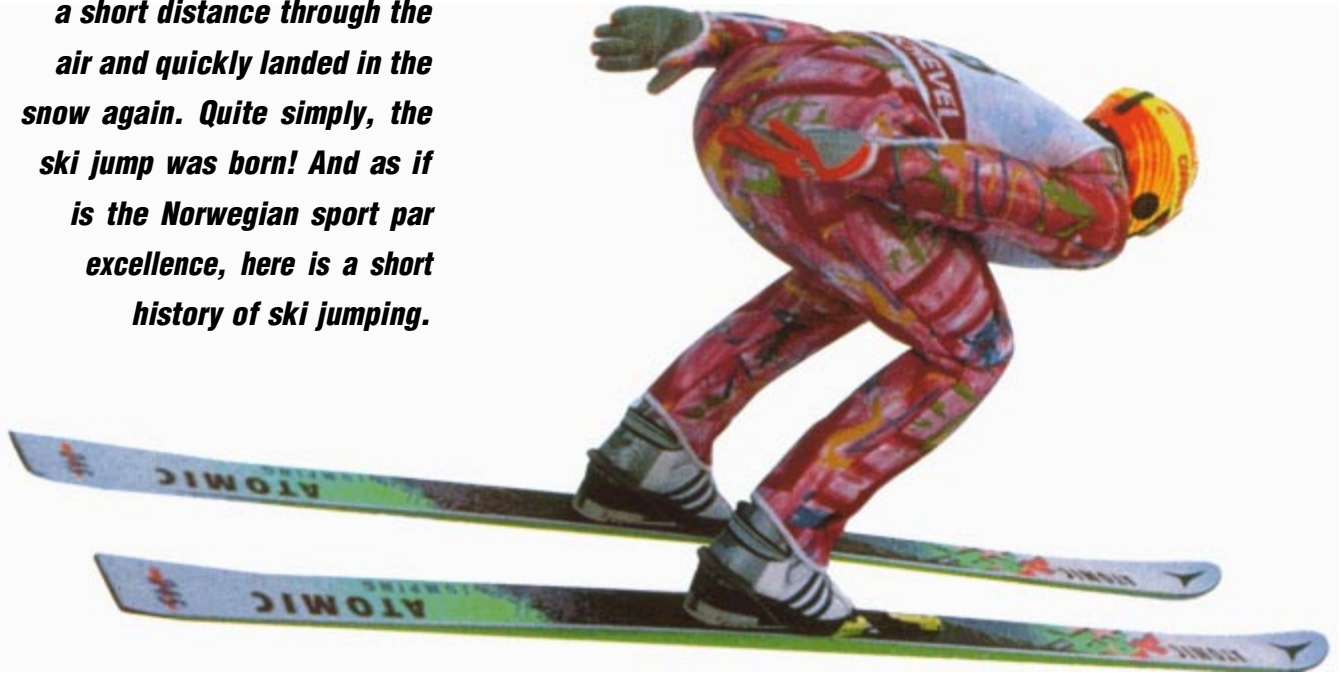


The world's first ever ski jump probably passed unnoticed when a skier skied off the course during a descent, flew a short distance through the air and quickly landed in the snow again. Quite simply, the ski jump was born! And as if is the Norwegian sport par excellence, here is a short history of ski jumping.

A short history of ski jumping



It is certain that the oldest description of a jump dates from 1682 in Johann Scheffer's "Lapponia" (Amsterdam 1682), in which he talks about the sporting activities which the Lapps indulged in for pleasure. In 1792 in Norway, the state introduced prizes for ski jumping and cross-country skiing for the rural population (until 1825).

In a Telemark song by Rikard Berge written around 1800 (and translated almost word for word by the skiing pioneer Carl J. Luther (1881-1968) the words go: *"...and in winter they ski down the steepest slopes. The hill is so high and the field so steep, they fly through the air as if on wings. With jumps some six yards, that is how they while away their hours. And as they hover in the*

air, the spectators gaze in amazement"

The only clear thing which emerges from this description is that the development of ski jumping cannot be

nally became the forerunner of the jump.

