

SHARON FIRTH

Nation: Gwich'in First Nation
Birth: December 31, 1953
Birthplace: Aklavik, Northwest Territories

Sports: Cross-country skiing
Competitions: 1970 World Nordic Juniors Championships, Gosau, Austria
1970 World Nordic Championships, Vysoke Tatry, Czechoslovakia
1972 Olympic Winter Games, Sapporo, Japan
1974 World Nordic Championships, Falun, Sweden
1976 Olympic Winter Games, Innsbruck, Austria
1980 Olympic Winter Games, Lake Placid, USA
1982 World Nordic Championships, Oslo-Holmenkollen, Norway
1984 Olympic Winter Games, Sarajavo, Yugoslavia

Career Highlights

- Four-time Olympian; competed at the 1972, 1976, 1980 and 1984 Olympics
- The first Canadian woman to compete in four consecutive Olympic Winter Games
- Nine Canadian relay titles, the most of any skier in Canadian senior history
- Won a combined 48 national titles
- A total of 37 medals won at Canadian National, University and Nordic championships - 19 gold, 14 silver and 4 bronze
- Competed for 17 years on Canada's national cross-country ski team 1967 - 1985
- Finished 26th in the 5 km at the 1976 Olympic Games in Innsbruck, Austria, the Canadian best until 2002 (shared with Lorna Daudrich, who placed 26th in 1988)
- 1985 Great American Ski Chase, winner, women's overall title
- 1981 Dannon Cup US Racing Series, Western champion with 104 points; national overall champion of east and west with 182 points
- 1977 American Cup, gold medalist in the 5 km, 4th in the 10 km, Telemark, Wisconsin
- 1976 Winter Olympics in Innsbruck, Austria, placed 7th in the 4 x 5 km relay
- 1975 North American Championships in Mont Ste. Anne, Que. Became the first Canadian woman to sweep gold in three categories, winning the 5 km, 10 km and the 3 x 5 km relay races
- First competition in Anchorage, Alaska at the age of 13; placed third
- 1971-1972, recipient, John Semmelink Memorial Award
- 1988, member, Order of Canada
- Member of the Canadian Skiing Hall of Fame
- 2002, recipient, Queen's Jubilee Medal
- 2005, recipient, National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation's Sports Achievement Award
- The Firth Award, named for Sharon and Shirley Firth, is given annually to women who have made an outstanding contribution to Canadian cross-country skiing

Biography

Sharon Firth was born in the remote trapping community of Aklavik, Northwest Territories, 10 minutes after her twin, Shirley. Their father was a Loucheaux-Metis trapper who every year tracked the vast caribou herds of the Mackenzie Delta. The family of 13 lived a traditional hunting and trapping lifestyle; Shirley has suggested that vying with her twin for the best spots to trap small game nurtured their competitive spirit. A desire to travel was another motivation for her.

In 1959, her family relocated to Inuvik. Firth was introduced to cross-country skiing there by an Oblate priest called Father Jean-Marie Mouchet in 1965, through the Territorial Experimental Ski Training Program (TEST). After training in temperatures that could dip to -40 degrees, and

in the 24-hour darkness that defines the Arctic winter, Firth placed third in her first major competition, at the age of 13, in Anchorage, Alaska. She and her sister eventually became the first Aboriginal women to compete internationally in their sport, and won a combined 79 Canadian National Ski Championships between them. In 1972, they were integral to the first women's cross-country ski team that Canada ever sent to an Olympic Games. Sharon retired from the sport in 1985.

Following her athletic career, Firth became a Youth Programs Advisor for the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs, GNWT. Among her roles there is traveling to northern communities to teach kids how to cross-country ski and encourage them to dream big.

Links:

Government of Canada 2010 Winter Games

<http://www.canada2010.gc.ca/101/athletes/010504-eng.cfm>

2005 Sports - National Aboriginal Achievement Award

http://www.naaf.ca/html/sa_firth_e.html

Canadian Ski Museum Hall of Fame

<http://www.skimuseum.ca/biodata.php?lang=en&id=63>

2005 Aboriginal Achievement - Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women in Sport and Physical Activity

<http://www.caaws.ca/e/awards/article.cfm?id=273>

2008 Athlete - Banff Sports Hall of Fame

<http://www.banff.ca/activities-events/sports-recreation/hall-of-fame/inductees/sharon-firth.htm>