

Hello Everyone,

Summary of the Finnish Border to Border ski (Rajalta Rajelle Hiihto) 2009.

Wow! - A total cross-country skiing , cultural and social interaction event!

When skiing 445 k in 7 days the focus is skiing (classical) because you average about 64 kilometers per day (39 miles per day). The shortest day was 47 km and longest was 86k.

In between skiing there was: 7 nightly saunas, eating food all day long and night, waxing skis when possible, moving to a new sleeping spot each day, meeting and greeting people from 12 countries, trying to relax and rest enough to make it each day.

Food was in fabulous. Some of the food brought me back to my childhood and mother's cooking; old-fashioned homemade root beer was available each day. Buttermilk, pulla rolls, and salmon on a regular basis were wonderful.

Saunas ranged from super deluxe to old wood heated buildings with no running water or electricity. Housing accommodations matched the sauna range from a 5 star hotel the last night to a mat on the floor and a 3-hole outhouse..

But that range of experiences is what made the whole event so unique and wonderful.

The highlight was the amazing people and volunteers who put this huge logistical project together and ran it very efficiently.

Finland you made me proud!

The 85 skiers were adventure seekers and doers who were incredibly fit and interesting folks.

Even the Danes who ski one day a year on snow (with a good snow year) were crazy about skiing, imagine Eric (a marine from No. Carolina) who skied the whole thing on rented skis – he had never skied on before (though he had a lot of telemark ski experience), the Finnish gals (60+) who kicked our butts on the trails each day, Minnesotan Pat Lanin 71 years young skiing like crazy each day, and the wonderful mixture of cultures and languages you heard and felt each and everyday.

If you have a REAL PASSION FOR CROSS COUNTRY SKIING - the Border to Border is one of those ultimate, peak experiences you should definitely put on your bucket list.

I kept a daily journal and if you are interested can read a more detailed account of the whole trip or just the skiing portion. See the attachment if you cannot open it and wish to read it I can send the journal in the body of the e-mail.

Nakemiin (see you later),

Roland Ring-Jarvi

March 2009

## **Suomi Rajalta Rajelle Hiihto 2009**

### **(Finnish Border-to-Border Ski Tour)**

**March 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4th 2009**

**Mpls – Helsinki via Chicago and Copenhagen.**

Start 6:10 pm. on the 3<sup>rd</sup>

Arrive at 5:30pm on **March 4th** Finnish time.

We arrive on time and while waiting for luggage we see Tom Rowe who is in Finland doing a different ski tour from south to the north. He will be skiing for 3 weeks not just one week. Tom is also from Minnesota now after being transplanted from Montana and has already done the border to border.

Akseli Hauhia meets us at airport and we drive in his Toyota Land Rover to see his new warehouse for his rapidly growing sprinkler business for commercial and residential fire prevention.

Akseli has recently gotten back from a trip to Lima, Peru and gives us (Dave and I) llama wool hats.

Alex is already at her parent's home when we arrive in Kerava to be greeted by the rest of the family. I forgot how huge their home is and have never seen a building anywhere with as many doors. We have a wonderful meal with wine and all the fixings for us. We share stories and photos and gifts. Alex stayed with us in 1994 and went to Anoka High School and played hockey of the girl's team. I bring her a box score from the last game of the season. She scored three goals and had two assists in a 7-0 win over Elk River.

They purchase train tickets for Kajaani for us on-line and we plan our departure for the morning.

Timo says he will drive us to the train station in Helsinki in the morning. We go to bed tired but are still trying to adapt to the 8-hour time zone change. We each have our own bedroom since Timo and Anja are empty nesters. Both still work in Timo's business and it is doing very well even in tough economic times - Finland is still thriving.

### **March 5<sup>th</sup> Thursday**

Both Dave and I sleep but not for the whole night – up early. We have a cereal breakfast and coffee. Try to access the Internet using my computer without success. Go on-line with Anja's computer using Google in Finnish and get on the Gustavus hockey site and follow the MIAC Championship game and see that Gustavus has won 5-2 with Ross (my son) scoring two goals in the win. Game just got over as we got on line – so I e-mail my congratulations to son, mom and grandma and tell them - we are alive and well in Finland. Dave also communicates with family back home.

