



INTERNATIONAL  
OLYMPIC  
COMMITTEE

# FACTSHEET

## THE OLYMPIC TORCH RELAY

### UPDATE – OCTOBER 2011

## THE OLYMPIC FLAME AND TORCH RELAY

### ORIGINS AND VALUES

The Ancient Greeks considered fire to be a divine element, and they maintained perpetual fires in front of their principal temples. This was the case in the sanctuary of Olympia, where the Ancient Olympic Games took place. The flame was lit using the rays of the sun, to ensure its purity, and a skaphia, the ancestor of the parabolic mirror used today for lighting the Olympic flame. A flame burned permanently on the altar of the goddess Hestia, and such fires were also lit on the altars of Zeus and Hera, in front of whose temple the Olympic flame is lit today.

In the context of the modern Games, the Olympic flame represents the positive values that Man has always associated with fire. The purity of the flame is guaranteed by the way it is lit using the sun's rays. The choice of Olympia as a departure point emphasises the link between the Ancient and Modern Games and underlines the profound connection between these two events.

### CEREMONIALS

A relay precedes the arrival of the flame at its final destination: the Olympic stadium in the host city of the Olympic Games. The Organising committee of the Olympic Games is responsible for bringing the Olympic flame to the Olympic stadium (Olympic Charter, Rule 55). When the flame finally arrives at its destination, the final torchbearer(s) will run into the stadium to light the Olympic cauldron with the flame, which remains lit for the duration of the Games and is extinguished only at the Closing Ceremony of the Games.

Like the messengers who proclaimed the sacred Olympic truce, the runners who carry the Olympic flame carry a message of peace on their journey.

## HISTORY OF THE FIRST TORCH RELAYS – SUMMER AND WINTER

The Olympic flame is the flame which is kindled in Olympia under the authority of the IOC (Olympic Charter (Rule 13)). Although a symbolic fire had already been used as early as the 1928 Games in Amsterdam, the Olympic flame's modern history begins with a proposal by Carl Diem, Secretary General of the Organising Committee of the Games of the XI Olympiad. Inspired by torch races that were held in ancient Greek times, Diem suggested that for the 1936 Summer Games a Flame be lit in Olympia and transported to Berlin for what would be the first Olympic torch relay. It marked the start of what is now an Olympic tradition.

Over the years, torches used to carry the Flame have been created for each celebration of the Games and the Torch relays that have brought it from Olympia to an Olympic host city have become one of the most symbolic events associated with the Games.

### OLYMPIC WINTER GAMES

In the case of the Olympic Winter Games the Olympic flame has a slightly different historical timeline. Similar to the Summer Games it was a symbolic fire that was first used, but not until 1936 in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany. In the context of the **Winter Games**, the first relay took place during the **1952 Games in Oslo**. This first relay did not start in Olympia, Greece, but in the valley of Morgedal in Norway. The region, considered as the birthplace of skiing, was chosen as a reminder of the origins of this sport. The flame was lit in the hearth of the chalet belonging to Sondre Norheim, a legendary figure in Norwegian skiing.

At the Winter Games in Cortina d'Ampezzo in 1956, the flame was lit in front of the Capitole in



Rome, as the city had been elected host of the Games of the XVII Olympiad. The tripod used for the ceremony was sent from Olympia. At the Winter Games in Squaw Valley in 1960, the flame was once again lit in Norway, at Sondre Norheim's chalet. The inscription on the torch "Olympia to Squaw Valley" is a reference to an attempt to start the relay in Olympia, which did not succeed as the time period was too restricted. Since the **Innsbruck Games in 1964, the relay for the Winter Games has begun in Olympia.**

The arrival of the Olympic flame at the Opening Ceremony of the Games in Turin in 2006 was much more than a protocol element indicating the start of a new edition of the Games. It also represented the end of a unique journey. Carried over 11,000 kilometres, the flame travelled through all the Italian provinces, Sicily and Sardinia, and also in San Marino before going back to the Alps and making a symbolic diversion through the French towns of Grenoble and Albertville, which hosted the Games in 1968 and 1992. The torch relay also visited the alpine countries of Slovenia, Austria, and Switzerland.

