

## **Masters World Championships, Minneapolis, USA, 2018**

Most people, at least those who would claim to know about these things, would probably consider Minneapolis to be in the American mid-west. The north-east mid-west, it's true, but the mid-west, no less. As we were told by the former mayor at the opening ceremony, it isn't mid-west at all, though but is, instead, north North America, not far from Canada and just south-west of the Great Lakes. The importance of it being in the north is that it has all four seasons, when compared with other parts of the mid-west although, as we discovered, its winters have been pretty snow-free recently.

Right from when this event and venue were announced, a couple of years ago, I confess that I had my doubts! Minneapolis is hardly a conventional, or indeed well-known, ski venue; it has a poor snow record for the last few years and was being billed as the first-ever 'no natural snow' Masters; mid-January is a poor time of year, because it meant a lot of time off during this month, time for on-snow training and then for the event itself; and in mid-January it could be f\*\*\*\*\*g freezing! Perhaps these reasons help explain why so few (just three) skiers from GB signed up.

Early indications seemed to validate some of these concerns. I turned up at Heathrow, well in advance of the flight, at Terminal 3 for the American Airlines flight to Philadelphia. It transpired out that the flight was operated by BA, so I had to transfer to Terminal 5 – no real challenge here, I had loads of time, but it was an annoyance – why don't Expedia show the terminal on their E-tickets? and I would have been in trouble had I arrive at the airport a 'normal' time before the flight. The flight to Philadelphia was uneventful, and I landed with plenty of time to transfer onto the internal flight to Minneapolis. At least, I had plenty of time when I joined the end of the passport queue; one and a half hours later, when I had still not got into the US, I was beginning to panic a bit. Our jumbo jet had just arrived from the UK containing maybe 200 people, and there were just 4 passport officers on duty!

Arriving in Minneapolis with a heavy ski bag, I was disappointed to learn that trolleys had to be paid for. I *hate* this! It gives such a bad impression to visitors. I struggled, though, through the terminal to my Super Shuttle departure desk, for which I'd paid \$19 in advance for the transfer to my hotel. Spotting my ski bag, though, the kind lady from Super Shuttle said "Ah, you have a ski bag. This takes up the whole of the minibus so you can't travel with anyone else. You will need to hire a minibus for yourself – that will be \$44, thanks". Me, "What?", she "It's all shown on our website", me "No it *expletive deleted* isn't, at least not in a way that anyone can see it, because otherwise I wouldn't have booked you", she "Take it or leave it, darling." As we pulled in to the Ramada Plaza Minneapolis, I delicately asked, knowingly, whether this was the Ramada Golden Valley and was not entirely surprised by the answer. It was another \$20 to ferry me to the correct hotel!

Sunday dawned, as I'd anticipated, pretty cold, -16 °C! It took a very long time, though, to sort out transport to Theodore Wirth Park. There's no sensible public transport (even less so on a Sunday), I couldn't use Uber because I don't have a cell phone, I couldn't book a hire car because either they refused to pick me up from the hotel or the price was up around \$130, ridiculous for three days when, basically, I needed only to drive the 3 miles to the Park and back again so, in the end, I went for a normal taxi, €14 each way. Expensive (what else could I do?), but this was nothing compared to the \$20 I had to pay, every day, to use the tracks which, in total, amounted to not much more than 7.5 km. Grrr. So, for three days, it was going to cost me \$50 a day for one and a half to two hours skiing. I accept that it was my choice to come to the venue a few days early but, to me, these sorts of costs indicate a place not really adjusted to cross-country skiing!

Leading up to the event, messages coming from the US had indicated that 11 km of track had been prepared using machine snow, and that we would therefore be racing on just one 10 km loop. It was difficult to verify this on Sunday, partly because, with fairly heavy snow falling, it was difficult to see exactly where the tracks were, and partly because some of the tracks were closed off for a huskie event. It was cold, at between about -16 and -10 °C, and the tracks were not in great condition; a little new snow on top of a hard, icy base. If you ever had the chance to ski at the Telford indoor track, snow conditions reminded me a lot of that!

