



# Ski the 2017 Sleeping Giant Loppet

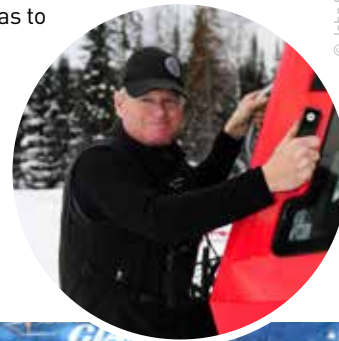
BY BONNIE SCHIEDEL

**THERE ARE LOTS OF REASONS TO LOVE THE LOPPET, THUNDER BAY'S BEST-KNOWN SKI RACE. HELD ON SATURDAY MARCH 4, 2017, IT'S ALSO MARKING ITS FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY THIS YEAR, AND ITS 800-PLUS COMPETITORS ARE SURE TO GET INTO THE SPIRIT OF CELEBRATION.** While about half of the skiers are from Thunder Bay, an equal number visit from other Ontario communities near and far, as well as from the United States and occasionally overseas.

What makes the Sleeping Giant Loppet special? "It's such a great family event," says race coordinator Peter Gallagher. "There are few recreational events that a family can do together, whether you're six or 86." Indeed, one of the keys to the Loppet's success is that it offers such a variety of races for every ability, from the 8km "mini-loppet" to the challenging 50km distances where elite athletes compete (see "Pick your distance" for more race details). "There's a family from New Jersey who comes to do the Loppet every year—that's their family reunion," says Gallagher. Some skiers are there to hone their skills or try for a personal best, and Gallagher recalls a British skier who included the Loppet in her bucket list of endurance events around the world. Other skiers dress up in tutus, retro ski clothing or crazy headgear, and one year there were two university students who rigged up two sets of bindings on one pair of skis and competed in the 20km race.

The site of the Loppet, Sleeping Giant Provincial Park on the rugged Sibley Peninsula that juts into Lake Superior, is also an undeniable draw. A popular provincial park less than an hour's drive east of Thunder Bay, it offers pristine trails sheltered from the wind by vast pine stands, breathtaking natural beauty and amenities like a visitor centre with washrooms and areas to warm up and socialize. "It's just a fun adventure to go and ski in the park," says Gallagher.

And let's talk about those trails: they're groomed by master groomer Peter Crooks of Kamview Nordic Centre. "Peter has many,



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## So, what's a loppet?

The word "loppet" has Scandinavian origins and is sometimes translated as a "citizen's race." It refers to a mass-participation community cross country ski event which features both recreational and competitive events, including longer, marathon-length distances over varied terrain.

many years of experience, and that's the secret," says Gallagher. "He knows about all the technical aspects—the moisture content of the air and snow, the temperature, all those little details that go into creating optimal trails. He groomed trails at the Vancouver 2010 Olympics and picked up a whole lot of new tricks there for working with old snow conditions, warm weather conditions, you name it."

Despite the hustle and bustle, the Loppet runs smoothly. Out-of-towners should arrange their race kit pickup with organizers ahead of time, and there are comfy luxury coaches that shuttle from Thunder Bay out to the park and back again. In addition to the race prizes for best times, there are prizes for the fastest skier in various age categories, and there is a grand prize attendance draw for a one-year lease for a Nissan Rogue.

Visit [www.sleepinggiantloppet.ca](http://www.sleepinggiantloppet.ca) for full details about the event, registration fees, fortieth anniversary celebrations, prizes and event hotels. Make 2017 your year to ski the Loppet! ■

## BE RACE-READY

Before you ski the Loppet, call the trail hotline at 807-285-0801 to get up-to-date info on the conditions. You can also get your skis professionally waxed, just right for the trail conditions, on the evenings leading up to the Loppet. Visit [www.sleepinggiantloppet.ca/pre-event](http://www.sleepinggiantloppet.ca/pre-event) for details.

## Pick your distance

There's a trail for everyone at the Loppet.

### 8KM FAMILY MINI-LOPPET

Ideal for families, beginner skiers or those who just want to take part in the fun Loppet atmosphere, this in-and-out trail along the tree-lined Marie Louise Lake park roads is mostly flat and level. Chariots (pulks) are permitted so even the littlest participants can take part. Enjoy a snack and a drink at the midway checkpoint, then head back and cross the same finish line as the skiers in the longer races. And, everyone gets a chocolate medal!

### 20 KM

This gently rolling trail, arguably the most popular route at the Loppet, circles clockwise around picturesque Marie Louise Lake. It's wide enough so you can ski with family and friends, and is groomed for both classic and free (skate) skiing. The race is timed and the top three male and female finishers receive an award.

### 35KM FREE TECHNIQUE

Great for intermediate skiers age 14 and over who want the challenge but not the entire distance of the 50km trails, this route includes the wooded Burma and Pickerel Lake trails. Registration is limited, and participants are bused to the starting

line. This event is timed and all participants receive a chocolate medal.

### 50KM FREE TECHNIQUE

This top event is for competitive and recreational skiers alike (age 16 and up). Challenging and beautiful, it includes both a circuit of Marie Louise Lake, and the Burma and Pickerel Lake trails. There are six support stations along the way with water, sports drinks and snacks. The top three female and male finishers receive a cash prize (\$1000, \$500 and \$250).

### 50KM CLASSIC TECHNIQUE

This timed race is skied on the same route as the 50km Free, but the competitors are ranked separately. Open to skiers age 16 and up, it offers prizes to the top three male and female finishers.

### 50KM SKIATHLON

New in 2016 and returning in 2017, this fun timed race offers the best of both worlds, plus a chocolate medal. Ski classic for the first 22 km, then switch to skate ski equipment for the second part of the race. Race organizers take care of the equipment transportation.



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