



Photo by Chris Wrobel

BEAUTY OF THE BROOKS—Towing his gear and food in a sled, Eric Cramer skis down the Hammond River on a hot, sunny day in the Brooks Range during the Alaska Mountain Wilderness Classic Ski Race. The race began April 3 and competitors skied 130 miles from Galbraith Lake to Wiseman, hauling their own supplies and breaking their own trail. Matt Obermiller of Valdez won the race in 4 days, 5 hours and 41 minutes.

Carpenter hammers out Wilderness Classic win

By **TIM MOWRY**
Staff Writer

While his winning time of just under 4 days, 6 hours in the Alaska Wilderness Classic Ski Race wasn't overly impressive, the manner in which Matt Obermiller went about it

was. "He did the the whole thing in mountaineering gear and he skated the whole way," said second-place finisher Frank Olive of Fairbanks, who along with teammate Phil Finzel, was about an hour behind Obermiller.

If that doesn't grab your attention, consider the fact that Obermiller didn't use any kick wax to get up any hills he encountered, even though he was towing a sled with upwards of 50 pounds of food and gear.

"You'd see where he went up these slopes and there would be these teeny Vs in the trail," said Olive, who was racing in his first Classic. "He just powered his way up."

Obermiller, a carpenter from Valdez, hammered his way to an impressive victory in this year's Wilderness Classic, the 130-mile, self-contained ski race from Galbraith Lake to Wiseman in the Brooks Range.

"That guy's an animal," veteran Classic racer Yoshi Nishiyama, who finished fourth this year, said of Obermiller. "He didn't bring any kick wax. That's absurd."

Given the rugged trail conditions racers usually encounter in the Wilderness Classic and the fact they're

towing a considerable load, most racers choose to use touring skis made for classical, not skate, skiing. Obermiller used mountaineering skis with Silveretta bindings and Koflach boots.

"It's a strange sight but he can go," race organizer and competitor Dave Cramer said of the big, rangy Obermiller, that couldn't be reached by phone.

In what may be a first in the 18-year history of the Wilderness Classic, all eight racers that started the race finished. Cramer wasn't sure if that had ever happened before, or not.

"It helps if you don't have a bailout point," quipped Cramer, referring to the fact there are no checkpoints on the route.

The race started Sunday and Obermiller, Olive, Finzel and Nishiyama all finished with two hours of each other on Thursday. Eric Cramer and Chris Wroble, who took a shorter but more technical route than the other six racers, finished at 2 a.m. on

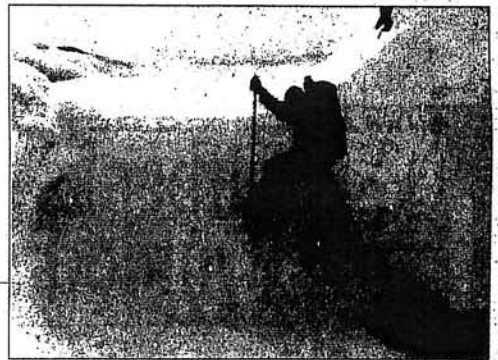


Photo by Chris Wrobel

UP AND OVERFLOW—Using crampons to get a grip, Eric Cramer climbs up overflow on Amwak Creek en route to the Hammond River during the Alaska Mountain Wilderness Classic Ski Race.

Saturday while Dave Cramer and Christopher Allard brought up the rear when they arrived in Wiseman at around 2:30 p.m. Sunday.

This year's race was marked by superb weather conditions that, if anything, were too hot during the last few days, said Cramer. The

See CLASSIC, Page C2



Photo by Dave Cramer

READY TO GO—Racers gather at the starting line on Galbraith Lake in preparation for the 18th annual Alaska Mountain Wilderness Classic Ski Race in the Brooks Range. Pictured from left are Chris Allard, Matt Obermiller, Dave Cramer, Frank Olive, Yoshi Nishiyama, Chris Wrobel, Phil Finzel and Eric Cramer.

First Canada geese arrive, but what kind are they?

