



# TYNESIDE LOIPERS

The NorthEast's Specialist  
Cross Country Ski Club

Newsletter  
April/May 2005



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### Club Events

Thurs 19<sup>th</sup> May, 7.30pm End of Season Meet at Frank's house  
May, June, July (tba) Evening bike ride, evening walk/pub meal, etc.  
 (see page 4)

*Other events – see page 4.*

### **End of Season Meet – Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> May at Frank's House from 7.30pm**

This is our usual end of season social get-together. Come along to Frank's house and find out what everyone has been doing this season. Bring your photos and slides and have a natter with other members over a glass of wine (provide by the club). We will be showing some great slides of this year's club trip to Norway.

Venue: 4 Field Lane, Heworth (about 600 metres from Heworth metro station).

Contact Frank Cauley (tel. 0191 438 0249) for further directions, or to check what food to bring.

**Alasdair Wilson (Chairman/Race Officer)**  
**Paul Gaines (Secretary)**  
**Paul Jameson (Treasurer)**  
**Alan Mitcham (Membership/Newsletter)**  
**Jackie Paice (Committee member)**

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## Apologies!

My third attempt at starting the newsletter – humble apologies to all readers!! This year has been more than usually hectic for me... 5½ weeks in New Zealand, one week skiing in Austria, one weekend in Scotland, days away on business, and so on. Had I been more organised, the newsletter would have been out in January! Nevertheless the trip to New Zealand was great and so were the ski holiday in Austria and the club weekend in Scotland (more of that on page 14).

## **Editorial Musings**

Well the snow finally came (end of February) and I am told it was the best for 20 years. News of the big snowfall reached us in New Zealand and I gently cursed my bad luck missing this rare skiing opportunity in Northumberland. I trust everyone else managed to get out and enjoy some good skiing. Charlie Fisher apparently had some great skiing in the Cheviots and at Yad Moss (see page 10) and others have mentioned being out skiing at Kielder and Allenheads.

We had plenty of good snow for the club trip to Norway (report on page 5). Scandinavia got large falls of early season snow but Spring seems to be coming earlier and earlier and conditions were certainly warmer than ideal.

The global warming debate goes on and the world seems to be divided between the seriously concerned minority (me for one) and those who don't care and the global warming sceptics (the US oil companies and their so-called experts). My latest evening class is on Quaternary Science – all about the Ice Ages and climate change of the last 2 million years!

## **Member News (now a bit out of date!)**

Heather Dickinson went back to the Goms valley in Switzerland (her annual New Year trip) and had a great week of track skiing. Charlie Fisher was not so lucky in Bregenzerwald (Austria) in the New Year – weather too mild and the loipen fading fast by the end of the week (well above zero, even at 800m plus).

Neil Aitchison was leading for Waymark in Norway over the New Year (good snow, I believe) and was back leading again, in the Rondane in late March.

Congratulations to Alasdair who did the Engadine Marathon in 3 hours 8 minutes and to Helen Dickinson who finished in 3 hours 45 minutes (4<sup>th</sup> British woman, out of 21). Alasdair also did the World Masters at end of February (held this year at Krasnogorsk, near Moscow). He competed in the 15 and 30 km freestyle events and also did the 45km classic. Alasdair's wife Dorothy also went along and has promised an article for the next newsletter.

Vivienne Brown and Harry Hall have been to Norway (twice) including hut touring on their own over the Easter holidays.

Several people skied in Austria. Pam and I found ourselves at a small resort called Hochkonig-Winterreich and had some great piste skiing (probably the best snow in the Alps in January) although with a notable absence of other telemarker skiers – I was the only one! Returning home through Amsterdam we bumped into Rich Hopkins who many of you will remember as a TL member until recently. Rich is still with the Royal Marines and has just been promoted to a C/O post at a small RM unit near Exeter.

Paul Gaines has just returned from 2 weeks of great telemark skiing in Fernie (British Columbia). After arriving to only thin snow cover, they had fresh dumps of fabulous powder snow each day. This could be the place to go and live for the best of off-piste powder skiing! During this winter Paul completed his Winter Mountain Leader training and spent some good weekends in Scotland including an overnight spent in a snow hole. Apparently very comfortable – do ask Paul about building snow holes!