The following day, Monday, stayed cold, at about -16 °C. The tracks were in a slightly better condition, and a combination of Swix -10 to -20 °C and Rex Green, -8 to -15 °C worked fairly well. Despite claims from the organisers that there was 10 km of tracks open, I was only able to find about 6 km and, in my judgement, this 6 km loop was about half of the normal difficulty of a Masters course. Tuesday confirmed this; I could only find the 6 km loop, although one addition up-and-down loop had been added, which increased the difficulty but only made the track length up to about 6.5 km. The taxi I'd booked to take me to the track didn't turn up, so I had to return to my hotel room for half an hour, awaiting the replacement and, when it came, I set off, confident that my gloves and hat were in my pocket. When I got to the track, they were not in my pocket after all but, instead, they were sitting on the table of my hotel room! Skiing at -14 °C with only a thin balaclava and no gloves was a new experience, but I was doing sprints that day which made things bearable. The same grip wax combination of the day before didn't work quite as well, but the tracks had been better prepared and were hard with not much soft snow in the grooves, so probably something a little warmer would have done the trick.

I could not get a taxi to collect me after training and, at -14 °C and no warm clothing, hat or gloves, I was cooling down rapidly. Luckily, I approached a stranger in the car park and he kindly agreed to drive me, free, back to the hotel; the chalet was shut that day so I didn't have to pay the \$20 track fee either! An E-mail that evening once more confirmed the availability of both a 7.5 and a 10 km loop, but I certainly couldn't find the longer track.

Despite their reduced length, I certainly wasn't complaining about the tracks; they were nice, much more like roller skiing in the UK than your normal Masters tracks. There were many fairly flat sections, none of the downhill were tricky (either runnable in the tracks or with the tracks removed), no snow-ploughing was needed at any point, and the only two substantial uphill were just 150-200 metres long, with the third, steeper, hill being just 50 metres long. Good, too, that the start involved about 500 metres of gentle descent, followed by about 500 metres of gentle uphill then by a fairly flat section of a further 500 metres or so – plenty of chance to get warmed up early in the races before any of the difficulty started.



**A good example of how the course wound its way around the golf course. Note the date printed in the snow!**

Wednesday was a non-skiing day as I planned to move from one hotel to the other and, in any case, I was fed up of paying the \$20 track pass for an hour or two's skiing. The taxi ride between hotels seemed to be about 4-5 miles and cost me \$20 but, because the vehicle had no taximeter, I got the impression that this was a tentative "Can I get away with it?" rather than a true reflection of the actual price. Roger arrived that afternoon and we installed ourselves in our room at the Millennium Hotel, which suffered from a lack of storage space (only one drawer each and a few coat hangers) but was otherwise comfortable. They also had no objection (although perhaps they had no idea) to us keeping skis in the room, even though a ski room was provided, with tables but without clamps or forms, down in the basement.

On Thursday morning, Roger and I set off for the stadium, using the free shuttle bus (the typical American yellow school buses) this time, which took only 11-12 minutes from hotel to venue. The temperature was about -3 °C when we arrived, but was anticipated to rise to about +2 °C early in the afternoon. For me, this meant Swix VR 55, 0 to -3 °C, while Roger opted to skate. The first lap resulted in my first fall of the trip, a silly tumble where, at full speed downhill in the tracks, I found that the corner had been cut rather sharply and I shot out and down – no harm done, apart from my pride, which was a little bruised. With the accuracy of his watch, our first lap appeared to extend to only 6,09 km which, given the claims of 7,5 km, was *shurely shum mistake, Ed*. After a nice free cup of coffee in the tent back at the start, and a free fig roll each, we set off again, now with the entire Australian team (Zac) joining us and, this time, we spotted the two additional loops, both with initial drops and then climbs back up to re-join the main track, one of about 200 metres in poor condition because it had been cut into the thin natural snow with no artificial base, the other of maybe 500 metres which, after a nice, fast, drop, climbed up with the only section of the track which needed herring-boning, this being the last 20 metres or so of the climb. This time the track length was about right, a little over 7,5 km. We were told at the end of this lap that the first little loop would not, in fact, be used (and was subsequently coned off).

Friday was not a skiing day for me, because I wanted to be well rested before the first race. This was the first day for a long time that the temperature went above zero and, as a consequence, the conditions changed from stick wax to klister. Up at the stadium, I invested in what was reckoned to be the wax for the following day, Guruwax Extreme 39, -2 to +7 °C (rather expensive at \$32) and then, that evening, I made a further, more reasonable, investment in Rode Chola as a klister binder. The neighbouring hotel to ours, which served as race headquarters, had a market of local ski shops, although I felt that the selection of things was poor.