## **ITINERARY OF THE RELAY - BASIC ROUTE**

Choosing a route for a relay is not as easy as drawing a straight line between Olympia and the Olympic stadium of the host city of the Games! Each relay has its own "flavour" and enables people from all over the world to discover the history and culture of the host city and country.

**From Olympia to Athens ...** the organisation of the lighting of the flame in Olympia is always handled by the Hellenic Olympic Committee (HOC). This Committee also organises the transport of the flame by runners to Athens or, more precisely, to the ancient Panathinaiko stadium which was used for the 1896 Games.

**From Athens to the host city...** the rest of the relay to the host city of the Games is handled by the Olympic Games Organising Committee (OCOG). The Committee chooses the theme and vision of the relay, which helps them determine the cities towns, regions and monuments to be visited and the different

modes of transport. The following are some examples of themes which have influenced the itineraries of the flame.

## **THEMATIC ROUTES – SOME EXAMPLES OF SIGNIFICANT RELAYS**

### **The relay of peace – London 1948**

In a Europe sorely afflicted by the war, the 1948 relay carried a welcome message of peace. The first runner, Corporal Dimitrelis, took off his military uniform before carrying the flame, commemorating the sacred truce observed in Ancient Greece. The planned route highlighted border crossings, where festivities were organised to celebrate the return of peace. In homage to the restorer of the Olympic Games, the relay passed through Lausanne, Switzerland and a ceremony was organised at Pierre de Coubertin's tomb in the Bois-de-Vaux cemetery.

### **The ancient Relay – Rome 1960**

The relay shone the spotlight on the two poles of classical civilisation: Athens and Rome. Lesser-known ancient sites in Greece and Italy were thus brought to the public's attention. For the first time, the relay was televised and the event closely followed by the media.

### **The relay to the New World – Mexico City 1968**

The relay retraced the steps of Christopher Columbus to the New World. The idea was to underline the link between Mediterranean and Latin-American civilisations and between ancient (Greco-Latin) and Pre-Hispanic civilisations. A direct descendant of the great navigator, Cristóbal Colón de Carbajal, was the last runner on Spanish soil. The Olympic flame made a stop at the Great Pyramid of the Moon in Teotihuacan. A "New Fire" ceremony was organised which, in the Aztec tradition, was celebrated to mark the end of a 52-year cycle. The reappearance of the sun at dawn symbolised the renewal of the world.

### **The Korean relay "Harmony and progress"– Seoul 1988**

The relay showcased the traditions of Korea. Its route, which was a zigzag from east to west, symbolised the harmony to be found in the



balance between two opposite poles. Some of the torchbearers did not wear the official uniform provided by the Games Organising Committee, but instead wore regional or traditional costumes.

#### **The “Down Under” relay – Sydney 2000**

The relay had a twofold goal: to situate Australia within Oceania and to promote the culture and heritage of the different regions in the country. The Torch relay visited 12 Oceanic countries before it arrived in Australia. The start of the relay on the Australian continent was in the “red centre” at Uluru (Ayer’s Rock), a sacred site for the indigenous population. The Aboriginal athlete Nova Peris-Kneebone, Olympic field hockey champion, was the first runner in the relay. The enthusiasm of the crowd along the relay route grew bigger and bigger. One million spectators welcomed the arrival of the flame in Sydney. In a ceremony which recalled the elements used in the design of the torch (fire, water, earth), Cathy Freeman “walked on water” before lighting a circle of fire which revealed itself to be the monumental cauldron.