John Starbuck (TL's most adventurous member) is due to go again to Greenland, to ski Gunnbjorns Fjeld, the highest peak in the Arctic Circle. His trip there last year met with nighttime temperatures down to -43°C (camping) and too low even for the climbing skins (the glue didn't work).

Peter Quigley joined up with a team of fellow skiers aiming to ski one million vertical metres to raise funds for the British Heart Foundation. Over a 3-day weekend in March, skiing successive days at Chamonix, Verbier and Courmayeur, Peter's personal target was 25,000 metres. In fact he skied 27,142 metres of descent (all on telemark skis) and raised over £1,300. Well done, Peter – was I supposed also to print the bit about knackered knees?

If anyone wishes to make a late donation to the BHF, contact Peter on 01207 542723 or e-mail: [peter.quigley@virgin.net](mailto:peter.quigley@virgin.net)

### SnowSport England – Tyneside Loipers Affiliation

This was the main issue that was discussed at the Loipers AGM last October. TL policy has always been to affiliate to the national governing body (previously the English Ski Council, now SnowSport England). However we defaulted at the end of 2002 (an oversight) and failed to pay our affiliation fee. It was agreed at the AGM that we would re-affiliate with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2005; however we then found that, since 2002, the affiliation fees had increased very significantly to £6.50 per full member.

Clearly we cannot afford to rejoin the national governing body when the affiliation fees amount to £6.50 per member (out of a full TL membership fee of only £10).

The committee have since met and discussed the subject at length. The SSE affiliation fees are largely governed by the cost of insurance; membership of SSE confers 3<sup>rd</sup> party insurance cover for all TL events (skiing and non-skiing events alike) and the cost of this insurance has increased dramatically in the past 2 years.

It is the opinion of the committee that we should rejoin SSE. This is the only way we can continue to enjoy the benefits of the training events organised by the SSE Nordic committee and the only way in which the club can influence the development of the sport in the UK. However this will necessarily require an increase in the membership fee. With the full information now available, this will put this to the membership at the next AGM in October – we hope you will support us in our efforts to develop the club. The committee are also looking into other ways of developing TL by updating the constitution and taking on the latest standards recommended by Sport England. In the long run, this may help us to attract local authority support, increase the membership of the club and increase the range of events that we can offer.

## **Summer Events**

We would like to organise one or two bike rides and/or evening walks ending with a meal in a convenient pub. Last year we managed an all day bike ride (coastal) and an evening bike ride (Morpeth/Mitford area) and also an evening walk (Riding Mill) – all really enjoyable.

Jackie has promised to organise an evening bike ride from Tyne Quay across to South Shields (for fish and chips) via the Tyne Cycle Tunnel and back via the ferry with a few miles of cycle paths in between and good pub to finish! Date to be confirmed, provisionally Thurs 9<sup>th</sup> June.

I am tempted to suggest also a full day bike ride (about 40 miles) starting and finishing near Consett taking in part of the C2C cycle route (probable date: late June or early July). This is a fine route and gives fairly easy cycling on well-surfaced paths and disused railways. If this appeals to you, please let me know.

Any suggestions or offers of help (walks or cycle rides) would be much appreciated. Volunteers will be sought, willing or otherwise! Bring your ideas to the end-of-season meet, or give me a call (01661 8239600) and I will coordinate everything.

## **Roller Skiing**

The Lakeland XC Ski Club are organising two roller ski events to which we are cordially invited.

On Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> June, they are doing a 7-mile route from Connah's Quay (near Chester) into Chester itself – all off road with a good track (smooth and wide) ideal for either classic or skating technique. Return by the same route (14 miles in total) or return by train.

On Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> August, they will be doing a route from Camerton (near Cockermouth) along disused railway lines to Workington and then along the coast below the cliffs to Whitehaven (manily off-road and well-surfaced cycle paths) 11 miles each way but with a preferred option returning by train. This route is more suitable for classic rather than skating technique.

Contact me (Alan Mitcham) for more details, or contact Mike Smith of the Lakeland club – phone: 015395 64742 or email: [mike.d.smith@tinyworld.co.uk](mailto:mike.d.smith@tinyworld.co.uk). Hire of roller skis and boots can be arranged for these events if sufficient notice is given to Mike Smith.