First race at last, Saturday, 30 km for me, 10 km for Patrick. The temperature was -3 °C at 09:00, rising to about +2 °C at race end, and a high of +5 °C at 17:00. I'd gone for a medium Kuzmin scrape, then the Chola, ironed in, with the Guruwax on top, also ironed in. I had to wait until I'd completed my extensive half hour warm up, running along the nearby road, before I could test the skis but, when I finally did so, they worked extremely well and stayed that way throughout the four laps of the race.

Following Roger's advice, I tried to start quite fast, and was just at the back of the large group as we headed down the gentle start. It was good to notice that although the fastest guys were pulling ahead, they were not whizzing away and I had plenty of people around and behind me. As the first lap progressed, I was being overtaken on the downhills by one person then overtaking him on the uphills, until the second lap when I pulled ahead. I felt that my skis seemed slightly slow on the first lap but, on the last lap, I was passing M08s and M07s, including e.g. Swedes who I imagined were on good skis, so this was, in fact, exactly what Dr Kuzmin predicts. It was good that tracks had been taken out on the first tricky downhill where I'd fallen two days ago, and on the long downhill, but had been put in on the shorter drops; this actually made the course very pleasant to ski on, although the total track length was just 6.52 km/per lap, so 26.1 km for me, the distance for which the speeds below are calculated.

#### Men's M01-M06 30 km classic technique, Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> January

Fastest	Tommy Gustafsson	SWE	M05	1.13:28.2	21.3 km/h		
1)	Jon Arne Enevoldsen	NOR	M06	1.18:29.9	19.9 km/h		
17)	Adam Pinney	GBR	M06	1.41:34.5	15.4 km/h	29.4 %	(30 starters)

### Men's M10-M13 10 km classic technique, Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> January

Fastest	Richard Kringhaug	NOR	M10	29:12.9	18.5 km/h		
15)	Patrick o'Connor	USA	M10	52:40.4	10.3 km/h	80.3 %	(18 starters)



Not long after the start, and going well!

The following day, Sunday, the temperature was much the same as the previous day, around -1 °C at about 09:00, peaking at about +4 °C in later afternoon. Much of the free-lying snow had melted, but the race tracks remained in very good condition, fairly hard packed and better to stay on the edge where there was less soft snow, the tactic adopted by Roger as he powered his way round his 13.05 km race to record an excellent 17.4 WMA points, his best Masters performance by far and one which puts him comfortably on the front page of the Best British Men of All Time list. Alasdair looked strong, too, with plenty of people behind him, and this was his first-ever Masters score below 30 % of the winner's time.

Always reliable, our man from Michigan, Steve was happy, this was his fourth-best ever Masters performance. Jack White, though, showed the benefits of taking a rest from Masters racing (he'd not raced since Pillerseetal in 2014), to come home with a very strong 6.9 %, his best performance ever and just one place away from a medal. A satisfactory end, then, to the first two days of racing!

### Men's M07-M09 15 km free technique, Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> January

Fastest	John Petter Harila	NOR	M07	37:03.9	21.1 km/h		
24)	Roger Homyer	GBR	M07	43:32.3	18.0 km/h	17.4 %	
40)	Alasdair Wilson	GBR	M07	48:06.2	16.3 km/h	29.8 %	(52 starters)
1)	Paul Graber	CH	M09	39:38.7	19.7 km/h		
15)	Steve Smigiel	USA	M09	49:14.8	15.9 km/h	24.2 %	(25 starters)

### Men's M10-M13 10 km free technique, Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> January

Fastest	Finn Magnar Hagen	NOR	M10	27:15.8	19.8 km/h		
4)	Jack White	CAN	M10	29:08.9	18.5 km/h	6.9 %	(12 starters)



**Roger, just ahead of Australian Zac, about 3 km into his race, before pulled easily ahead!**

The 10 km classic race was going to be *my* race; it was the race I'd trained for, hysterically it has also been my best distance and, this year, with it being just 7.5 km, I was going to give it my all! First, though, we had to get past Sunday evening, which was a worrying time especially for classic skiing. The weather forecast was around zero centigrade for race start, at which point there was a chance that it would start snowing. Oh for a pair of carpet skis! I opted to scrape both pairs of classic skis with the medium Kuzmin scraper (-3 to +3 °C) with fine rilling over this, and had planned to leave things at that until the morning. Luckily, though, I checked the start list and found that I was starting at 09:20 instead of 09:40 as I'd thought, so some grip waxing had to be done in advance. With Roger's advice, I opted for the "Jim Davidson" system, which is stick wax (VR55, 0 to +2 °C for new snow, 0 to -3 °C for old snow) topped with klistler, then ironed in to mix the two. Would this work? I wondered. Well, read on to the next paragraph, where you will find out.

