catalonian brass band making melodic noise in order to expel devils, demons and jazz lovers led us to the festival square of Font-Romeu. Several speeches were given, Miguel's not long but still the longest (shame on him), The SCIJ anthem was played and the sky was filled with fireworks.

▲ Les Angles Grand Slalom race track.



▲ An unknown skier passes the Sport 2000 cafe in Les Angles.

Dogs barked, hounds howled and small children cried, but we chatted merrily with a little help from hot red wine.

With one fun event over we had to get ready for another and returned to the hotel to get ready for the Nations' Evening at les Airelles, the main restaurant at the ski slopes.

A few words of explanation to those who have never taken part in a Nation's Evening: every team brings along specialities from their country, food, drinks and sweets. Usually everyone rushes first to the Russian table to have caviar sandwiches and then to the Italian table to have spaghetti for the main course. Dolci and cheese can be found in most tables.

Too many of the national specialities are poured into glass. Later the evening even the crippled, lame and other wretches dance recklessly like true sportsmen and sportswomen.

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▲ Marius Danci, always working. Some feel love... Some don't.

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29.01.2007 MONDAY - FREE SKI AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

We are divided. Busses leave for five Neiges Catalanes resorts - Porté Puymorens, Cerdagne Puignal, Chambre d'Aze, Formiguères, and Puyvalador.

The Germans, Austrians, Finns and part of the Swiss team left for Chambre d'Aze, a smallish resort on the opposite side of the valley. Nearest to the parking place and restaurants several slopes for beginners rise to the height of some hundred meters. However, further to the left we find 3-4 rather long and quite enjoyable slopes where we enjoy the sunny day till lunch and even after it. Most of our group seem to enjoy the sunny terrace more than skiing.

In the evening the General Assembly voted Irish Patrick Kinsella and Bulgarian Anna Draganova to new vice presidents replacing Uli Ritter and Helga Dingova. German Klaus Spathelf and Canadian Frederik Wallace were the other two candidates. Candidates for the 2008 SCIJ winter meeting - Garmisch Partenkirchen in Germany and Jasna in Slovakia gave their presentations.

Last year in Bansko, the 2008 meeting was given to Jasna in Slovakia the 2009 meeting to Feldberg in Germany. However, Feldberg had been changed to Garmisch, and Garmisch now wanted to organise the meeting in 2008. That could not be accepted. The representatives of Garmisch were not exactly happy about the decision.

Belgium proposed to organise a meeting in Morocco, and also gave a presentation. Morocco will be a new nation in SCIJ and they are now organising a national team.

Only then can an official proposal be made. The longish GA was finished and we all rushed back to the hotel to get ready for a Jazzy Dinner and dance.



▶▶ Still full of energy: Ken Creffield (GB) Borislav Kosturkov (BUL) and Aleksander Pumpianski (RUS)

▲ Wonderful refuge from the physical exercise., Le Chalet in Les Angles.



▲ Female rookie of the year, Luciana Neacsu (ROM)

▲ We all agree: the Bansko CC track was much nicer. The sun is the same.

▶ The best CC man, Veikko Niemi was disqualified for good reason: He tested the race track!! German multi-champion Ralf Scheurer committed the same felony. WHAT NEXT? we have good reason to ask. DOPING TESTS?

30.02.2007 TUESDAY - THE DAY AT THE RACES

The day longed for - by some - and trained for - by some - woke us with bright sunshine and mild temperature. The grand slalom race day always consists more or less of standing on the top of the slope and waiting and freezing. That was not the case this time in Les Angles. The day consisted mostly of waiting, perspiring and getting a tan. Also the champions changed. Slovenia's Maja Ros and Mocnik Blaz were absent and Italy's Gisella Motta and Spain's Rossello Toti became the champions in the "rare" category (junior). Germany's Ralf Scheurer was surprisingly but the runner-up. The "medium rare" category (seniors) winners were Marjeta Sostaric of Slovenia and Luigi Breciaroli of Italy and the champions in the "well done" category (super-senior) were Slovakia's Maria Tolnayova and Spain's Francesc Isard. Medium rare steaks awaited us in the Espace Bleu Neige. Some of us left Les Angles to visit the National Training Altitude Center. Most of us hit the slopes to enjoy a sunny skiing afternoon. At the soirée we first stuffed ourselves with excellent oysters. Later grand slalom prizes were given to guilty ones and great food and gypsy music to everyone irrespective of one's success in the day's race.