## **Nordic Downhill and Telemark Ski Coaching at Pendle, Lancashire (10/11<sup>th</sup> Sept 2005)**

This is a course run by Snowsport England (similar to the successful courses we have run for several years at Silksworth Ski Centre). It promises a high standard of coaching in several groups with up to 10 hours over the weekend – a proven and recommended format with much opportunity for personal improvement using video feedback where appropriate.

Contact Stephen Johns on 01772 654319, or see further information sent out with this newsletter.

## **Chamonix 2006 - New Club Venue for Next Year?!?**

The Glenfeshie weekend was a great success (full story on page 14). But one or two loipers have suggested a club trip to the Alps for next year. Now that EasyJet is flying direct from Newcastle to Geneva, this seems a good idea. Perhaps we can arrange a three- or four-day weekend in the Chamonix valley with options for cross-country and telemark. Transfers from Geneva to Chamonix are easily arranged and there is a good free bus service along the valley during the ski season.

If anyone has any better ideas, or suggestions for accommodation (cheap hotel or an apartment) please do let us know.

## **TL Club Trip to Norway 2005**

Heather, Charlie and Alan are just back from this year's Norway trip. It was a great trip and we have some great photos (watch out for the slide show at the end-of-season meet on 19<sup>th</sup> May)! Focusing on the Jotunheimen area, we had some pretty good weather and mostly good snow. Once again we stayed in the DNT huts including a 3-day stay in the unstaffed hut at Glitterheim, from where we skied up Norway's 2<sup>nd</sup> highest mountain Glittertind (2465m). Several other days were equally challenging as we took some interesting routes (away from the marked routes between huts) going over high cols and glaciers.

Heather (the statistician!) has worked out that in 8 days we skied 155km and climbed 4700m. (Charlie and Alan did another 90km in the 5 days before that.) If you would like to hear more about the Norway trip (or think you may be interested to join us another year), do come along to the end-of-season meet on the 19<sup>th</sup>.

## **Skiing To the South Pole!**

Readers will no doubt have heard of the story of Hilary and Conrad Dickinson from Hexham who were well feted by the national press and TV in January and February. Together they became the first British couple to ski to the south pole and Hilary the oldest British woman. Skiing with one other couple (Danish?), they were otherwise unsupported. Pulling sledges weighing 115 to 135kg each at the start, they took 52 days to get from Hercules Inlet to the South Pole (often up to 9 hours pulling per day). On the return journey, they were able to harness the power of the wind and returned in only 17 days using traction kites and being pulled on alpine skis, covering distances of up to 104 nautical miles in one day!

It is a great story of adventure and endurance with no doubt lots of discomfort and hardship. Hilary talks about it in the *Tynedale Harriers* club newsletter – 'Antactica is remarkably beautiful, sometimes pure blue skies – 24 hours per day in their 'summer', circular rainbows called Sun Dogs, ferocious storms or sudden ice fogs which roll in as if across the sea'.

I have had the pleasure of two weeks telemark skiing with Hilary and Conrad in Norway and France and they certainly deserve their success. What next, after Antarctica?? TL club trip to Norway seems almost like a walk in the park.

Alan Mitcham



29 January 2005 – Glenfeshie W/E  
At the top of the ski area with  
Cairngorm summit just ahead of us –  
skiing on hard lumpy ice nodules the  
size of tennis balls!  
(photo: Nuala Wright)



**29 January 2005 – Glenfeshie Weekend**  
Stunning Views across Loch Morlich in the late afternoon (photo: Nuala Wright)

## An introduction to mountaineering - the Club Alpin Francais way

The Club Alpin Francais's "Introduction to Mountaineering Course" claimed to be designed for experienced walkers with little or no mountaineering experience who wanted to go higher in the mountains – that's me! So here I am in a very small bus winding up a single track road carved out of the mountainside to La Berade, a tiny hamlet in the Parc National des Ecrins. The Tour de France is in the area this week and the narrow road is awash with cyclists emulating their heroes. The bus driver generously pulls off the road to let those swooping down skim past and I try not to look at the drop just inches from the wheels. In retrospect, the bus trip provided a good introduction to what was to be a recurring theme of the week: fear!

Later that evening I meet up with the rest of the group – four men and one other woman, Julie – and our instructor, Jean. He seems rather surprised to find that none of us have any mountaineering experience but soon recovers to rattle off a list of peaks we will tackle during the week. "And tomorrow we'll go climbing". Climbing? I've never climbed in my life before. There was no mention of this in the course description. I start feeling slightly apprehensive.