Spring migration in the Tanana Valley is off to a slower start than last year. The first Canada geese were reported near the Metro airstrip in Fairbanks on April 3 and at Creamer's Field Migratory Waterfowl Refuge on April 6. There

Both species may be seen in the Tanana Valley. The larger Canada goose breeds in Interior Alaska while the cackling goose is occasionally seen here while migrating to its North Slope breeding grounds.



Spring is a season that keeps on giving

My yard is a veritable treasure trove these days.

Every day is Christmas at my house during breakup. Every day something new appears



From fly fishing to gold panning

Learn how to fly fish and pan for gold on Saturday at the Alaska Public Lands Information Center on Cushman Street.

Sharon Jones, from the University of Alaska Fairbanks Tanana Valley Campus, will be presiding over a 2 p.m. seminar that will include tips on both fly fishing and recreational prospecting.

Topics include selecting proper tackle and flies, where to find fish, how to choose the right gold prospecting equipment and where to begin your adventure.

The Alaska Public Lands Information Center is located in the lower level of the Courthouse Square at 250 Cushman Street.

If you have an item to be included in the outdoors calendar contact News-Miner outdoors editor Tim Mowry at 459-7587 or e-mail him at tmowry@newsminer.com



CLASSIC: Wilderness ski

Continued from Page C1

coldest it got was about 20 below and that was only for the first night or two. After that, the temperature ranged from zero to 40 above.

"Heading straight south on the North Fork of the Koyukuk you just cooked," he said of the sun.

But Cramer acknowledged that it was "better than 65 below," referring to the cold, windy conditions racers faced last year on the same route, when only four of eight racers finished.

In addition to warmer temperatures this year, racers encountered caribou on the Itkillik River and there were "tons of wolf tracks" along the trail, but no wolves, said Olive, a 30-year-old sales rep at Beaver Sports.

"We saw a bunch of earibou; they were running around everywhere," he said. "We saw groups of 20, 30, 40 and 50 caribou."

On the North Fork of the Koyukuk River, a 5-mile section of trail was actually torn up by caribou, Olive said.

"There were huge ruts and holes all over the place," he said. It was worse than not having a trail.

While Olive, Finzel and Nishiyama all finished within two hours of Obermiller, they never saw him after the first day of the race.

"We didn't realize how close he was," said Nishiyama, 34, who finished his sixth Classic. "I thought for sure he was a day ahead of us."

Known for his creative route finding in previous Wilderness Classic races, Obermiller added to his legacy in this year's race.

"He didn't pick the most direct line at times," said Olive, who warmed up for this year's race with an 80-mile trip from Eureka to Valdez in March with Nishiyama. "He had a couple of snafus the last couple of days that allowed us to get close."

Going through Delay Pass, for example, Obermiller missed an obvious snowmachine trail and ended up breaking trail for an hour or two before reconnecting with the trail. It took Olive, Finzel and Nishiyama only about 15 minutes to cover the same stretch of trail on the snowmachine track.

Racers benefited this year from the remnants of a trail left



Photo by Chris Wroble

TOUGH TRAIL—Eric Cramer ties two sleds together while breaking trail on the upper Hammond River. In order to make progress in the soft, deep snow, Cramer towed two sleds while partner Chris Wroble broke trail in front of him.

Alaska Mountain Wilderness Ski Classic

Here are the results from the 18th annual Alaska Mountain Wilderness Ski Classic, a 130-mile race from Galbraith Lake to Wiseman in the Brooks Range.

- 1. Matt Obermiller**, Valdez (North Fork Route), 4 days, 5 hours and 41 minutes.
- 2. Frank Olive**, Fairbanks, and **Phil Finzel**, Fairbanks (North Fork Route), 4 days, 6 hrs., 41 min.
- 3. Yoshi Nishiyama**, Fairbanks (North Fork Route), 4 days, 7 hrs., 41 min.
- 4. Eric Cramer**, Tok, and **Chris Wroble**, Anchorage (Hammond River Route) 5 days, 14 hrs., 41 min.
- 5. Dave Cramer**, Tok, and **Chris Allard**, Anchorage (North Fork Route), 7 days, 2 hrs., 4 min.

by a group of Norwegian skiers on the North Fork of the Koyukuk River. The Norwegians skied from Wiseman to Anaktuvuk Pass a few days before the race, leaving a trail for about the last 70 miles on the North Fork.