Timo gets us to the train station early – we get some more Euros from ATM machine and board the train at 8:00am for Kajaani.

Arrive in Kajaani at 14.40 – Esa, Eero and Inkeri are at the station to meet us. Head to a Kahvi shop – for a cup of coffee and snack.

Drive to Sotkamo about 45 km away and we notice lots of snow and skiers and ski walkers along the route. Share photos and stories again. Eero has built and designed the entire house – which is very unique and different. Eero has over 20,000 photos on his computer and has created DVD's with music, text and special effects. He shows us a wolf-hunting trip from last fall where two wolves were shot - very interesting hunt using cross-country skis.

He has a DVD show of his grandson's ski trip to Sotkamo in which they entertain the kids for five days with skiing and outdoor activities with snowmobiling/skiing and cooking outdoors in winter. I share some photos and shows I have created.

We have moose stew for dinner with all the trimmings. Esa and his wife Riitva come over for evening coffee and we share more photos and stories. Esa will be retiring from the military in one week and they plan a trip to central Europe with a RV vehicle.

Hot sauna feels great after traveling for two straight days with some oluta (beer). Get to bed after 10.30 and are tired. We sleep well.

### **March 6<sup>th</sup> Friday**

Wake up about 8 and have oatmeal, toast, eggs, cheese and coffee for breakfast. Share genealogy – Eero has created a huge map of his family tree with 18 generations. I find my mom and great grandpa and myself and family on it. We discover that Eero is

probably the most organized guy I know – he has photos, messages, trips, Christmas cards and letters all organized by dates and topics. He asks me what year I visited him and I tell him 1970 and he pulls up a file with photos of my trip to visit him in 1970.

We pack our stuff and head to see the ski tunnel and ski area in Voukkati area, which is only 10 km away. Ski tunnel is 10 years old and has a hill (18 meters high) underground and is 1259 meters long (3/4 of a mile). Snow covers the floor of the tunnel but it is not in used since – winter has plenty of snow outside to ski on. We pay 2 Euros to visit the tunnel in which ice sculptures are being shown now. Very cool and interesting – first ski tunnel in the world also has a curling rink at the beginning of it – which you can observe from a small café adjacent to it.

We go to see the indoor half pipe for snowboarding which in winter is a sliding hill and is used for snowboarding in summer. Drive to the top of ski hill and Eero buys lunch and we celebrate Dave's up coming 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, which is the next day.

Drive to Kajaani to catch a bus at 13.15 for Kuusamo since the buses don't go there on Saturday we need to go a day earlier than we had planned. Housing will be whatever we can locate today.

Perhaps we can hook up with Pat and Jim since they should be arriving today as well in Kuusamo. We'll see what happens...

Take taxi from bus station to Hotel Kuusamo. It is deluxe, we sauna, eat in the hotel restaurant- excellent, use the free

computer Wi-Fi connection to e-mail home and even check weather here in Finland. Watch some tube and sleep.

## **March 7<sup>th</sup> Saturday**

Oivanki – Youth Center – We arrive by Taksi (Taxi) and are the one of the first groups to arrive, unpack and change clothes to go ski and loosen up after 3 days straight of traveling. But first we wax our skis in their deluxe wax room (using the same bench that Dave has at home) the room has a large venting hood to take out waxing fumes. Need the European adapters and convertor (from 220 to 110 volts) to fit the outlets for my computer and wax iron. I bought them just before leaving when Dave and I decided to bring an iron for waxing.

Ski conditions are excellent we ski about 10 k – first the 5 km loop used for night skiing and then check out and ski the Children's Ski Country area –set up just for kids and learning.

It has a great layout using a small hill to teach kids and motivate with variety and fun. Dave and I try out the climbs and different ways to go down the hill – we skip the jump but it looks doable – we just don't want to break anything before we start the tour. We take a sauna and clean up before the introductory evening meeting and meal.

Minnesotans Pat Lanin and Jim Lundberg arrive and move in to our small room. Pat unfortunately has food poisoning of some kind from last night's meal and is really sick. Dave has some Imodium that seems to help. Pat and Jim do a short ski.