Day 1 sees us setting off to the local cliff. A quick survey shows that all the guys have done some climbing during their military service, leaving only myself and Julie as complete novices. But it soon becomes apparent that Jean has no intention of teaching us how to climb. The climbing is merely a means to an end; the end in this case being to learn how to use ropes. If we fall off the cliff, all the better – it will be a chance to test our rope work.

I am paired with Pascal, an ex-army forester from Val d'Isere who spends his 14-hour working days walking up mountains in order to cut down trees. Although his climbing isn't the most stylish, he makes up for this through pure muscle. Pascal kindly leaves the rope in place for me to follow, but Jean has other ideas. "But Helen, aren't you going to lead? You need to practise these things". I feel that practising climbing might be a good starting point. But the cliff turns out to be not as bad as it looks. Apart from a lengthy halt half way up, while I pluck up courage to tackle a difficult bit, it is do-able. As I get to the top the endorphins kick in and I decide that climbing is fantastic. I love it! And for the rest of the day I get to the top of each climb with a huge smile of achievement on my face. Although perhaps it's more of a smile of relief at still being attached to my limbs.

On day 2 we climb up to the refuge which will be our base for the next few days and are introduced to Jean's leading style. He clearly hasn't been through the Duke of Edinburgh training on the importance of resting for 10 minutes every hour. We set off from the valley at 900m altitude and don't stop (other than for Jean to whip out his Donald Duck umbrella when it starts drizzling) until we get to the refuge 1400m higher and 2.5 hours later. At no point does our leader turn round to check his group is still with him. Although on this particular path falling off would require real skill and considerable planning, we discover the next day that he follows the same approach on rock and ice. As a group we soon learn the critical importance of getting clothing choice right when setting off in the morning. Get it wrong and you are in for 3 hours of either shivering or sweating.

On day 3 we ascend our first peak. I have made a careful study of the topo guide the night before. There is a NW ridge route marked as "facile", and a NE ridge as "peu difficile". I lobby hard for the NW ridge but Jean has other ideas. The NE ridge is an arête, not too narrow and not too steep. But there's a small cliff to overcome to get access to the ridge. With my meagre

climbing skills when wearing climbing shoes, how am I going to get up that in mountaineering boots and with a heavy rucksack?

We set off towards the ridge, me trying hard to convince myself that the cliff will look less steep from close up. It doesn't. As official "most incompetent" of the group I am roped directly behind Jean with the second most incompetent, Giovanni, behind me. Jean sets off across the cliff, arrives at the summit of the ridge and tugs impatiently on the rope for me to follow. The climb is at about the limit of my meagre climbing abilities but I make it by concentrating hard on the rock and my feet and avoiding looking down. I arrive at the top with a big smile on my face, which is immediately wiped off when I see the view. The side of the ridge we have climbed up is steep but far from vertical. Just 50cm away from me the other side of the ridge drops away in a sheer cliff to the valley 300m below. I suddenly discover I am scared of heights and cling to the comforting, solid rockface despite Jean's exhortations to stand up. Jean sets off nonchalantly along the other side of the ridge, traversing along a ledge in the sheer face. "I really cannot do that" I think to myself. I really can't. But luckily Jean comes back muttering something about "un peu exposé" and sets off on the other side, which results in the verdict "un peu dur". So we climb back down to the rest of the group, still waiting at the bottom of the cliff. The net result of this little diversion is that the two least competent members of the group have done what turns out to be the hardest climb of the week. Oh good.

Jean finds us an alternative ascent involving crossing a few snow patches and we all make it to the top. As most incompetent I am lucky enough to be directly behind him and can follow in his foot and handholds in the easier climbs that follow. But those in the next two ropes are too far behind to see this and Julie has real difficulty with a chimney we climb up without any belays. Jean is blissfully oblivious to this and climbs on leaving the rest of the group behind. "They'll be fine," he says, when I suggest we could wait for them.

But the view from the top is good. It is the day of the Tour de France time trial up to Alpe d'Huez, which nestles across the valley and 2000m below us. We can't see the cyclists themselves but the whole of the mountainside glitters as the strong sunlight is reflected off thousands of car windscreens. Through Jean's binoculars we can just about make out the dark crowd of the million spectators lining the route. It is a strange feeling being only a few kilometres away from this huge sporting event, yet completely cut off from it.

