

# Cross Country Skier Lucy Steele

by Liz McKee

*Dans cet article, l'auteure trace un portrait de Lucy Steele, une membre de l'équipe canadienne nationale de ski de fond.*



Photo: Steve Zaleschuk

Lucy Steele sees her sport as her job and goes at it with the spirit of someone who truly enjoys her career. She sees herself as a role model for younger athletes in her community, Whitehorse and throughout the Yukon. At 24, she has been a member of the Canadian National Cross Country Ski Team for eight years.

Being on the national team means Lucy spends most of her time skiing and training in other parts of Canada and in Europe, but the rest of the time she is happy to train on world class trails in Whitehorse. "It's a bit difficult because of how far away from everything we are," she says. "When we go to Europe, instead of having six hours of time change, I have nine, for example. It takes me two days to get there rather than one—all of this is tiring."

That's one reason why Lucy chose to live in a training camp in Ottawa for a few years. She acknowledges that the camp was ideal for training, but comments that it was lacking in what she needs to go along with the skiing—the support of her family, friends, and community. "Athletes are much more successful when

they're happy and I'm happy in the North."

Lucy is financially sponsored by a local hotel chain. This means she can live as a full time athlete and treat training and competing as a full time job. "I also have an incredible network of support from people who are just interested in what I'm doing," she says. "This includes other athletes from the club [the local ski club], recreational skiers, and even people who don't ski. "When things are going well, this support is nice, but it's when things are not going so well that I realize how essential this encouragement is for me to continue in my sport."

Although Lucy did go to the 1992 Albertville Olympics, she experienced a major disappointment in her career when she was not selected to go to the 1994 Olympics. She was the top woman cross country skier in the country, but Canada did not send a woman's team to that Olympics. "Throughout that period, I had people around me like I've never had before. It really encouraged me to continue."

Instead of giving up when she learned there would be no woman's team at the Olympics, she returned to Whitehorse at Christmas and entered the U.S. Nationals and the Olympic ski trials, in Anchorage, Alaska.

In the meantime, back in the Yukon, names were gathered on petitions and letters were sent to newspapers, all calling for the Olympic selection committee to send Lucy to Albertville. "Strangers were stopping me in the street and saying how sorry they were that I wouldn't go to the Olympics. It made me realize how much people care."

For most skiers, cross country skiing is an individual sport. Not so for Lucy. Grinning broadly, she says that she sees her skiing as a team sport, "It's me and the rest of the Yukon!"

The northern spirit works both ways for Lucy. "I really like the feeling of being unique because I come from the Yukon. When I tell anyone from south of '60 where I live, they're always amazed.

"I'd be pushing it a little bit to say that the winter is 'easy' here," says Lucy with a touch of understatement. "I've lived in Ottawa and I've experienced some of the coldest weather there, but Yukon cold spells last longer. It's difficult to train over long periods of extreme cold." When it's very cold the snow gets slow and it makes skiing difficult. Muscles tire very quickly and over an extended period it's difficult for athletes to recover from fatigue.

"In a way, all of these things just make me tougher," she says, looking at the bright side.

"To be a champion, you have to work like a champion. The weather is always there. We either love it or hate it, but we have to stay active!"

Lucy grew up in a family where outdoor activities are part of everyday life. Her parents and brother and sister are all active skiers, but she also draws encouragement from other women athletes in the Yukon.

"It's a very close community of people involved in athletics in general, whether it's running, kayaking, hiking, climbing, or skiing," she says. "A lot of the women athletes know each other and we all support each other. It's a fun group. I'm outside a lot of the time, but when I come back there's always someone to call on to do a training session, or whatever."

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