The JD system, intended to prevent new snow from sticking to the skis was not, in the end, needed at all, because the new snow didn't arrive until about 10 a.m., i.e. more or less at the end of my 7.5 (really 6.5) km classic race. The tracks remained hard and klistler alone was probably needed and, at -2 °C, maybe the Guruwax was a bit too warm. I felt that I was lacking the very positive grip I'd had earlier in the 30 km race, and this wasn't helped by the fact that skiers in front of me had churned the tracks up with, in my view, unnecessary herring-boning. Without the positive grip, I just couldn't get fully into the race, and the result was disappointing. Things weren't really helped by the fact that there were a lot of leaves in and on the tracks and, at one point, my skis stuck to a leaf and I went down, albeit not for long. Oh well, at least I didn't have to race in the afternoon!

BMCCSA had two other participants in the classic races, though: our two American members, unusually because he doesn't often race classic, Steve Smigiel and Patrick o'Connor who, having moved up an age category, was racing over 5 km. Starting at 10:50 and 10:55 respectively, Steve and Patrick certainly had the worst of the classic conditions, the snow which had been promised for earlier was in full force by now, falling heavily. I don't know what grip system either of them were on, but it certainly wasn't klistler! Steve, at 28 % of the winner's time, was some way down on his normal free technique performance but, for Patrick, his percentage was only slightly down on his first race. Watching people skiing in the afternoon, I notice one thing about the venue; the trees, although they looked it, were not actually full size, and this made skiers look a lot bigger than normal!

**Men's M01-M06 7.5 km classic technique, Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> January**

Fastest	Matthew Liebsch	USA	M01	17:25.3	25.8 km/h		
1)	Jon Arne Enevoldsen	NOR	M06	19:07.0	23.5 km/h		
20)	Adam Pinney	GBR	M06	26:00.6	17.3 km/h	36.1 %	(26 starters)

**Men's M07-M09 7.5 km classic technique, Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> January**

Fastest	Daniele Vuerich	ITA	M07	21:04.5	21.4 km/h		
1)	Veikko Piirainen	FIN	M09	24:13.5	18.6 km/h		
20)	Steve Smigiel	USA	M09	31:02.2	14.5 km/h	28.1 %	(30 starters)

**Men's M10-M13 5 km classic technique, Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> January**

Fastest	Alpo Virtanen	FIN	M10	15:09.0	19.8 km/h		
13)	Patrick o'Connor	USA	M10	27:45.0	10.8 km/h	83.2 %	(16 starters)



**Patrick enjoying his time in the snow!**

The afternoon races were, to say the least, a struggle! It had been snowing hard since the morning and, as a consequence, there were several inches of new, soft snow lying on the tracks. This was, in fact, the heaviest snowfall in Minneapolis since 2011. There was also a strong, cold, wind, which didn't help matters. Roger and Alasdair found the conditions challenging, partly because there was only ever one line through the snow, and partly because it was difficult to see the edges of the track. Anyone diverging from the one line risked catching a tip, and this caused the crash of several skiers right in front of Alasdair within a few hundred metres of the start. Alasdair, swerving to avoid them, skied off the track and into the soft stuff at the side, and down he went, too. Ahead, though, Roger was making strong progress and working hard, to record a fine 22<sup>nd</sup> place but not quite matching his FIS points of earlier.

Star of the show on this snowy afternoon, though, from a BMCCSA point of view, was Jack White. In his best result of the event (but, ironically, not his best percentage), he skied strongly to pick up a fine bronze medal, just 10 seconds off silver!



After the relay, Roger and I went to investigate some of the new parts of the track which the fresh snow had allowed the organisers to cut. After 3 km or so, a new loop had been added, introducing an initial long, fast downhill (runnable in the tracks, though), followed by three fairly steep but short herring-bone sections, one further long downhill (again in the tracks) until a final climb of 250 metres or so brought us back up to the original tracks. A further loop, of 5 km and this, almost all pretty flat, had been adding on the other side of the road, but I didn't try it. All of this brought the track up to somewhere near a full 15 km, and the new climbs made it up to Masters standard.

