

Erik Lidström, a.k.a Lidas

I am a Swedish ski patroller from the north of Sweden, 300km north of the arctic circle. I started as a patroller here in Riksgränsen in 2015 and I bumped up to ski hill operations manager in 2018, and now I am our company's mountain manager. I run our two small ski hills with a total of 11 lifts and a staff of 65 people during high season. Ski patrol instructor since 2019.

I am also an alpine mountain rescue operator, licensed for winch rescue and trained in technical rope rescue operations in the Swedish mountain rescue organisation. I am also a volunteer in the local fire department. Doing emergency responding around Riksgränsen. As you might understand I have now dedicated my life to work with rescue and emergency responding.

I got asked to join the international team of patrollers for the 2022 Olympic winter games by my dear friend Marie Nordgren. Big warm thank you Marie!! She talked me into sending my application and so I did, and I am glad I did.

My experience with ski racing is that I had been competing in alpine skiing up until I turned 18. But I have never worked on any races before, so I really saw this as an opportunity to get more experience and learn from patrollers from all over our skiing world.

Together with two colleagues from Sweden, Johan af Ekenstam from Hemavan and Joakim Nordlund from Vemdalen we shipped out to Beijing, China through Milano, Italy. All ready when we left Sweden we started on our daily Covid test which would continue all through our stay.

First day at the venue we connected with four of our colleagues that were already in place and had been from early December. We got to go and ski around the ski area and learn how everything works. There is a long transport all the way from the top of the hill that takes you past all the racing and training slopes. The work was still going on with prepping, or should I say icing the race slopes.

At the top of the mountain the Downhill course starts and also the technical training slopes. A bit further down on two separate ridges is the technical Race and practice slopes and Speed practice slope. The finish areas is divided into two different places, the technical a bit further up the hill and the speed finish at the bottom, where we have our changing room and lunch office down below. The last stretch of the speed slope runs through a deep beautiful canyon with steep rockfaces on both sides. Beautiful scenery!

The first one and a half weeks in place at the venue we did a lot of practicing together. It was our opportunity to get to know one another better and see what challenges we had in terms of working over the country borders and cultures.

What I had learnt theoretically in advance was that ski patrollers all over the globe work pretty much the same way but with of course some differences. I could fast see and hear that we are talking the same professional language. Argentinians, Swedes, Canadians, Americans, the Scotts and the French. We all could take our training and experience and put it to use in the international groups and teams that were supposed to form the ski patrol on the Olympic races.

I was given the opportunity to be head of ski patrol during the races from day one. Starting out quiet "easily" with the men's downhill of course! But luckily we had a strong and knowledgeable team member from Canada, Sue Alder who had worked on the 2010 winter Olympics in Vancouver. She came and really taught us the tricks of the trade.

And that was really good since we didn't really have any documentation about how we were supposed to work during the races. But with Sue and Erik Hansson helping me sort it all out and when the international team of doctors arrived we finally got the medical guidelines from FIS we were ready to go.

I stationed our team along the slopes on specific medical stations that were pre planned by the organisation. Each team consisted of 2 international ski patrollers, 1 local ski patroller, 1 international doctor and one local doctor. The equipment we had to work with was excellent. We had cascade toboggans, the Legend, Harwell Medical EVAC-U-Splint Mattress, a smaller leg splint, some blankets and a big (stiff) cover to shield from snow.

It is a really steep and technical race slope for the downhill with some gnarly pitches like the White face, ("cliff-steep" Glacier hard) traversing section that ends with the respectable "Duen duen" jump (Do not trust my Chinese spelling or English for that matter). A couple of seconds later the racers would go full speed hard right turn down into the 38-degree steep top of "Haitoo Bowl" a wall of ice and snow!

Most of the crashes occurred here in Haitoo Bowl. Our tactic here was to have patrollers equipped with crampons and ice axes as well as power drills, ice stakes, slinges, carabiners, and rope. First patroller would go down fast on skies to evaluate the situation and if necessary call in more equipment and personal. Fastest way to secure the athlete on the steep and icy slope would be to drill down an ice stake with sling and carabiner.

We were never in need of using the rope in any of the situations. In Haitoo bowl the athlete's tended to slide down past the steepest sections which made it easier for us to work only on skis.

On the technical side of the venue for GS, S and combined the slopes were partly as steep and extreme as the downhill slope. Most of the incidents here were with side slippers involved before the actual competitions and during. On the top section I had some of the patrollers to be working with crampons and some with skis due to the steep and icy start of the hill.

We were well staffed on the technical races all along the racecourse but on a couple of the race days they ran both downhill / SG and a technical race the same day. This really pushed us to the limit with our number of patrollers, but we managed to staff it and keep a good alert / response level throughout it thanks to the tough and devoted crew.

Between the Olympics and Paralympics we said goodbye to the team of international doctors. We got some really good and helpful instructions from the head of the Chinese Para team. He would talk to us and be able to show us the tricks of the trade when it came to dealing with difficulties with an injured para-athlete. We also got to watch a digital lecture that our Argentinian colleagues had brought with them. All this was crucial to our work during the Paralympics.

During the races we saw some really hard and nerve-racking crashes where you would think that the athlete had broken every single bone possible in their body but instead they came out relatively unharmed.

After a long and interesting nearly 2 months in China we shipped out back to our home mountains again. Actually the night right after the races had ended, a well-earned pizza and a bottle of red wine was shared in Milano before our trip back to Sweden.

I want to send out a big thank you to all of the international team of patrollers who I had the pleasure of working with during the Olympics and Paralympics. A big special thank you goes out to my Swedish Colleagues in China. Johan af Ekenstam and Joakim Nordlund

Erik Hansson, for all your help and that you saw the potential in me in China.

Sue Elder, for all your expert knowledge and spotless start announcing during the races.

Zach Weinberg, for your expert guidance through the do's and don'ts in Chinese Culture.

A special thank also sent to the Chinese patrollers who showed us great skills and gave us a warm welcome on the venue.