

In 2018 I was a complete novice Cross Country skier when I embarked on an Icelandic adventure, now I am a converted Worldloppet skier.

Four usually not so adventurous Wanaka 'girls' were having a coffee at Snow Farm when someone lets go to Iceland. We agreed it was a brilliant idea, to convince our partners we needed purpose. We googled the Fossavatnsgangan Worldloppet race, it had distances from 12.5km to 50 km classic, so I thought, sure I can go. I had just started cross country skiing, as retired dairy farmers wife with my only exercise milking cows. I was nervous as I do not like the downhill component but Mary Lee told me not to worry just take your skis off and walk on the side of the trail.

We purchased the race package with Wild West tours that included some of Iceland's best tourist attractions. A little concerned about what I'd committed myself to, I studied Worldloppet skiing and realised it focused on finishing not speed. I had only skied the 7km Merino Muster and have an aversion to downhills.

September 2017 was our last ski so getting in shape was a challenge.

We arrived in Reykjavik on the Monday prior to the race, visited the Golden Circle and flew to Isafjodur.

I should have been forewarned when we found Mary & Sarah after the 25km evening skate in an exhausted state that our training might not have worked but luckily I was so happy in the ski environment I didn't really give it a second thought.

Friday was practise day, Jacques & I skied on the course light snow was falling. Carolyn (USA masters group) took pity on me when she saw my downhill technique. Carolyn said just tuck, hands up like reading a book and you'll be OK. She was impressed by my skis kick but I couldn't tell her as I hadn't heard of klister or kick wax, I just said Mary waxed them. Mary took the compliment for Salomon skins.

Race day was perfect skiing weather, with great tracks.

I was just fine for the first half of the race as it was uphill, I made new friends and loved chatting with the volunteers offering goodies like 'chocolate-coated raisins'.

The moment of truth 'Last Hill You can do it' sign was scary for me as it was 7 kms downhill to the finish. Carolyn's advice tuck and read a book, well that "sort of "worked, but I had to used Mary's advice, skis off and walk along the edge of the trail. I was ecstatic when I saw the finish line. I must have looked as I felt overcome with joy, that they gave me a 50 km Medal. It's twice the size of the 25km medal but being completely unaware of the difference I didn't understand the mistake, so I still have it.

The race finished with a cake party where I very proudly got my passport stamped and that evening, the grand finale party. My claim to fame, as we watched the excellently produced video of the day, there was a long segment, with a lady dressed in a blue Musterers on Tour Jacket walking beside the trail with her skis on her shoulder. Our group dissolved in hysterics alerting all around that it was ME
Give me a wave if you see me striding beside the trails on steep downhills.

What a privilege to be able to ski in Iceland and soak up the magnificent views of the fjords and mountains. I loved the challenge thank you, everyone, who encouraged me to ski and I have overcome some of the downhill fear and have other Worldloppet races in my sights.