Thursday was the final race for most of us, 45/30/15 km classic. I woke, after not sleeping very well, with a cold which was just about to break and, as they say in America, "That was all he wrote". It was about -4 °C at the start, rising to -1 °C at race end (and +1 °C later in the day), so grip was a combination (layers) of Swix blue and Swix violet, and this seemed to work adequately but, luckily, I added two additional layers of violet just before the start. Light fog made the weather cool, and it was lucky that I'd seen this from the hotel and decided to dress warmly, putting on a second thermal top, because my hands were cold on both the third and fourth laps. My cold left me with very little energy; I got slower and slower as the race went on, I had to stop for a pee on the third lap and, on the last lap, I stopped again to change my skis over from one foot to the other, hoping to improve grip. Each time I stopped I was overtaken by an M06; disappointing!

If only the organisers had followed the advice given on Minneapolis metro trains, "See tracks? Think train"! Half way round my first lap, John Downing, WMA director, told me that, because of a train, the 5 km new, flat loop had been cut off and my race was changed to four laps of about 9 km each. Patrick had no problems (he was on different tracks anyway), but things were not so good for Roger and Alasdair, starting 40 minutes before me. To get to this 5 km loop, the track went over a railway line which, unfortunately, had a train parked on it by a driver who then refused to move, and this happened only just after Roger had crossed it. So Alasdair, coming a little later, was prevented from crossing and sent back, after quite a long wait, to the main tracks, while Roger ended up skiing a further 3 km or so.

There is no section in the MWA rules which deals with "Train blocks track" and, in the immediate aftermath, there was chaos, at least for the M07s. Walkie-talkie messages were flying around and, for a while, instructions given to skiers were varied! So Roger and Alasdair's 30 km race ended up as either one 15 km lap and one 10 km lap (Roger and most others), two 10 km laps (Alasdair and three others), three 10 km laps (four skiers) or one 15 km lap and two 10 km laps (a further four skiers). The organisers were very apologetic at the Team Captains' meeting afterwards, explaining that they'd run 80 previous events over the same tracks with no problem. One of the jury members, Italian national director Giacomo Gamozzini, announced that it had been decided that only the large group of 23 skiers who covered 25 km would be considered as 'official' results but, at the medal ceremony later that evening, all four groups were considered as official and this is how Alasdair, having finished third of the four who completed about 20 km, received his bronze medal!

#### Men's M01-M06 40 km classic, Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> January

Fastest	Truls Valmestad	NOR	M05	1.48:24.1	19.9 km/h		
1)	Jon Arne Enevoldsen	NOR	M06	1.51:26.5	19.4 km/h		
16)	Adam Pinney	GBR	M06	2.47:18.4	12.9 km/h	50.1 %	(19 starters)

#### Men's M07-M09 30 km classic, Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> January

Fastest	Daniele Vuerich	ITA	M07	1.12:52.8	18.2 km/h		
16)	Roger Homyer	GBR	M07	1.35:05.7	13.9 km/h	30.5 %	(35 starters)

#### Men's M07-M09 20 km classic, Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> January

Fastest	Carl Hoerger	USA	M07	1.35:32.0	11.3 km/h		
3)	Alasdair Wilson	GBR	M07	1.43:17.1	10.5 km/h		(4 finishers)

#### Men's M10-M13 15 km classic technique, Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> January

Fastest	Alpo Virtanen	FIN	M10	45:48.8	17.1 km/h		
12)	Patrick o'Connor	USA	M10	1.20:17.7	9.8 km/h	75.3 %	(14 starters)





**Roger leads a fair sized group towards the end of the first additional loop**



**Alasdair on his way to an unexpected bronze medal**

There were no equivalent dramas for the final Masters race on Friday, as Steve and Jack completed their competitions, because the organisers had decided not to attempt to cross the railway line again. It was, though, the warmest race of the event, with a temperature of +5 °C at race start. For Steve it was a good final effort, his best result of the event. For Jack, though, he wasn't quite able to match his best percentage of the week, 6.9 %, which brought him 4<sup>th</sup> place, nor his bronze medal which had come from 14.9 %. Peu importe, three results on Page 1 of the Best BMCCSA Members of All Time sound pretty good to me!

