

The Birth of Nordic Walking - The Story

The “Roots” of Nordic Walking

- Since „30s the Finnish cross-country skiers have used poles for their summer trainings...

1966

- The first documented “walking with ski poles” lessons and promotions outside of competitive sport training: Leena Jääskeläinen, P.E. teacher in the School of Viherlaakso, Helsinki
- The idea of Nordic Walking was born: adding the poles to the regular walking using them “cross-country ski style”, and promote it as a physical activity which is suitable for all.

1968-71

- University of Jyväskylä, Faculty of P.E. and Sport Sciences: Leena Jääskeläinen, as a Professor, introduced poles as a tool to use during P.E. lessons: walking using poles ”cross-country ski style”, making exercises, etc.

1973-91

- Leena Jääskeläinen, as a Chief Inspector of the National Board of Education (Ministry of Education) introduced walking with poles among the “New ideas for P.E. in schools”.
- National TV channel MTV3 broadcasted an interview of L.J. and a demonstration of NW with the students of the school of Myyrmäki, Helsinki.

1987

- the first “presentation” of walking with ski poles at a public event: Leena Jääskeläinen in the Finlandia kävely (Finlandia Walk) in Tampere.
- 1987 - Leena Jääskeläinen: “This is going to be the sport of the future!”

1988

- 05/01/88 - The first public walking event with ski poles organized by Tuomo Jantunen - Suomen Latu (Photo).



Early „90s:

- More and more experimental events of “sauvakävely” (walking with poles), first articles were published.
- The key person in launching and promoting Nordic Walking in Finland: Tuomo Jantunen, director of the Suomen Latu (The Central Association for Recreational Sports and Outdoor Activities).

1996

- Project to publish a leaflet for the magazine “Latu ja Polku” of Suomen Latu: presentation of how to exercise with poles (keppijumppa) and how to walk with ski poles.
- Collaboration between Suomen Latu, Sports Institute of Vierumäki and Exel, a manufacturer of poles.
- During the “project”, in 1997, Exel produces the first specific poles for this new “sport”: “Walker” and “Nordic Walker” (Image).



Autumn 1997

- Publication of the leaflet inside the “Latu ja Polku” magazine of Suomen Latu and the “official launch” of the physical activity called “sauvakävely”.
- Presentation of the name in English: “Nordic Walking”.

1997

- The “official launch” of Nordic Walking.
- The poles made the difference!
- We all should thank the middle-aged Finnish women!

Nordic Walking in 1998 - only one year after the launch!

- First NW Instructor courses organized by Suomen Latu / Tuomo Jantunen.
- First training centre of sauvakävely: the “cottage” of Suomen Latu at Paloheinä, Helsinki.
- Presentations in the other Scandinavian countries.
- Presentation to the President Martti Ahtisaari.
- 160.000 Finns practise regularly NW, 520.000 have already tried it (Suomen Gallup) (Population of Finland: 5,3 million).
- National Award “The Health Promoting Action of the Year” (Vuoden terveysteko) given to Suomen Latu.

1998

- Presentation to President Martti Ahtisaari and his wife (Photo).
- Bergen, Norway: presentations to other Scandinavian countries.
- Members of Suomen Latu nordic walking in Tanzania: Mombasa beach, Kilimandzaro.
- The first ever Nordic Walking training centre at Paloheinä, Helsinki.



Evolution of Nordic Walking

- „60-“70-“80: occasional promotions, the “idea” is born.
- 1988: the first public march with ski poles.
- First years of the “90: numerous experiments, the word “sauvakävely” appears (“suomalainen sauvakävely”).
- 1997: official launch in Finland with the specific NW poles.
- 1997: the English name “Nordic Walking”.
- 2000: INWA, International Nordic Walking Association (now Federation) was founded.
- 2010: present in over 40 countries, about 10 million participants.
- Growing trend in various parts of the world.
- “The best Finnish invention after the sauna”.

2010.

The first pioneers of Nordic Walking: Leena Jääskeläinen and Tuomo Jantunen, are very active even nowadays!



Tuomo Jantunen

Photos and Images: L'Associazione Nordic Walking Italia (ANWI)