Day 4 wins the prize for scariest day of the trip. Today's peak is a serious expedition involving starting at 4am to get up some snow slopes before they get too soft. After the usual route march to the base of the climb we scramble up and over a rock band to get to the snow. The ascent up steep, hard packed snow slopes is fairly uneventful but gives us our first serious training in using ice axe and crampons. We ask Jean what to do if we fall. "Faut pas tomber" (You mustn't fall). But what if we do fall? "Faut pas tomber" comes the helpful response once again. I'm a bit worried. I have vague memories of ice axe arrest from a trip to the Lake District a decade ago, but then we weren't roped. What happens if Giovanni, who is heavier than me, slips? I worry that I won't have the strength to stop his fall.

Higher up, the snow slope flattens out and we cross a small glacier. Another top tip from the guide here; "Where do we cross the glacier?" – "Where it's good" – "So how do we tell if it's good?" "If it looks OK". It's hard to believe this guy's a retired teacher.

It's on the descent that Jean's "Don't fall" theory is put to the test. The steep snow slopes which we had climbed up so confidently in the cold of the morning are now soft and slushy. We can

see the 40-degree slope dropping away 200m in front of us. Jean tells us to walk straight down the line of greatest slope, kicking in each foot and letting it slide until it comes to a halt. But the crampons we are wearing are now useless – the sharp points and smooth metal bases slip straight through the sandy snow. Giovanni falls in front of me. I slam in my ice axe and am anchored just in time before the jerk of the rope hits me. I stay upright and Giovanni's headlong slide stops. I'm relieved to find that I can stop him. But now it's me who is slipping, sliding on my back down the slope. Jean brings me up with a jerk and shouts at me to stand up. We make a few more paces and now it's Giovanni's turn again, and this time I can't hold him. We are both sliding down the slope, and my 10 year old ice axe arrest technique seems useless as the point of the ice axe just slips straight through the loose snow, however hard I push it in. After what seems like a long time (long enough to ask myself whether panicking would be a constructive course of action at this point) we are brought up with another jerk. I find out later that Giovanni and I had pulled Jean from his feet and all three of us had been sliding down the slope together. But eventually Jean had been able to stop us. He jerks violently at the rope to pull me up and starts haranguing Giovanni and me in a stream of furious French. If improving my French had been my priority for the next 15 minutes, I would have expanded my vocabulary of swear words considerably. "Stand UP! Weight on your feet. Face straight down the slope. DOWN THE SLOPE. Now walk. WALK, I SAY. One foot in the front of the other. And don't start on this rubbish again. LEAN FORWARD! Weight on your FEET! Do you want to kill us all?" I am seriously frightened, and from the way he is shouting and swearing, Jean must be too. I try and follow his instructions, but putting all your weight on one sliding foot requires a confidence which is hard to come by when only seconds before you have been sliding towards an icy death. Can't we put in a belay, I ask? We practised belaying on snow slopes the day before. No! comes the impatient shout. "Just do as I say. WALK! And stop panicking. Take some deep breaths." I'm not panicking, I think indignantly. Putting in a belay to stop us all plummeting to our deaths seems an eminently reasonable proposition. Panicking would involve sitting down in the snow and refusing to move. Or perhaps attacking you with my ice axe.

Twenty minutes later, after a succession of small further slips from Giovanni or me, which set off another stream of invective from Jean, we reach the end of the steep part. Was that really dangerous, I wonder? The only conclusion I can come to is "yes". Why else would Jean have been shouting in that way? He is lucky that the remainder of the group were more sure-footed than Giovanni and I. If Julie's hefty boyfriend had slipped and Julie hadn't been able to stop his fall, what would have happened?

After the excitement of Day 4, Day 5 is a bit of an anticlimax. We spend a relaxing morning bouldering near La Berade and in the afternoon have a gentle route march up to our next refuge. Despite being accessible only on foot and leading nowhere but a clutch of mountaineering routes, the refuge cuisine has won it a place in one of France's restaurant guides. We feast on homemade soup with freshly picked herbs, a vast casserole, a plateau of four local cheeses and finish with blueberry tart, washed down with some local genepie (juniper gin). As we set out at 4am next morning, the refuge warden is off to pick some more herbs for that evening's meal.

