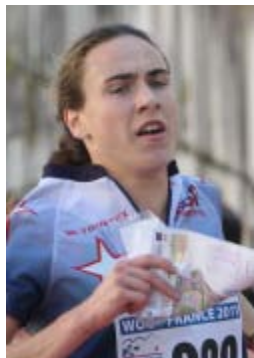


# International Orienteering Federation

## Athlete of the Month, January 2012



**Name:** Alison Crocker

**Country:** USA

**Discipline:** Ski Orienteering, Foot Orienteering

**Career highlights:** World Ski Orienteering Championships 8th place (Long distance 2011), 12th place (Mixed Relay 2011)

Last year, Alison Crocker achieved a very creditable eighth place in the Long Distance race in the World Ski Orienteering Championships and was also in the USA team at the foot orienteering World Championships. A short time ago our Athlete of January put orienteering in the limelight with an article in the American sports magazine Sports Illustrated. This year the American has ambitions of even better results, starting with the Ski Orienteering World Cup races on home terrain.

“It will be great fun to race in the World Cup in my own country, and it should be really exciting for many here who have never seen SkiO live at the level of the World Cup. The internet is amazing, but only by being present can you get much of a feel for what is really going on”, Alison says.

The World Cup in Ski Orienteering is taking place in the USA for the first time, but the country is huge. From where Alison lives in Massachusetts, a state in the north-east of the USA, it is 4,601 kilometres to the venue for the World Cup. “It would take me almost 2 days to drive from my house to Tahoe City. So needless to say, I will be flying in, as will almost everybody else!”

*“How are you preparing for the races on home ground?”*

“Well, trying to be in the best possible shape! Unfortunately I haven’t skied so much due to there being little snow right now in the north-east of the US. A few local ski orienteering races will be the best preparation I can get for the Tahoe World Cups.”



Last winter Alison Crocker showed impressive form at the World Ski Orienteering Championships.

#### *Magazine feature*

The new orienteering star has just been featured in Sports Illustrated, the big weekly sports magazine in the USA. That's a big step forward for orienteering.

“Sports Illustrated usually just covers our big sports – football, basketball, baseball and hockey – so it was really nice to be included! The Executive Director of Orienteering USA, Glen Schorr, made the contact. It is certainly true that without his effort, SkiO and orienteering probably wouldn't have been sought out by them! I've had a lot of colleagues at work and friends from outside orienteering comment on the piece, so it really has brought a bit more attention for orienteering in the US!”

#### *Looking for a new job*

The 27-year-old multi-talented athlete, who has also done very well in cross-country skiing, works as an astrophysicist at the University of Massachusetts, which is close to some great hills and woods. One of

the other US women ski orienteers also lives there, so they can train together. Alison's job is temporary, ending next September, and she is looking for a new post. "I hope I can end up somewhere with both good orienteering terrain and plenty of snow", she says.

*"How is it to work with the galaxies and combine that with sport at a high level?"*

"I study the star formations in local galaxies – by local I mean maybe the 1,000 nearest, still very far away. It's a full-time job and thus of course takes some time away from doing as much training as I would like. But luckily the hours are flexible, so it's fine if I train during the morning and then work late. Occasionally I have to travel to a telescope, recently Chile, soon Spain, and be at an observatory for a week or so, using the telescope all night. This changes my schedule a bit. I then wake up at 3 p.m., go for a run, eat dinner about 6 p.m., go observing 8 p.m. – 7 a.m., then sleep during the first part of the day. But, the observatories are usually at altitude, so I get a bit of altitude training in!"

*Aiming for top five*

*"What are your goals for the coming winter and summer seasons?"*

"I hope with my better preparation this year that I will be able to come in the top 5 in one of the World Cup races this winter. I'd be very, very happy with that! In the summer, I'd like to try for the top 15 in Sprint and the top 20 in the Long. At least, if those are the races I end up doing – the schedule doesn't look like it makes sense to try to do all three individual races at the World Championships in Lausanne."



Alison at the World Ski Orienteering Championships 2011.