#### **ORIGINALITY OF TRANSPORTATION**

Traditionally, relays have been carried out on foot (for Berlin 1936, London 1948 and Moscow 1980 the relays were entirely run in this way). Although at the beginning, runners were mainly selected from amongst athletes, gradually the general public began to participate as well. As the celebration of the Olympic Games has evolved, the Olympic torch relay also did. The **modes of transport** have slowly become more and more diversified, not only for practical reasons, but also to showcase the particularities of the regions crossed.

**The flame in the snow!** Legendary Norwegian skiers (or their descendants) carried out the entirety of the transport of the flame (Oslo 1952). The flame went into the Arctic Circle at Inuvik, with stages carried out by snow-bike and skidoo (Calgary 1988).

**The flame in the water, on the water and under water!** In the sea off Veracruz, Mexico, swimmers carried the flame from the boat *Durango* to the shore (Mexico 1968). A diver swam across the port of Marseilles holding the

flame out of the water (Grenoble 1968). The flame travelled on the frigate *Cataluña* for the passage between Greece and Spain and arrived on Spanish soil in Empuries, the gateway to Greek civilisation on the Iberian peninsula (circa 600 B.C.) (Barcelona 1992). A diver even carried the flame under water at the Great Barrier Reef (Sydney 2000). And in Venice, a Gondola was used to cross the Canal Grande (Torino 2006).

#### **The flame in the air, through the air and in space!**

The flame made its first trip in an aeroplane (Oslo 1952). It later traveled faster than the speed of sound on its journey from Athens to Paris – aboard the Concorde! (Albertville 1992). The wonders of technology were highlighted when the Canadians organized the transmission of the flame by satellite between Athens and Ottawa (Montreal 1976). For the first time in the history of the Olympics, the transfer of the flame took place between two parachute jumpers (Lillehammer 1994). It also made an impressive entry at the opening ceremony of the Games, carried by a ski jumper during his actual jump! (Lillehammer 1994). The torch (but not the flame) was carried into space by astronauts (Atlanta 1996 and Sydney 2000).

**The flame on horseback and on a camel!** To mark the fact that the equestrian events were held separately from the other Olympic events, the torchbearers for the journey of the flame from Kastrup (Denmark) to Stockholm carried the flame entirely on horseback (Melbourne/Stockholm 1956). Horses played a special role again when the history of the Pony express was featured as a part of a torch relay (Atlanta 1996). They were replaced by camels when the flame crossed the Australian desert (Sydney 2000).

**The flame and the Wild West! For the Olympic Games in Atlanta in 1996,** the modes of transport that were used bring to mind great moments in American history. For example, the flame traveled in an Indian canoe, on a Mississippi steamboat, and on a wagon of the Union Pacific (the first transcontinental railroad) (Atlanta 1996).



## RELAYS FACTS AND FIGURES AT A GLANCE

### SUMMER GAMES

#### Berlin 1936

- Number of torchbearers: 3 331.
- Total distance: 3 187 km (including special stages in Kiel and Grünau).
- Countries crossed: Greece, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Germany.

#### London 1948

- Number of torchbearers: 1 416 (sources may differ).
- Total distance: 3 365 km.
- Countries crossed: Greece, Italy, Switzerland, France, Luxembourg, Belgium, and England.

#### Helsinki 1952

- Number of torchbearers: 3 372.
- Total distance: 7 870 km (4 725 km for the overland transport).
- Countries crossed: Greece, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland.

#### Melbourne 1956

- Number of torchbearers: unknown.
- Total distance: 20 470 km (including air transport), distance covered on foot: 4 912 km.
- Countries crossed: Greece, Australia with stopovers in Calcutta, Bangkok, Singapore, and Djakarta.

#### Stockholm 1956 (Equestrian Games)

- Number of torchbearers: 330 runners in Greece and approx. 160 horse riders in Denmark and Sweden.
- Total distance: ~350 km by foot. Distance by horse uncertain.
- Countries crossed: Greece, Denmark, and Sweden

#### Rome 1960

- Number of torchbearers: 1 529.
- Total distance: ~2 750 km (distance covered by foot 1 863 km).
- Countries crossed: Greece, Italy.