"It wasn't a perfect trail but it really helped out," said Olive.

While weather conditions were ideal and racers had the benefit of a semi-broken trail to follow the last 70 miles, the race was not a piece of cake by any means.

"Any time you're out there putting in 12-hour days it's not easy," said Olive.

Rather than turning down the North Fork of the Koyukuk River like everyone else, Eric Cramer and Wroble skied through Kinnorut Pass and then came down the Hammond River, one of two alternative routes mapped out for the race. The route was about 25 miles shorter than the North Fork route but portions of it were more technical.

"We'd both been on the North Fork and we wanted to see some new country," said the 27-year-old Wroble, who finished his third Classic in four tries.

From an aesthetic viewpoint, it was a spectacular route, he said. The only problem they encountered was about 20 miles of deep snow they spent a day

and a half breaking trail through on the upper Hammond River. At times, the racers took turns breaking trail. One skier would break trail while the other would follow towing their sleds.

"Four feet deep and bottomless," is how Wroble described it.

They ran into frozen overflow about halfway down the Hammond River, which made travel much easier. The highlight of the trip was negotiating a narrow canyon on the Hammond River that was dotted with rocks jutting out of the ice that were the size of cars. Steep rock walls towered above them on both sides of the canyon.

"That was impressive," said Eric Cramer, 29. "You're in a big, wide valley and it necks down into something 20 feet wide."

Fortunately, there was a fresh inch or two of snow on the ice, which made it easier skiing through the canyon.

"Without that snow it could have been a wild ride," said Wroble.

Like other racers, Wroble and Eric Cramer saw lots of caribou and lots of wolf sign, along with tracks from wolverine, lynx and marten. They encountered a flock of several hundred ptarmigan in Kinnorut Pass.

"It was tough but it was well worth it," said Wroble.

News-Miner outdoors editor Tim Mowry can be reached at tmowry@newsminer.com or 459-7587.

Bob Eley Sports



Sports Insight

Here's hoping it was worth the wait

WASHINGTON—Love the world go 'round, but takes cash to make the tu spin.

Fortunately for baseball Washington showed up plenty of both Thursday welcome back a team in this same field in a panic 3 years earlier, while then Bob Short hung in effigy stands and fans forced a by storming the field to rip turf in search of a keepsake.

The same baseball that Joe Grzenda was holding mound that evening has a drawer at his home even. The former Washington brought it back with him. Stadium always hoping for such an occasion, and had to President Bush for the monial first pitch. The leather sphere, which threw high and inside, is the only thing within the metropolitan area that remained largely unchanged.

The population has since 1971, to about 5.8 million and the cost of doing business with Major League Baseball jumped several times. The team Short bought for \$1 million in 1968, figures to more than \$300 million at the end of the 2001 season. That, despite the fact that the reborn Nationals are essentially the same team that lost 95 games and an average of 9,357 fans last year while playing in Montreal Expos.

"I won't lie," Washington off hitter Brad Wilkerson said. "Baseball is such a long and some days, when dragging you look up 45,000, or 10,000 people stands, it's tough. But 30,000 or 40,000 is a different energy level. It helps you." No matter where you are, it's a different version of the same thing. In the National Baseball League, the Nationals have a chance to improve the franchise this year.

Skiland's slopes still holding out

Staff Report

Don't put those downhill skis away yet.

Mount Aurora Skiland on Clear Summit, the only one of Fairbanks' three downhill ski areas still open, will be open at least through this weekend and maybe even next weekend, said manager Brenda Birdsall. The north-facing slope hasn't showed much sign of melting yet, she said.

"The base is holding up well," Birdsall said. "Usually our (chairlift) ramps go first and there's plenty of snow on the ramps."

More than 200 skiers hit the slopes last weekend for what was a glorious weekend for skiing.

"People were asking for sunscreen," Birdsall said.

Whether or not Skiland will be open next weekend will depend on the weather, she said.

"We'll ski as long as we can," Birdsall said. "We've been grooming and maintaining it. There's lots of snow left to play with."

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