The evening meal is great with a variety of excellent choices and unlimited quantities.

The meeting is very well organized – this is the 26<sup>th</sup> year for the tour and we are wave 4 – so three previous groups have and are already skiing the same route will use for 7 days. Each wave can have a maximum of 100 skiers. This year the total skiers is 270 with wave one has 79, two – 30, three -79 and fourth wave has 86 skiers. We each get a hat, booklet, emergency information and additional information about day one of skiing.

After the evening meeting, which outlines the whole first day, we have an evening snack.

### **March 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday Day 1.**

**Distance:** 63 km. 7 Hours 30 Minutes of skiing.

**Temps.** -11 to -4 C Cloudy, No wind, very light snow.

Up at 6 to go eat at 6:30 am – too early –restless night sleep too much thinking about what lies ahead. Load bus for hour plus ride to the border for the start area. Take photos at start – out team America (9 skiers) takes so long we abandon the concept save for a couple shots – everyone had a camera and it would have taken forever to get a photo by all the cameras. We are basically the last group to leave the start area.

First 5 km were amazing – narrow single track winding around trees with curves and almost all downhill with a couple major drops to the river (low point 150 meters) and then up... the 90 meter climb which was like going up a ski jump for steepness.

Skiing up long gradual hills with a few herringbone hills to add some spice. After the river decent and ascent the trail is reasonable and the climb to the high point (390 meters) is gradual with only a large herringbone to reach the top plateau with is totally snow covered and glorious with a trail winding gradually descending. The ski seems long with many herringbone hills. Many flat portions on lakes and swamps.

Finish at resort we are staying at 5:00pm – sun has set but we still have enough light to see easily. We are tired – Pat and Jim are waiting for us in the building at the finish area. We head for out cottages (cabins) with 5 people per cabin. Sauna is right by lake with a hole in the ice due to bubbler keeping it open all winter.

We head to the hotel to eat and attend the meeting. Jim and I take a steam bath/sauna in the buff with both genders in the buff –



interesting. Evening information meeting has us singing the Finnish National Women's song – which is being done to happy birthday – since every knows that tune across the nationalities. The men stand and sing while the females remain seated. New information the last 6 k has been eliminated for day 2 due to water at the lake close the finish. No one is disappointed or upset since we are all tired. Our tour leader says to remember that the last aid station has a cut –off time of 5:00 pm. On day one we only made the cut by 1 hour. But the course profile for day 2 looks tame compared to the first day. No worries. One small statement at the end of the information meeting - “mostly flat or downhill all day until last 5 k which has some rolling hills. “

Dave and I wax our skis and go to bed.

## **March 9 th Tuesday - Day 2.**

**Distance:** 59k – 6 hours and 40 minutes.

**Temps.** Cloudy -11 to -4 C

Up at 6:10 am – Breakfast at the hotel is 300meters from our cabin. Load the bus for a 15-minute ride to the start. Temps are same as yesterday -10 then up to -5. Trail is flat – we end up double poling for 45 km. because we can and it is faster plus our legs need rest after the climbing from yesterday. The kilometers seem to go faster today and we spend more time at aid stations because we can. Lunch today is fabulous with salmon soup (Lohi) – I have two portions with bread.

The last 5k are ok at first but the hills are gold trail in difficulty going up and the down hills are steeper than anything at Giant's Ridge alpine area. I had to think twice about going down - I thought about walking down two different hills. However since no one ahead of me had done this I figured I could make it as well. I made it but it was scary and super fast. I remember the "rolling hills phrase" from the evening meeting and think - what are big hills here?

Arrive at our bus; it takes us to the hotel because the day has been shortened. Then the hotel van takes us to our condo, which is brand new with sauna and all the amenities. Take a brief sauna, shower and lay down for a few minutes. Head down the hill to eat and attend the information meeting for the evening. Jim and Pat also arrive a few minutes after I did.

Dave is staying in the primo cabin right next to the trail and not up the hill. After the evening meal and info we head up back to our condo now on foot. Pat and Jim are both having problems with their feet. Pat asks me to cut off part of his toe? NOT! I watch Pat cut off his own dead calloused skin off his toe; it seems to provide some relief for him. Jim is cutting up moleskin each night to apply all over his feet. His problems get worse before they get better. Jim has bloody feet in his ski boots the next day. He then finds second skin and his problems are somewhat alleviated.