#### Tokyo 1964

- Number of torchbearers 101 866 (this high number is explained by the fact that in Japan, 1km was covered by the bearer of the flame, two reserve runners and up to 20 accompanying people)
- Total distance: 26 065 km (including air transport), distance covered by foot: 7 487 km.
- Countries crossed: from Greece, Turkey, Lebanon, Iran, Pakistan, India, Burma, Thailand, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Taiwan. Three routes and two others flames lit with the sacred one inside Japan.

#### Mexico 1968

- Number of torchbearers: 2 778.
- Total distance: 13 620 km (including transport by boat), distance covered by foot: ~2 500 km.
- Countries crossed: Greece, Italy, Spain, Canary Islands, San Salvador, and Mexico.

#### Munich 1972

- Number of torchbearers: ~ 6 000.
- Total distance: 5 532 km.
- Countries crossed Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Austria, and West Germany.

#### Montreal 1976

- Number of torchbearers: approx. 1 214.
- Total distance: 775 km.
- Countries crossed: Greece, Canada

#### Moscow 1980

- Number of torchbearers: ~ 5 000.
- Total distance: 4 915 km.
- Countries crossed: Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, and USSR.

#### Los Angeles 1984

- Number of torchbearers: 3 636.
- Total distance: 15 000 km.
- Countries crossed: only United States.

#### Seoul 1988

- Number of torchbearers: 20 899 (including escort).
- Total distance: 15 250 (including air transport)
- Countries crossed: Greece, Korea.

#### Barcelona 1992

- Number of torchbearers: 10 448 (599 cyclists)



- Total distance: 6 307 km (including transport by boat).
- Countries crossed: Greece, Spain.

#### **Atlanta 1996**

- Number of torchbearers: 12 467.
- Total distance: 26 875 km.
- Countries crossed: Greece, United States.

In honor of the Centennial Olympic Games, the HOC held a celebration as the flame was brought into the Panathinaiko Stadium. This celebration of Greek traditions and the re-enactment of the first modern Olympic Games in 1896 concluded as representatives from 17 cities that had previously hosted the Olympic Games each received a safety lantern, lit from the sacred Olympic flame. During the next 21 days, these flames were celebrated in each former host city while the original flame burned in Athens.

#### **Sydney 2000**

- Number of torchbearers: 800 (Greece), 1 500 (Oceania), 11 000 (Australia)
- Total distance: 27 000 km in Australia.
- Countries crossed: Greece, Guam, Palau, Micronesia, Salomon Islands, Samoa, Cook Islands, Fiji, New Zealand, and Australia.

#### **Athens 2004**

- Number of torchbearers approx. 7 700 (Greece), approx. 3 600 (internationally)
- Total distance over 78 000 km
- Countries crossed Greece, plus international route covering all five continents and visiting all previous Summer Games host cities. The Torch Relay travelled along the following route: Ancient Olympia, Athens, Sydney, Melbourne, Tokyo, Seoul, Beijing, Delhi, Cairo, Cape Town, Rio de Janeiro, Mexico City, Los Angeles, St. Louis, Atlanta, New York, Montreal, Antwerp, Brussels, Amsterdam, Geneva, Lausanne, Paris, London, Barcelona, Rome, Munich, Berlin, Stockholm, Helsinki, Moscow, Kiev, Istanbul, Sofia and Nicosia.

#### **Beijing 2008**

- Number of torchbearers: 21 800
- Total distance: 137 000 km during 129 days.
- Cities visited: Almaty, Istanbul, St. Petersburg, London, Paris, San Francisco, Buenos Aires, Dar es Salaam, Muscat, Islamabad, New Delhi, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta, Canberra, The Olympic Torch Relay / October 2011

Nagano, Seoul, Pyongyang, Ho Chi Minh City, Macao. The 2008 Olympic Flame also reached the summit of Mount Everest.

