

MARTHA BENJAMIN

Nation: Vuntut Gwich'in First Nation
Birth: June 15, 1935
Birthplace: Old Crow, Yukon
Sports: Cross-country skiing

Career Highlights

- 1963, Midland, Ontario, Canadian Championships, gold medalist, set world record and beat the top male competitors
- 1989, inductee, Sport Yukon Hall of Fame
- 2001, recipient, Governor General's Caring Canadian Award for, among other things, reactivating sports and children's programs in her community and cutting and grooming trails for young skiers

Biography

Martha Benjamin has spent most of her life in the remote village of Old Crow, the Yukon. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, she made a name for herself in cross-country skiing, competing in Canada, the U.S. and Europe.

Father Jean-Marie Mouchet, founder of the Territory Experimental Ski Training (TEST) program, was her coach. Benjamin got into the sport in an unusual way. As a parent, she volunteered to help with the program. After accompanying some children to one of the meets in which TEST skiers participated, she announced that she, too, would race. Mouchet was skeptical of her chances because she'd only tried skiing a couple of times. The next day, however, she took first prize in her category.

Mouchet was especially proud of Martha. He told *The Whitehorse Star*, "Old Crow has the potential. Martha is steel, straight steel. She could go on forever. Old Crow skiers have the ability to find a source of energy that we don't know exists."

Benjamin was 25 years old and the mother of three when she made the trip from Old Crow to Midland, Ontario to compete in the 10 km at the Canadian Championships. With a time of 43:29, not only did she beat her competitors in the senior women's category, she bested the top men's times, as well. *The Whitehorse Star's* headline was "Martha beats them all."

Benjamin trained for the Olympic team, but her family responsibilities did not allow her to compete at that level. Still, she is regarded as a tremendous skier, one of whom Canadians can be proud.

Links:

Sport Yukon Hall of Fame

<http://www.sportyukon.com/halloffame/inductees/MarthaBenjamin/>