**March 10<sup>th</sup> Wednesday Day 3**

**Distance:** 60 km. – 7hours and 30 minutes.

**Temps.** -10 to -4C Cloudy and overcast.

Up at 6:40 am, pack bags and leave outside condo. Walk down hill to breakfast. Start at 7:45 from outside condo #1. First downhill is steep but short. Trails today are wonderful all the way – well groomed and fun to ski. Trails feel like skiing the Bronze, Oslo, Summit and Silver trails at Giant's Ridge, Minnesota – both ways up and down. There are some real cool single tracks that wind through the woods. Long down hills and up hills. Moderate climbs. Last aid station was an old farmhouse – really interesting. Last 5 k is all up hill to the base of an alpine ski hill. We ride the t-bar up to the hotel. Ski resort has spectacular views for the dinning room, our room, even the wax room looks out over the mountainside. There is tons of snow on top of the hill.

Dave and I eat, wax skis, take a sauna, nap, attend information meeting, eat again and then head to bed. Numerous options exist for skiing tomorrow with different start and finish locations. Projected distance is 86 km.

## **March 11 th Thursday Day 4**

**Distance:** 86 km. (2k added) 9hours 54 minutes.

**Temps.** Sunny day -10 to -4 C – great weather for a long ski.

Rise at 6:00 am. Breakfast 6:30 – pack a lunch for later. Ride bus 1k down hill to yesterday's finish at bottom of the downhill run.

A few ski down the alpine slope (800 meters straight down – wow!).

Trail is very fast 5 km that we skied up yesterday. We cross the road by skiing over a bridge. Gradual climb to high point for the day then a steep snowplow for about 2 k – I just about get leg cramps from continuous snowplowing. Rest of the day is very flat and slightly downhill all day long. Rest stops are quite far apart with first one at 13k and the second one 18 k later.

Because the terrain is mild we do mostly double poling all day long. The packed lunch is eaten and many bottles of water and juice are consumed along the way. Dave Dahl set a great pace all day long and I get to know his backside really well.

The Finnish women are tough – they keep passing us when we take a break. So we pass each other back and forth all day. The distance and time required takes its toll – we are tired.

Arrive, check in, change clothes go eat, take a sauna, attend information meeting and eat again. I type this up and head to bed! No Internet access at the hotel.

## **March 12 Thursday Day 5**

**Distance:** 47 km    5 Hours    54 minutes.

**Temps.** -11 to -4 C Cloudy

Day starts with a photo of entire group a 100 meters from the hotel. Team America photo is taken with 4 Minnesotans, 4 Wisconsinites, and one from North Carolina. The good-looking guys are from Minnesota?

Skiing starts right there – flat terrain all day, cloudy all day, some wind which is head, tail and in between. One downhill labeled dangerous which in comparison to earlier hills is a bunny hill.

First aid station is 19 k but has hot dogs and coffee over an open fire – really neat environment for lunch.

We cook our own food to eat – Dave and I have two (makkara) each with lots of fluids.

Next aid station has an “ice bear” which makes for fun photos with the skiers. Mostly double pole day again. We have some wind, which is occasionally in our face. Worst part of the day is the road skiing with terrible snow or no snow. We walk twice perhaps 500 meters total but the trail also continues for quite a few k with terrible conditions for skiing and ski bases. However in a cross-country ski across a country you expect to have some gaps between ski trails. Finish is at a school type building with a separate old wood heated sauna for cleaning up. No electricity in the sauna or running water. Water comes via a garden hose and is heated by the sauna stove. Clean up is in the sauna -no shower.

Half of the group is in Rauna and half here Hosio. We are staying with many people we already know and it is fun to talk and share stories. Waxing is primitive in the basement. I fry Dave's iron

because I forget to put the 220 to 110 convertor on the extension cord. My computer can run on either 220 or 110. I forget to plug the convertor so we lose the iron. Luckily the Wisconsin guys are waxing at the same time and we use their stuff to finish our wax melting.