#### **London 2012**

- Number of torchbearers: 8000 (UK)
  - Duration 70 day, from the 19 May to the 27 July 2012.
- The Olympic flame is lit in Ancient Olympia, Greece, and arrives in the UK on 18 May 2012.

Representing peace, unity and friendship, the Flame will be carried by 8,000 inspirational Torchbearers during the Olympic Torch Relay. The London 2012 Olympic Torch Relay will focus on the nation's youth with a large percentage of the torchbearers being 18 years and under.

As it makes its way across the UK on a 70-day journey it will bring the excitement of the Games to everyone. The Olympic Flame will travel to within an hour of 95 per cent of people in the UK, Isle of Man, Guernsey and Jersey during the 70-day Olympic Torch Relay

The Olympic Torch Relay will help shine a light on the whole of the UK – from dynamic urban areas to places of outstanding natural beauty. Evening celebrations in towns and cities will show off the best of the local area, bringing people together to mark the Olympic Flame's arrival.

Coca-Cola, Lloyds TSB and Samsung are the three Presenting Partners of the Olympic Torch Relay.

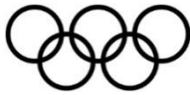
## **WINTER GAMES**

#### **Garmisch-Partenkirchen 1936**

For the first time at an edition of the Olympic Winter Games a symbolic fire was lit. A symbolic fire was also used a second time in 1948 for the Olympic Winter Games in St. Moritz.

#### **Oslo 1952**

- Number of torchbearers 94 (skiers).
- Total distance ~ 225 km.
- Countries crossed Norway, departure from Morgedal, valley in the Telemark region, Oslo.



### **Cortina d'Ampezzo 1956**

- Number of torchbearers: unknown
  - Total distance: unknown
  - Countries crossed Greece, Italy
- The flame used for the Torch relay was again a symbolic rather than Olympic one. This time it was lit at the Temple of Jupiter at the Capital in Rome.

### **1960 Squaw Valley**

- Number of torchbearers: +600
  - Total distance: not available
  - Countries crossed: Norway, United States.
- A symbolic Nordic flame was again lit in the hearth of the Morgedal House in Norway, birthplace of Sondre Norheim, the great pioneer of modern skiing. From there it was sent across the Atlantic and on to Squaw Valley by torch relay

### **Innsbruck 1964**

- Number of torchbearers: unknown.
- Total distance: unknown.
- Countries crossed: Greece, Austria.

### **Grenoble 1968**

- Number of torchbearers: ~5 000.
  - Total distance: 7 222 km.
  - Countries crossed: Greece, France.
- Organizers added their own unique touch to the final leg of the Olympic Torch relay by rigging a microphone to the chest of the torchbearer, Alain Calmat. As Calmat mounted the steps to the Olympic cauldron the sound of his heartbeat could be heard throughout the stadium.

### **Sapporo 1972**

- Number of torchbearers: 16 200.
- Total distance: 4 735 km in Japan, 335 km in Greece
- Countries crossed: Greece, Japan.

### **Innsbruck 1976**

- Number of torchbearers: unknown.
  - Total distance: 1 590 km divided in two routes
  - Countries crossed: Greece, Austria.
- To celebrate the fact that the Olympic Winter Games were being held for a second time in Innsbruck there were two Olympic cauldrons – one for 1964 and one for 1976.

### **Lake Placid 1980**

- Total distance: 12 824 km (of which 1600 km in the USA).
- Countries crossed: Greece, USA (from Langley, Virginia to Lake Placid, New York State).
- Number of torchbearers 52 (26 men and 26 women representing the different states of America, the District of Columbia and the town of Lake Placid) A total of only 52 torchbearers, both male and female, who best exemplified the ancient Greek ideal of the 'whole man' were selected to carry the Torch for the 1980 Olympic Winter Games Torch relay. Each torchbearer carried the torch multiple times on the 1,600km national leg of the relay route.

