

## The first winter Olympic flame

Next to the ski jump at Garmisch Partenkirchen in 1936, the Olympic flame burned for the first time at a winter-Olympic event. As early as the summer games in Amsterdam, this tradition from antiquity had been adopted, and in 1936 the Olympic flame was admitted to the winter town of Garmisch Partenkirchen. The winter games that year must be seen in close context to the summer games in Berlin in the summer of 1936. There, the Olympic Games chair Carl Diem had managed to ensure that an Olympic flame was lit in Olympia in Greece. The torch travelled to Berlin via a relay through the cities of Sofia, Belgrade, Budapest, Vienna, Prague and Dresden before finally reaching Berlin during the opening ceremony of the games. The flame for the games in Garmisch Partenkirchen was not fetched in Olympia, but rather, lit on site.



After the war, a flame was also lit during the winter games in St. Moritz, but it was not until the Olympic Games in Oslo in 1952 that the torch relay became an important ceremonial preliminary to the winter Olympics.

The idea for the torch relay came from teacher Olav Bjaaland of Morgedal. It was a good thing that the issue was raised early because it had been discussed as early as 1948.

The important thing regarding the decision was that the IOC had no objections towards it. The statement in small print that the torch was “not an Olympic flame to be fetched from Morgedal to Oslo, but rather a torch-greeting from the birthplace of modern ski sport...” was happily overlooked by all. It was the Olympic flame that was lit and transported on skis from Morgedal on Wednesday, February 13<sup>th</sup>, 1952 at 10:00 AM.

The South Pole explorer Olav Bjaaland lit the fatwood torch in the fireplace of the cottage where Sondre Norheim was born at Øverbø in Morgedal. The first relay participant was Olav Hemmestveit, third generation skier from the Hemmestveit-family. From Morgedal to Oslo, the route was divided into 92 legs, and all the torch-bearers got to keep the beautiful steel frame that the torch was placed in along the way. The torches were German, made by the Deutsche Feuerwerke, and they burned willingly in wind and inclement weather on their way to the capital city. Major Qvale of the skiing federation gave a speech at the Sondre-memorial in Morgedal, and the route then headed toward Seljord and over the mountain to Hjartdal. New torch-bearers carried the torch on to Kongsberg where it made a stop at the home of Olympic champion Birger Ruud. Birger was home with a broken foot and was not able to participate in the relay, but the Morgedal-torch burned merrily in his living room even so!

The relay also made a stop at the memorial stone in Drammen commemorating Thorleif Haug, and then it continued toward the city.

On Friday morning of February 15th, the torch travelled from Bærum via what was left of the predecessor to the Holmenkollen ski hill, the Husebybakken hill. A small ceremony was held there before the last few legs toward Bislett Stadium and the opening ceremony for the winter Olympic Games in Oslo.

The famous skier Lauritz Bergendahl carried the torch in through the Marathon-gate at Bislett. On the ice stood Egil Nansen, Fridtjof Nansen's grandson, ready to carry the torch on the last leg around the stadium. Once back at the Marathon-gate, Egil took off his skis, climbed up the stairs and held the torch over the specially constructed large dish in which the flame was to burn through to the closing ceremony ten days later. That this was just a simple "torch-greeting" from Morgedal was far from anyone's thoughts. The crowd rejoiced as the Olympic flame from Morgedal rose higher.