31.02.2007 WEDNESDAY - FREE SKIING, WINE AND DANCE

I only visited les Angles shortly and returned to the hotel. What happened today and on Thursday I only know by reading the program and through the grapevine and the jungle telegraph. The Noro virus got the upper hand of me and I didn't even dream of the usual activities of SCIJ namely skiing, eating, drinking, dancing and... Sorry, gotta go. What I heard was that the others skied at the various five stations assigned by our hosts. Overnight there had been some snow, and though the day was still overcast, they had the luxury of 10 cms of fresh powder on the cannonised base. Local lunch, and more skiing, and coffee, and cognac, was followed by a well deserved rest, then dinner in different restaurants of Font Romeu, and music in the tent.

01.01.2007 THURSDAY - THE "GROSS COUNTRY" RACE

A few days ago it wasn't certain if there would be a cross-country competition at all. However, with an enormous effort our hosts managed to shovel up a ski trail at the lower part of a ski slope Pyrenees 2000. The effort that was needed was easy to see. A part of the trail was like taken from the last race of the Tour de Ski in Alpe Cerm, where the cross-country competitors had to climb the whole ski slope to the finish.



▲▲ Delicious dinners day after day. The gala dinner topped the whole week.

In this SCIJ competition the skiers also had to ski down the slope. No wonder only half of us even started, and every third of them fell. Even the best ones were exhausted after the race. Has the trail-master has ever tried what it's like to ski alpine with Nordic skis. Maybe he has; His fellow countrymen took two gold and one silver medal. To use an old cliché: everyone having finished the race was a winner. Disqualifying two top skiers left a bad taste to the fine day.

Now we divided again, with a choice of activities. Some went shopping in Andorra. Others shared the languid pleasures of a bath in the local hot springs, while the more energetic took a trip to the animal park at Les Angles, or just carried on skiing! For the scientifically inclined there was also a visit to the advanced experimental solar oven, where the sun's pure light is used to bombard materials with intense, carbon-free heat. Later, a small group took part in a fascinating discussion with the Mayor of Les Angles, M Christian Blanc, of how under-development may be a better route for small ski stations to maintain a balanced economy in the new climate of warm winters.

02.01.2007 FRIDAY

- ALL THE DUTIES OVER

Another excellent day in Les Angles continued the good work of giving us lots of sunshine and excellent snow.

I meant to be the last SCIJer on the slopes, but passed Malin Kvist of Sweden a few hundred meters before the end. The lifts had been stopped already and I couldn't take another run.

So what.

It's had been a great week with great people.

In spite of the two days I spent in bed without food but with a good book and couldn't compete in cross-country.

In spite of the busses that never left in time.

In spite of some noisy members at the GA. Because at the gala dinner in les Airelles we could feel the same old togetherness and sadness of losing these people for a year and some of them, maybe, for good, as inevitable, as years go by, each and everyone of us will retire.

03.02.2007 SATURDAY - "EARLY MORNING AT EIGHT A O'CLOCK WE ARE FAR AWAY..."



▲▲ Disco never dies, or are we the only ones who keep it alive?

▲ Snowcat ballet etc.

◀ Ladies' champions combined:

- 2. Radka Markova, EU
- 1. Gisella Motta, EU
- 3. Malin Kvist, EU

◀ Gentlemen's champions

- 1. Denis Clerc, EU
- 2. Miguel Aquiso, SUI
- 3. Lubomir Boyavdiev, EU

◀ It's over: Our sympathy in fighting the warm winter to Jérôme Arnaud, chief of the tourist office of les Angles.



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