

**NEWSLETTER OF THE
LONDON REGION
NORDIC SKI CLUB**



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Website Address - <http://www.micromission.co.uk/LRNSC>

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Deadline for the Next Newsletter

AUGUST 30th

DON'T BE LATE!

SESIAMI STICKS

By Richard Wilkinson

If the film *Local Hero* had an airport, it would be Stavanger airport. Admittedly, the pilot of the plane from Heathrow does not check your passport and drive the airport bus. But the plane is still cantering along the runway when it hangs a left and pulls into a gate, as if it were turning off a road and into the front drive; when you walk into the arrivals area (which is just an extension of the check-in hall) the pilot pops out of a door adjacent to the one that you've just walked through; and the passport control officer turns up at the newsagent gossiping with the assistant. Plus they don't get many foreigners round these parts!

Actually there are plenty of foreigners in Stavanger, but none, it seems, that fly in just to take part in the local cross-country ski event. Which clearly worked in my favour, as the couple who replied to my original enquiry to the website, couldn't do enough to help, including putting me up in Tonstad in their lakeside house and waxing my skis the evening before the race. (Or maybe they were just concerned for the safety of this wayward Brit?)

All of which is the perfect backdrop to the Sesilami. Set up 29 years ago so that Norwegians living in the south west had their own event (and as a warm down exercise, when it falls on the same weekend as the Birkebeiner!), this year it attracted about 1,650 foolhardy souls, who set off in relatively small age-related groups at intervals.

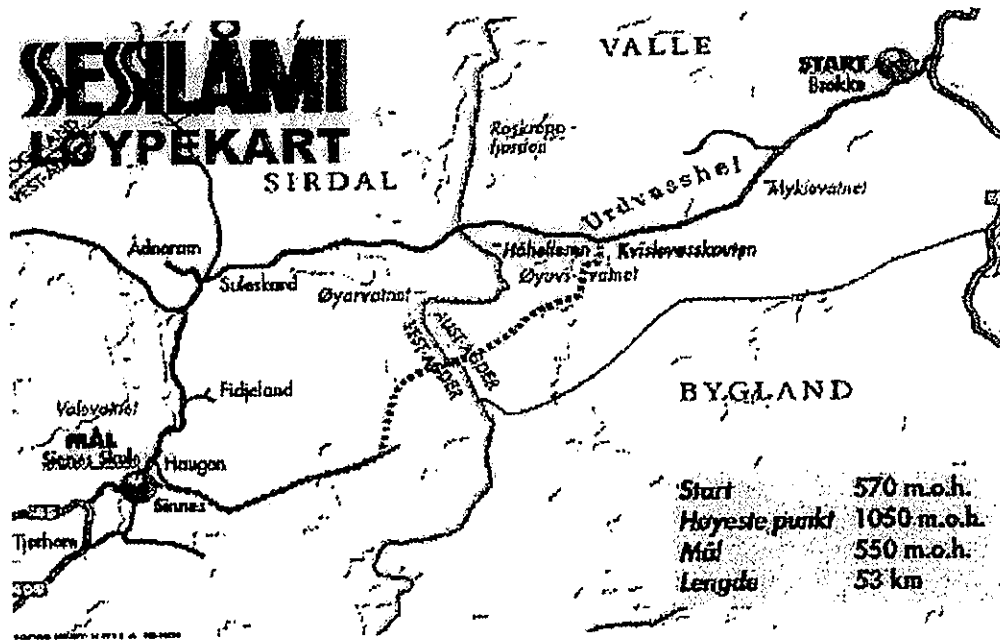
The course starts in Brokke in the Settes valley, follows a mountain road most of the way up to a pass, then meanders up and over moorland and the odd frozen lake, before dropping down to Sinnes into the Sir valley, less than 2 hours to the east of Stavanger. The route climbs fairly steadily for the first 18km of the 53km, the crux being a good 3km haul towards the top, and the total ascent is around 650m – 700m. The style is classic, but you can skate the last 10km – a blissful relief for tired classic muscles!

Getting to the event is fairly easy, if a touch surreal, as people congregate at pick up points in towns across south west Norway in the middle of the night (3:45 from Tonstad, and it was the night the clocks went forward) to catch one of a fleet of buses converging on Brokke. Or else, you can catch a lift with a bus from Stavanger the day before, and stay in a hall overnight near the start.

The start seems relatively calm, unless of course you modestly stand too far back, and all the skiers for the next start pile into the tracks from the side, the moment the main body of skiers in your group have shuffled off. But a bridge after only 200m forces the 7 or 8 tracks to reduce to 2, and brings everyone together, after which you quickly find your natural place.

For backmarkers, the event turns into a slitherthon for some of the middle section on

high ground, and all signs of the tracks disappear on steeper gradients. But my fellow skiers were keen to talk to this curious lone foreign skier and the 4 drink stations were still manned by smiling attendants offering hot energy drinks (plus a curious oat soup at the 2nd, and the world's coldest bananas at the 3rd). The LRNSC got a mention in public as, at the finish, they announce the name, time and club of each skier deemed to be of "special interest" – although in my case I wondered if it wasn't a case of special needs – which they rounded off with a very touching "You're welcome".



Map showing route of Sesilami

I'm glad to announce that I broke the mythical 6-hour barrier ("mythical", if it's your first event, have only skied 14 days before, and happen to finish in 5 hrs 55 mins). However this still left me 3 1/2 hours behind the winner, but as I told the local press – another mention for the LRNSC! - I'm coming after him and am confident that another ten attempts should get me within 2 1/2 hours of him! More upsettingly, I was not fast enough to catch the bus (with pre- and post-race gear on board!) back to Tonstad at the end of the race. All was not lost though, as another bus driver took pity on me, and dropped me off en route to Egersund.

All in all, they're delighted to greet more skiers from foreign parts, and all that was missing from the *Local Hero* feel was the aurora borealis.

More information can be found at www.sesilami.no, and if I pull my finger out, the abbreviated English version may have expanded into a full version of the Norwegian text later in the year.