

June 8, 2009

## Those Wild and Goofy Finns Are At It Again

The Finnish love of traditional sports is well known. Not so well known is their love of wacky sports, too. If it's silly, the Finns have devised a contest for it.

About 40 such events are held annually, ranging from the more traditional - hay mowing, for instance, and mölkky, a skittles game - to the more contemporary, such as topless winter jogging. The list gets longer every year. Here's a summary of weird and wonderful events in Finland.

**Wife-carrying:** Staged at Sonkajärvi in eastern Finland since 1992, this 'discipline' dates back to the 19th century when local villain Herkko Ronkainen used to swing his favorite girlfriend on his shoulders, an act that will be duplicated by couples competing in the World Championships on July 3-4, 2009.

**Mobile-phone throwing:** In the homeland of Nokia, what could be more Finnish than this one? The next World Championships will be held on August 22, 2009 in Punkaharju, eastern Finland. The organizer promises to provide "official WC mobile phones... During the throw the competitor must stay within the throwing area. The phone must land within the marked throwing sector." Contestants may be relieved to learn that "there will be no doping tests. However the jury can rule out the contestant if his/her mental or physical preparedness is not adequate for full a performance."

**Sauna bathing contest:** Some would say that sitting naked in a hot chamber is eccentric enough, but Finns have taken their national pastime a step further with an endurance test to determine the 'World Champion' at sauna bathing. The 11th Sauna World Championships will be held at Heinola on August 7-8, 2009. "Competitors have to sit in the sauna with buttocks and thighs on the seat," say the rules. "Posture must be erect; elbows must stay on the knees and arms have to be in an upright position. The competitor will have to leave the sauna without outside help; otherwise he/she will be disqualified."



*Finns love a hot sauna - this one's actually in a Yllas 1 ski lift gondola.*

**Twangy Guitar Festival:** The Taarasti art centre in Nastola near Lahti was the venue on June 27, 2009, for the annual celebration of that peculiarly Finnish style of guitar playing, a kind of melancholy country sound often

preferred at lakeside summer dances.

**Air guitar playing:** What is it about Finns and guitars? Or in this case, Finns who wish they had guitars? Masters of the phantom instrument gather each year at the Club Teatria in Oulu in northern Finland. Would-be Jimi Hendrixes and aspiring Brian Mays congregate to trade licks and strut their stuff, with 'training camps', lectures and demonstrations of the 'sport', as well as the competition itself. Traditional Finnish dominance has been challenged recently: the 2006 winner hailed from Japan, with runners-up from Australia and Germany. The competition will be held August 19-21, 2009.

**Swamp football:** A big patch of very muddy ground, two teams and a football are the basic requirements for this one, and 2009 sees the twelfth anniversary of the World Championships at Hyrnsalmi in north-eastern Finland on July 17 - 18. There's no offside rule and if you lose your boots in the mud - well, tough, you can't pause to change or replace them.

Other unusual events and pursuits in Finland include:

- Mosquito swatting (Lapland is prime country)
- Milking stool throwing (farms up and down Finland)
- Table drumming (bars and restaurants)
- Sitting on an ant's nest (in any forest you choose)
- Team berry picking (Suomussalmi, eastern Finland)
- Kick-sledding competition (Ylläs, Lapland)

For more information, see Visit Finland at [www.visitfinland.com](http://www.visitfinland.com). Or better yet, go on over, take your camera and Twitter shots of the weird events to your followers back home - they won't believe how much fun those Finns have.

*- Rich Steck & Judi Janofsky*