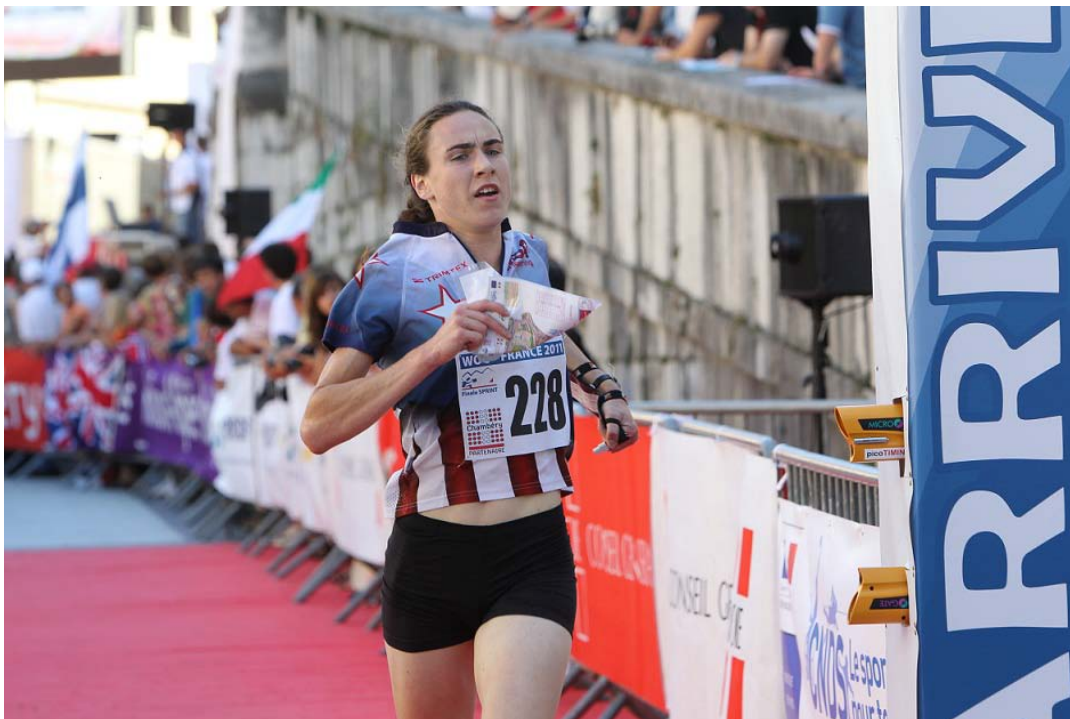
Just before the winter season really got under way, the American was 42<sup>nd</sup> in the World Rankings in ski orienteering. In foot orienteering her position is 63<sup>rd</sup>. However her ranking placings will undoubtedly improve when she takes part in more World Ranking and World Cup events.

*2,000 controls before July*

*“How are you planning to improve your standard from last winter and summer in ski and foot orienteering?”*

“Having now had one competitive season in SkiO, I know more about how to train. Since World Orienteering Championships in August I have been working hard to build up my upper body strength. Hopefully that will mean I can go faster uphill on the narrow trails, because I did not feel very strong on those last year. I am also training more on roller skis with my map board. Last year I kept wanting to hold the map with my hand as in foot orienteering, but that really slows you down when on skis!”

Although ski orienteering is the bigger focus right now, she will keep training her foot orienteering skills a little bit through the winter this year too, as many of the big races in the US are early in the spring. As last year, she has a goal to orienteer to 2,000 controls before the next World Championships. The idea is basically just to be out orienteering as much as possible: “Most of my orienteering training is at the weekends, at meets hosted by one of the local clubs within two hours’ drive. I’ll often do one of the beginner’s courses as Sprint training after running my first race. And then I also try to get one midweek session in with our small but quite dedicated local group of orienteers.”



Alison Crocker’s aim is to be among the 15 best at the World Orienteering Championships. Her best position so far is 27th in the World Championships Sprint in 2011.

*Likes the Mixed relay*

*“There’s a lot of debate right now about changes in the World Orienteering Championships (WOC) programme. How do you view the IOF proposals for a new programme?”*

“Personally I think it would be a shame to replace the middle qualification + final with the prologue + pursuit. It would really change things from the middle as it is, which is sort of the ultimate solo technical challenge. The pursuit sounds more like a relay leg, which would be exciting and require its own set of skills, but then again there is also the relay for that. The mixed sprint relay at the World Ski Orienteering Championships last year was a blast though! I think it would be great if something like that could be incorporated into WOC. So looking at the IOF November 2011 proposals, I’d be pretty fine with them except that I’d like to change the middle back to a qualification + final as opposed to prologue + chase. I know a first-to-the-finish race is desired, but adding a second relay does mean an extra race of that sort already. Also, being from a nation that would probably only get one spot to run in the Long Distance race will definitely change things – our team trial Long race will probably act a bit like our Long qualifier, or something like that!”

Anna Füzy, the MTB orienteer who was the Athlete of December, has two questions for Alison: *“Orienteering is your second sports career – you have done cross-country skiing earlier. Do you feel any handicap with the navigation, or is it easy for you? And – MTB orienteering technique is very similar to ski orienteering, and many ski orienteers are excellent MTB orienteers. Have you ever tried MTB orienteering?”*

“When I switched from skiing to orienteering I definitely had a lot to learn about navigation! It was nice coming in with the fitness from skiing, but I just had to be patient and try to make more and more sense of the maps. It was actually nice learning in southern England, where I started orienteering at the Oxford University Orienteering Club, because the maps aren’t very, very tricky. Then I moved to the eastern US and the areas are far more technical; I used to be scared of any map with lots of squiggly contours, but now I love them!”

“As for MTB orienteering, I haven’t actually ever tried it. We don’t have much MTB orienteering in the U.S. I’ve only seen it once, at a training weekend in New Hampshire and then I did wish I had a bike to give it a try, although I’m not an expert mountain-biker at all.”

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*Morihiro Horie from Japan is the Athlete of February. Alison’s questions for him: “Have you ever had to use the spare equipment stop in a SkiO race? If so, why and how far did you have to travel to it with one ski or pole?” And a second one: “How do you train for SkiO during the summer months? By foot orienteering? Roller skiing? Any fun drills? Have you ever done a roller SkiO race?”*