### Men's M07-M09 30 km free technique, Friday 26<sup>th</sup> January

Fastest	Einer B. Vikinstad	NOR	M08	1.26:12.0	18.8 km/h		
1)	Paul Graber	CH	M09	1.36:36.7	16.8 km/h		
11)	Steve Smigiel	USA	M09	1.59:04.1	13.6 km/h	23.2 %	(16 starters)

### Men's M10-M13 15 km free technique, Friday 26<sup>th</sup> January

Fastest	Finn Magnar Hagen	NOR	M10	43:02.7	18.2 km/h		
6)	Jack White	CAN	M10	47:10.8	16.5 km/h	9.6 %	(9 starters)



**Steve powers his way to yet another fine performance**

Racing over, the only thing remaining was the second of the two parties (the first one having taken place on Monday), both replacing the banquet. These parties proved successful; there wasn't quite as much food as in the banquets, but there was enough to avoid the need to eat anything else on either night. Prior to the party, I went to watch Minneapolis kids, Zac and a few other Masters sprinting on the short snow track which had been laid down in the middle of the city, and which turned up one week later on the BBC's coverage of the Super Bowl which was the main sporting attraction in town.

The following day, Saturday, we had been encouraged to race in the loppets which were taking place in Minneapolis, me entering the 21 km classic, Alasdair the 42 km. My race was always going to be tight, time-wise, starting at 10:00 and with my flight scheduled for 16:00. The warm temperatures of the day before played havoc with the tracks, though (which should have started in Theodore Wirth Park and made their way towards the city), and led to my start being delayed until 11:00. This, combined with my cold and the fact that the organisers hadn't laid on any sensible transport from city to venue, led to me scratching – rather a waste of the \$80 entry fee! Alasdair, on a later flight, took part, though, on the same tracks as used by the Masters but over the shortened distance of 30 km, finishing 120<sup>th</sup> of 204 in a time of 1.58:54.

In summary, the event as a whole had some good things and some not quite such good things, recognising, of course, that any ski venue is going to look rather shabby without snow! I got the impression that Minneapolis isn't really a ski resort because, outside of the park facilities, there seemed to be very little. Public transport was a disaster, as was the very high cost of using the tracks outside of the event.



**Jack (foreground), downtown Minneapolis (background)**

Quite a few skiers, I believe, shared this opinion, with the total number of participants, at about 850, well down on what had been expected. There were only 11 Russians but this, we were told, was due to Russia closing a lot of visa centres, meaning that anyone wanting to travel to the US had first to go to Moscow. There were no Dutch, only one Australian, and so on. In addition, the large influx of American skiers who live within a 3 hour drive or so of Minneapolis never really materialised, mainly because of a lack of snow in the general area. Beitostolen next year is going to be 'crunch time' for the Masters; if it can't, with all its advantages, attract more than 1 000 skiers, then some serious rethinking of the whole Masters is likely.

On the plus side, the tracks were, I think, excellent; always well prepared and great fun to ski on. The event transportation worked pretty well (apart from Monday, when the very heavy snow meant that it took us an hour to get back from the venue instead of the usual 15 minutes). Facilities at the stadium were pretty good. It was a short walk from the bus stop to the storage building where the national cages were, then another short walk to the start area with a warm tent to wait in or recover in (sometimes with free drinks).

I liked the hotel arrangements and, at just £50 a night B+B, this was not very expensive. There were adequate waxing facilities (tables) in the basement, and Alasdair's vices allowed us to wax whenever we wanted. I liked, too, that they had no objection (but then they probably never knew) to us grip waxing in our bedroom. The breakfast (we had a choice of two, but only the style of eggs varied with one of the breakfasts) became a little samey after 10 days and a buffet might have worked better. The randomness of delivery by the stone deaf waiter added amusement on some days, though. But we were a short walk from a large supermarket, and access to the gym in the neighbouring Hyatt Regency Hotel (race headquarters), which had two microwaves, meant that it was easy to buy porridge, ready-meals, etc. and heat them up there. I was disappointed with the cost of eating out (difficult to find much for less than \$20), and Roger in particular was very disappointed at not being able to find breakfast cereal which didn't contain 20 % or more sugar!

Catching cold before the 40 km race and panicking the night before the 10 km race rather compromised the sporting aspects of the event but, as is always the case in America, everyone was very friendly and easy to talk to, and it was nice to have a lot of skiers (mainly Americans) around me. Would I return to Minneapolis and should we have another similar event in the future? I think probably not, because it proved rather unattractive for many people, although the design of the tracks should be repeated at all future Masters!