### **Sarajevo 1984:**

- Number of torchbearers: 1 600.
- Total distance: 5 289 km in Yugoslavia (2 602 and 2 687 km) figures not provided for Greece. A second flame was created from the original sacred one and the relay was divided and conducted in two separate routes from Dubrovnik to Sarajevo.
- Countries crossed: Greece, Yugoslavia.

### **Calgary 1988**

- Number of torchbearers: ~ 7 342.
- Total distance: 18 000 km in Canada, figures not provided for Greece.
- Countries crossed: Greece, Canada.
- The torchbearer selection process for Calgary made history for the time by becoming the largest contest of its kind in Canada. Almost 7 million entries were received to fill the approximately 7,000 slots to carry the Flame for a distance of 1km.

### **Albertville 1992**

- Number of torchbearers: ~ 5 500.
- Total distance: approx. 5 700 km in France, figures not provided for Greece.
- Countries crossed: Greece, France

### **Lillehammer 1994**

- Number of torchbearers: unknown.
  - Total distance: approx. 6 000 km.
  - Countries crossed Greece, Germany, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and Norway.
- The Olympic torch took to the air when the third to last torchbearer, Stein Gruben, leapt from a



ski jump while holding the lit torch. The fact that this feat was not an easy one was proven when the original designated jumper, Ole Gunnar Fidjestol, injured himself during a rehearsal and had to be replaced by Gruben. A separate 'non-Olympic' relay using a Nordic flame lit at Morgedal was also held but it was the Olympic flame from the official Olympic Torch relay that burned in the Olympic cauldron for the duration of the Games.

### **Nagano 1998**

- Number of torchbearers: 6 901.
- Total distance: approx. 1 162 km, figures not provided for Greece. The flame was split into three and carried along separate routes.
- Countries crossed: Greece, Japan

### **Salt Lake City 2002**

- Number of torchbearers: 12 012
  - Total distance: 21 725 km.
  - Countries crossed: Greece, United States.
- For the first time in Winter Games history it was an entire team - the 1980 U.S. men's gold medal winning ice hockey team - who were selected to light the Olympic cauldron. The cauldron reflected the 'Light the Fire Within' theme of the Games with its unique design that had the Flame burning within rather than atop the unique triangular shaped glass cauldron.

### **Torino 2006**

- Number of torchbearers: 10 001.
- Total distance: 11 300 km.
- Countries crossed: Greece, France (to former Olympic Winter Games host cities Albertville and Grenoble), San Marino, Slovenia, Austria, and Switzerland Italy.

### **Vancouver 2010**

- Number of torchbearers: ~ 12 000.
  - Total distance: ~ 45 000 km.
  - Countries crossed: Greece, Canada
- This edition of the Olympic Torch Relay was the longest national relay ever held. The flame was lit in Olympia on 22 October 2009 and from 30 October 2009 until the 12 February 2010, the Olympic Flame visited over 1 000 communities and place of interests in Canada,
- Over 100 days in length.
  - Nearly 200 celebrations hosted by communities in every province and territory.

- Approximately 90 per cent of Canada's population was within a one-hour drive of experiencing the Olympic Flame.
- Extensive tour of the North including a planned visit to Alert, Nunavut, the northernmost permanently inhabited community in the world.

---

## **IMPRINT**

### **THE OLYMPIC TORCH RELAY**

October 2011

---

A publication of the

For further information, please contact



INTERNATIONAL  
OLYMPIC  
COMMITTEE

Château de Vidy,  
1007 Lausanne,  
Switzerland

Olympic Studies Centre  
Tel. + 00 41 21 621 66 22  
Fax + 00 41 21 621 65 12  
[studies\\_centre@olympic.org](mailto:studies_centre@olympic.org)