Food is good and excellent in quantity and quality however much is the same and I am tired of being required to eat for fuel reasons.

Sleeping could be a nightmare tonight since all the men here are in one small room on cots. Actually it wasn't too bad for sleeping I try to stay awake until everyone is asleep so I won't keep everyone up with my snoring.

We have the evening information meeting and meal and head to bed.

### **March 13 Friday Day 6**

**Distance:** 60 km - 6 Hours 20 minutes.

**Temps.** Cloudy -3 – 0 C Windy at times.

Trail is a gradual downhill or flat all day. Wax questions abound over the choices and range from no wax to a variety of kick choices. Light glaze over the tracks at the start. I have 2 layers of Swix blue extra and two layers of Toko violet. Skis are fast so we are double poling virtually all day again. Feel very sluggish at the start but warm up after about 30 minutes. Terrain and track are fast – we ski our fastest speed the whole tour to the first aid

station about 14 k per hour. We ski the first 35k in 3hours. First aid station has food but we are not hungry since we just had breakfast and we have packed food from the breakfast to eat later in the day. About 100 meters from the second aid station 7-8 snowmobiles drive by and trash the track for the next 12k.

The ski trail has become a snowmobile trail to ski on with no track. So it becomes much more work to stabilize your ski and move forward at the same time. We expend more energy than we would like without the track. Double poling, double poling and more double poling. Pat has a rough day with his no-wax skis not working well in these conditions.

The food I packed this morning which I thought I would never even look at is eaten and all the candy as well. We finish and are very tired again.

After eating two huge bowls of soup and lots of bread we catch the bus for Kivala School The school has no running water and we are sleeping on the floor upstairs on mats. Sauna is the only place to clean up and men's and women's time schedules are posted. But not observed by two very attractive young German women who felt a need to clean up early in the buff. No one from our group complained.

We wax skis in a primitive wax room with little heat and no benches. Dave and I are very efficient in getting the job done. The bathroom is a three hole out house which in the morning has all three holes occupied.

The bus brings us back for the evening information meeting and evening food. Fun lottery takes place. Happy birthday is sung in numerous languages for a Norwegian skier who has a B-day.

Bus ride back for sleep. No bathroom in the school has everyone taking a walk for their evening pee.

### **March 14 Saturday Day 7**

**Distance:** 72k - 9 hours 40 minutes.

**Temps.** Around 0 C. Windy, Some Snow, Cloudy

Awake at 6:00 am. and catch the bus for breakfast at 6:30 am.

Eat and leave early for our day at 7:20. Light wet snow on the ground and very overcast. Ski about 1km and decide we need more kick wax. Put on silver and special red. Dave accidentally put some kick (silver) on his glide area behind his foot. Details and Dave's reaction deleted. Dave has compromised glide all day - only 70 km. all for a better workout according to him.

We ski to the sign we saw yesterday that said Tornio 70k and have been told that the distance is only 65k today. First aid station is 18 k away so we pace ourselves because of the distance and hills. We will do two climbs and then have descent most of the day. Wax is working for glide but not kick... hills are tough.

On a downhill I see Dave has fallen on a corner so I prepare for a crash however I manage to get around the corner. I wait for Dave and he tells me that he fell while setting up for his turn the extra



kick wax stops him and launches him into the bottomless deep snow.

Double poling dominates the day again. One open area on top of the climbs is very windy and we struggle into the head wind. Thankful for me Dave is always leading and making my life easier however the view could be better.

Second aid station has a talkative Finnish lady who shares her war story as a child in Finland. We briefly talk politics – Obama and Bush. The 5k to the next aid is very interesting and seems very long. We ski through a city and need to remove skis numerous times for roads and bridges. Finally we leave town to cross a lake with large wind and snow driving into our face. Fortunately Dave is again leading the way. The lake almost has white out conditions and we crawl across the lake to the far shore. Once off the lake the wind is not noticeable. We continue to the aid station crossing more roads and bridges. The aid station is a small chalet for a alpine /cross country ski area.