THE FIRST MEASURED JUMPS

In the year 1809 the Norwegian lieutenant Olaf Rye jumped almost 9.5 metres through the air to show his soldiers what a courageous fellow he was. This was the first measured ski jump in skiing history. In 1860 the Norwegian carpenter and skier Sondre Auverson Nordheim (1825-1897) from

Morgedal succeeded in jumping "without sticks and upright" the record distance of 30 metres, a record which remained unbroken for 33 years. Although much neglected in the history books on ski jumping, this jump provided the impetus for rapid develop-

In 1879 in Christiania, the first ski jumping competition drew over a thousand spectators.

considered separately from the rest of skiing. From skiing on a level surface, developed the obstacle-course skiing much enjoyed in the Norwegian Telemark province, and this already contained the first elements of the downhill. And this downhill fi-

ment of the sport. On Sunday 2nd February 1879, the Christiania (today Oslo) Ski Club, founded two years previously, held its first ski jumping event, which even at that early stage attracted several thousand spectators. The jump itself was a snow-covered hill which provided the basic shape of the ski jump now so popular all over the

The winner had always been the one who crash-landed furthest from the jump!

world. The hill was called the "Huseby-Bakken". and on it the cobbler's son Torjus Torjussen Hemmestveidt (1861-1930), a pupil of S.A. Nordheim, jumped the then fantastic distance of 23 metres which the history books today claim to be the first world record. An eye-witness, the Norwegian Fritz Huitfeldt (1831-1938), an expert ski jumper of the time, described the event: "*Off he went like a meteor amidst the crowd of astounded onlookers who stood there as if rooted to the spot... The Telemark people were invited and came to the race in Christiania. The shouts of joy rose heavenward, rending the air and causing the old trees on the Huseby-hill to tremble and shake...*" That was Huitfeldt's flowery description. Early ski jumping in Norway was not concerned with distances achieved, and every participant jumped using different body positions. They tried either a crouch position to look as though they were jumping higher, or stood upright on the skis.

SKI JUMPING IN OTHER COUNTRIES

The birth of ski jumping in Central Europe took place on 2nd February 1893. In Müzzuschlag am Semmering (Austria) the Steiermark Skiers' Association organised the first jumps. There was great admiration for the Norwegian baker's apprentice Wilhelm Bismarck Samson who achieved the record distance of six metres. Six metres - that was how far the rest of

Europe was lagging behind Norway. What is more, these first jumps in Müzzuschlag used a snow-covered dung heap as a take off platform!

The first German competition was held in 1894 on the Tauherberg near Munich, where the Norwegian Wium jumped 14.5 metres, a feat which created a sensation at the time.

When at the turn of the century the Norwegians Bjarne Lissen and Thorleif Holte jumped over 20 metres on the Feldberg, both were hailed as skiing prodigies. Only in 1904 did the German jumper Alfred Walter from Munich also succeed in jumping over 20 metres.

Just before the turn of the century it was realised that when ski jumping it was possible to land "upright" after the jump; until then the winner had always been the one who crash-landed in the snow furthest from the jump! It often comes as a surprise to today's spectators that it is not only the distance but also the body position which are decisive factors in a jump! Distance points and style points are added together following a set

The ski-jump dearest to the heart of the Norwegians, Holmenkollen, symbol of their sports

system of scoring to give an overall total. The jumper with the most points wins.

A THRILLING SIGHT

It is always a thrilling sight when one of these experts launches himself with all his strength off the jump and sails through the air, his body parallel with his skis; for a moment all the laws of gravity seem to be suspended. Already by 1888 the great Norwegian polar explorer Fridtjof Nansen (1861-1930), who crossed Greenland on skis with a group of companions, was full of enthusiasm for ski jumping, and wrote the following in his book "Paa Ski Over Gronland" (Across Greenland on Skis) which brought skiing to the attention of the rest of the world: "*To see how an expert ski jumper executes a jump is one of the most sublime sights the earth can offer us*".

