

FIERLJEPPEN

Also known as pole leaping or dyke jumping originated in Friesland a province in the north of Holland.

Originally poachers used to jump the 'dykes' that surround every field, steal eggs from the land and jump back without being caught by the farmer.

In the 1950s this activity became competitive and evolved into the sport we know today.

There are a number of fierljeppen clubs in Holland each competing regularly in inter-club events and leagues. At certain times in the year there are big events like the NFM which is the 'open' championships, the Frisian championships and the Dutch championships where Friesland take on mainland Holland.

Belgium have a keen team of jumpers from a town called Hamont, they have their own site and appear every year at the NFM ... (for the beer....)

Japan are the latest recruits to this crazy sport and have built a site from plastic and tyres, it is hoped that they will soon be at a standard to make a challenge in the NFM.



VENUE

A venue for fierljeppen has to be purpose built. Any old canal just wouldn't do...either for safety reasons or for the standard of jumping.



A jetty stands out from the banking, approximately 2 meters above the water.

The water is 12 meters wide and has a very soft sand pit stretching for another 12 meters beyond.



In the water is a pole (which is really a lamppost !) 10 or 11 meters long and leaning towards the jetty.

During competition the jumper with the furthest distance from the jetty is the winner.

Marshals measure the jump from the rear-most mark in the sand to a tight string set at an accurate distance from the jetty, usually at 12 and 14 meters.

TECHNIQUE

Although looking like a strength sport, fierljeppen requires mainly technique and involves a fast run up, swift climbing and a final leap to the sand for extra distance.

To assist the climbing most fierljeppers wear rubber bicycle inner-tubes around their ankles, this along with sticky spray gives a good grip on the pole.

To achieve maximum distance and with consistency the pole has to be set exactly the same for each jump. A successful leap might encourage the fierljepper to adjust the pole by a mere 2 centimetres.

On the approach it is vital to keep focused on the pole and where it will be grabbed. It is easy to get distracted and glance down at the end of the jetty, this will lose rhythm and slow down the speed.

Upon grabbing the pole, legs are swung forward to gain the forward momentum and then back into position ready to climb. The underside of one foot is used and the top of the ankle+ shin on the other. Climbing usually lasts 3-4 seconds as the pole goes over, but the top jumpers can stall it at the vertical, gaining vital seconds and of course the big distances.

The current World record holder is Aart de Witte, who set an incredible 19m 40cm in 1991 and few people have got anywhere near since.

In comparison the British record is 14m 29cm set by Andy Chattaway in 1997. A long way off but the Dutch did say that an Englishman would never jump 14 metres !