The ski tracks have all been wiped out by snowmobiles and skiing is again very difficult and requires more effort. After 6 days of skiing this is frustrating to us. We double pole with some striding but very little due to poor kick and no track. We come across two signs indicating 20 k remaining the second sign is confusing because it should be 15 k left to ski. At the aid station we are told that the distance is really 20 k. 5 k has been added and we now have a new mind set. After whining a bit we adapt and ski.

We now have skiers we catch and that catch us and we start to ski together in a line to help especially into the wind on the river. The last 9k were on the river with poor or no tracks at first so we try some skating without much success. Finally some ski tracks appear and we double pole and double pole together. Brock, Henrik, Jim, Dave and Rol all work together and catch the 3 Finnish ladies with Sisu.

Finish line is on the shore at a 5 star hotel in Tornio. A group is there to cheer us up the last hill where we take numerous photos and share congratulations for surviving a long day.

Hotel is very deluxe we find our gear and head for food and sauna. Evening meal is served and we sit with most of the people we have gotten to know during the week. Whole group has relaxed meal with a few beers.

We (9 Americans) meet in our room to plan our skit for the evening ceremonies. We discuss possibilities for our presentation. Pat comes up with a simple fun idea and Brock has a song he composed in his head while skiing today. So we rehearse a couple of times and head to the evening program.

We are first and our skit works just great. Pat speaks for the group and greets everyone in numerous languages. Then he asks "Day one in Finnish '- and points to one of us and we say, "Where's Tornio " then Day two and three... Then we sing Brock's little never-ending ski trail song twice.

The presentations are all very good considering how little time we have had to prepare. The Germans have a computer presentation on the lessons learned during the week. One of the German skiers was hurt and did not ski the last day so he created a computer show that was projected. It was marvelous with interaction with the whole group and each German skier leading some stretching exercise that actually helped us.

Most of the presentations are song or music oriented. The Norwegians had a quiz show with questions related to the ski tour. One question was how many double poles were done by the average skier during the 7 days? They computed 140,000 double poles.

We get miniature ski poles with RR 2009 on the strap, a list of all the skiers and e-mails, a certificate of completion all in an envelope with our name on it.

The hotel bar has a famous Finnish band playing tonight hence the place is very crowded with Finns of all ages. They are really good and I can see why there are a lot of people. Beer is 5 Euros and the band starts to play at midnight. The band has numerous instruments with horns, drums and guitars and play pop rock with a lot of enthusiasm and energy. We recognize some American tunes played/sung in Finnish. Bed after 1:30pm.

### **March 15 Sunday**

Short night with an early morning wakeup for breakfast 6:30 and bus departure at 7:45 for Oulu. I check the Internet for the

hockey score for Gustavus College and find my son has scored the winning goal at the Division III National Championship quarterfinal game! I e-mail home to congratulate him and my wife and ask about traveling to Lake Placid, New York to see the Finals on the 20<sup>th</sup>. Eat a breakfast buffet that has everything under the sun. Pack my stuff and load the bus to Oulu. Say goodbye to new friends. Two hours to Oulu by bus goes by very quickly.

At the train station in Oulu Dave and I decide to catch the train to Helsinki at 11:40 so we will hopefully be able to stay with the Hauhia's in Kerava.

I am writing and editing on the train to Helsinki. Arrive in Helsinki and go to find a pay phone to call the Hauhia's and ask a young women clerk where the phones are located. She replies, "We are a Nokia country so there are no phones." So I ask her if I may use her phone she says of course and I call. Next we must find the correct train to Kerava. We say goodbye to the 4 Wisconsin guys who are heading to a hotel in Helsinki and catch our train. Timo is at the train station when we arrive much to our relief. We are beat from traveling by bus and train for 12 hours.

Anja has food for us and we are happy campers with our own rooms and sleep. Their house is an old apartment building with numerous doors and we get lost just trying to navigate in their house. They have multiple computers, TV sets and all the high technology you can imagine. Timo's has an engineer's office in the first floor of the home for his company Inteleco. We are in our straight night in a different location and sleeping spot.

Fortunately we sleep here three nights and do not have to move all our stuff.

### **March 16<sup>th</sup> Monday**

Sleep in until 8 and have a great breakfast. Alekski is going to Helsinki on a Delivery for his business so we tag along for the ride into town. We help unload the sprinkler parts for a new construction site in downtown. He then goes to the center of the city and drop us off and walks a bit with us in town and helps us orientate ourselves.

