

Loppet returns despite harsh weather

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Despite extremely harsh conditions, the 18th Lake Louise to Banff Loppet and Relay

returned to the Bow Valley on Sunday after a year off.

The morning of the race seemed innocent enough, with the temperature at around -6 degrees when the race began at the Chateau

Lake Louise at 8 a.m., but as the day went on, a biting wind blew through the Valley.

"And the temperature stayed ideal about until one in the afternoon, when the cold front started to move in," event coordinator Jo

Lunn said. "We knew the storm was approaching, we just hoped it stayed off until the evening."

Don Roycroft won the men's category with a time of 4:45:29, while Steven Millar and Jacob Herrero finished second and third respectively.

Roycroft finished nearly 15 minutes ahead of the winning men's team, made up of Charles Schrama and Yvon Sevigny, who finished in a time of 5:00:35.

Banff's Theresa Gawron won the women's category — good enough for second overall — in a time of 5:31:48, while Ida Reaume placed second and Sara Mae Moore came third in the women's category.

The cut off for cancelling the race temperature-wise is -22 degrees, with no wind, Lunn explained.

"We were above that," he said. "Nobody appeared to be put off by it. Certainly, the longer they were out in it the more tired they became because of the falling temperature."

But the wind blowing snow over the machine-set tracks didn't help any of the skiers.

Banff had received six centimeters of snow the night before so there was no time to put new tracks onto the course, Lunn said.

The conditions were so bad in parts between Healy Creek and the Bow River that the wind had stopped skiers dead in their tracks.

"So we didn't get those stellar views that are out there."

As well, by 4 p.m., near the back swamp by Sunshine, shuttles had to bring skiers from the course because the track was barely visible.

Roycroft got to Banff's Central Park by 12:45 p.m., but the last skier to arrive didn't get there until 5 p.m. because the snow made the track slower, while the skiers could get less glide from the cold.

"So they had been out there for almost nine hours," Lunn said, adding that skiers had to get to the saw pack picnic area by 2:15 p.m. "Everybody made the last cut off time that we have in place."

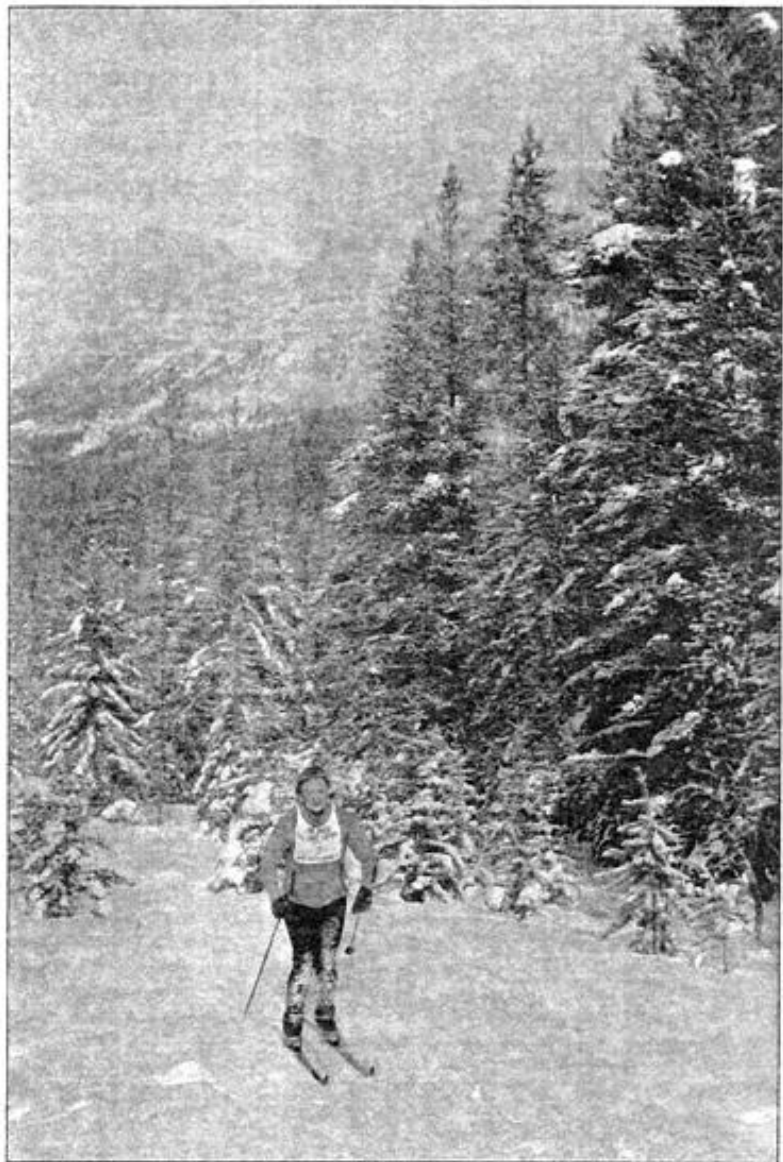
But when all was said and done, the conditions didn't stop the competitors from having a great time, Lunn said.

"It went extremely well, given the conditions," he said. "We got a lot of very positive feedback about the fact that the loppet was running again."

"Without it running last year, people felt it's too important a local event not to see it happen again."

The event drew 55 volunteers and approximately 115 skiers, including a team from Anchorage, Alaska.

"A big thank you to the volunteers to making it happen again," Lunn said.



LOPING THROUGH THE LOPPET Kendra Harper makes her way under Castle Mountain during the Lake Louise to Banff Loppet. Individuals or teams ski their way 65 km along the Bow Valley Parkway.

PHOTO: JONATHAN RUSSELL