We start at Stockman's department store, which is huge and very modern with many floors. We check out a number of areas looking for souvenirs and gift ideas. After a number of purchases we go to the top floor for shipping home and after setting it all up find that it would cost 100 Euros (129 \$) so we decide to just carry it all and find a way to stuff it in our luggage. We have our backpacks to help carry it all. We need to keep it in tact to take to the cash refund at the airport to obtain our 22% tax back.

The main seaside market and harbor are our next stop. We visit three churches on foot each very unique and special in appearance and importance to Helsinki. The Russian Orthodox Church is closed on Mondays so we head to the state church, which is close by and surrounded by Helsinki University. It also is undergoing repairs but is open. A large church however very modest compared to the ornate churches in the rest of Europe. On to the Church carved into a rock. A choral group from Whitman

College in Walla, Washington, USA is singing a whole concert program. We stay for a number of songs they are great. The church has very interesting acoustics due to the rock walls. Pat and Jim arrive and we see that it's a small world again – we chat briefly -they are leaving for home tomorrow morning.

We head for the Olympic stadium from the summer games of 1952 and the tower beside the stadium. From the top the view is excellent even though it is overcast. Many Olympic venues are visible from the tower and a number of soccer fields are in use by kids. We walk to the first train station north of Helsinki since it closer than going back to the main station. Our legs are tired from walking. We take the commuter train to Kerava and Timo is there to pick us up,

To see Alex we must drive about an hour because she is on active duty at a military base but will be able to join us for dinner. Timo has a very deluxe Mercedes auto so the ride is fun and we see more countryside still all covered with snow. Dinner is fun we show the pictures of the ski tour and talk about old times and the future. Food is pizza and beer so we are right at home. Dave and I buy which makes us feel better. Timo does not drink since he is driving -the laws are so strict – people don't consider drinking at all if they gong to be driving. Get back about 10 and head to bed.

### **March 17 th Tuesday**

The large snowstorm predicted by the weathermen was for 50 cm of snow and like at home only about 2cm came over night.

Breakfast, ride the commuter train into Helsinki, shop, visit the modern art gallery, which is right downtown. Very interesting exhibit called, “ Choosing My Religion” that is a highlight for us. The other exhibit is called “ A building is not a building” is interesting but not so fascinating. We head to the National Museum about 2 blocks away. This is huge and we see only a small portion of it and they have a special focus on the war of 1809 with Russia. The galleries are well done and have a variety of means to present materials along with lot of old artifacts.

Head back early since we need to pack and sort to fit everything into our luggage. Anja again has a wonderful meal for us and we shower, sort and pack. Timo shows us some cold war stuff from Estonia in which they were preparing for a nuclear attack and this was all hidden from the outside public. He has a number of posters that show what to do in case of attack. Finland had no idea that Estonia just across the Baltic was doing this type of stuff. He obtained the materials while working a job in Estonia and asked if he could have the posters. He also showed us Sue’s (my wife) hockey team here at his house in 1995 and then playing in a game. Fun stuff to bring back for Sue to look at for the first time – the old video has been transferred to a DVD disc. Bed by 10 –we have a long day tomorrow.

### **March 18 Wednesday**

Up at 6 to eat and say thank you (Kiitos). We load and head to the airport to start our long day home. Airport check in goes fine – we can carry our gift bag as carry on. The only glitch is we now

must pay for the skis (40 Euros). Flight to Stockholm 1 hour plus then we transfer planes to Chicago for a 10-hour trip. The plane is crowded and warm so it is difficult to sleep. Arrive in Chicago with very little time to make our connection to Minneapolis. The plane made two attempts at landing fortunately the second one was good. On the first attempt the pilot aborted the landing because the plane coming in too early. So we have even less time to make the connection and need to go through customs and recheck our bags. We make it! Sue meets us at the airport.

We are happy to be home and done traveling 13 hours.

I am leaving in about 12 hours for Lake Placid, New York to watch my son play in the Division 3 College National hockey tournament. Unfortunately we are going by van and I will be traveling another 20 plus hours tomorrow.