On our last day we are to tackle our highest, steepest, snowiest peak yet, the Pic Coolidge, named after a 19<sup>th</sup> century Briton who pioneered routes in much of the area. After my earlier experiences I am deeply suspicious of Jean's capacity to keep the group safe, and have done an even more thorough study of the topo than usual. This leads me to opt out of the climb at a col around 600m below the peak. I am instructed to wait at the col whatever happens and under no circumstances to try and descend on my own. This gives me an exciting 4 hours of contemplating rocks at 3100m, interspersed by visits from passing mountaineers and a poetry recital to the

stones. When the rest of the party return they report that the climb wasn't actually that bad compared to what we had done earlier in the week, especially as the fog meant they couldn't see the drop. I didn't regret my decision though – in this case I feel discretion was the better part of valour and I'd rather be responsible for my own safety than relying on someone else.

So has this experience put me off mountaineering? In fact, apart from the occasional scary moments, I really enjoyed the week and am keen to try some easy ascents next summer. And in a triumph of hope over experience I decided to sign up for a climbing course which the CAF Paris section organise at the boulders in the Fontainebleau forest just south of Paris. The contrast couldn't be greater. Our unqualified, volunteer instructor is safety conscious, patient, encouraging, fun and can actually teach and we've had some wonderful days climbing. It turns out that, when someone explains what to do, climbing isn't so difficult after all!

Helen Dickinson

*A brilliant article! Helen, I think you should submit this to one of the UK climbing magazines! (Ed.)*

That Was The Winter That Was...

Charlie Fisher was out twice during the unexpectedly wonderful late winter. On the last Thursday of February he went with KIMM partner Colin, an ex-army ski instructor and competitor whose gear has admittedly seen better days. From Alwinton they went up Clennell Street until clear of the last wall and then picked their way up into the hills and did a horseshoe around the Alwinton burn, with the terrain including everything from icy heather to deep drifts with a crust strong enough for Charlie's touring skis, but not Colin's old track skis. The locals seem bemused, but it was fun (just) and perhaps the highlight was evidence of a wind slab avalanche above the Burn!

The following Thursday they went to Yad Moss after hearing the good news on the Carlisle Ski club's recorded message service. The B road was officially closed but about 20 folk made it to park at the bottom and spend a wonderful day skiing on a good base of fresh firm snow under blue skies, watching the piste-bashers help sculpt a jump for the boarders, and generally posing on the piste just like in the Alps! Completely surreal - perhaps the best days skiing at Yad Moss since records began...?

Charlie

*(See photos on page 11. Ed.)*



The Late February Snowfall at Yad Moss (photo: Charlie Fisher)



Charlie Fisher on the Slopes above Alwinton – February 2005

## Norway 2004 – Tyneside Loipers Club Ski Trip (continued from last newsletter)

### *Day 9 (1<sup>st</sup> Aril), Fondsbu – Olavsbu*

We left the luxury of the DNT hut at Fondsbu (inside showers and toilets) having each lightened our rucksacks by 1 or 2 kg, removing unwanted gear from our rucksacks and dumping items at the hut in Helen's big (heavy) orange plastic bivvy bag. We knew we would be back at Fondsbu in a few days time. We left behind the glorious sunshine of yesterday and wended our way up the marked route past a number of privately owned huts (250m of climbing in the first 2km).

A very fit Norwegian out for a day ski trip soon overtook us wearing a one-piece suit emblazoned "National Ski Team – sponsored by Madshus". He was pleased enough to stop and talk and ski along with us for a while until the next uphill stretch when he quickly disappeared. With most of the climbing over, we peeled off our skins and stopped for lunch. After a couple of hours of undulating terrain and a steep descent the Olavsbu hut was in sight across the lake.

Olavsbu was our fourth unserviced hut. We had to fetch water from a hole in the lake about 50 yards away (the hole quickly froze over in the early evening and it was a job to break away the ice and reach down to fill the buckets without slipping into the hole). The hut was occupied by two Norwegian girls with a dog, plus one French couple (only the second time we had come across French people in the huts). The Norwegian girls (and the dog) decamped to an annex a short distance from the main hut – dogs are not allowed in the huts and this one was not too happy being left out in the entrance area (it had obviously been inside the hut before we arrived).

Around 8pm, the evening sunset was superb – time for photographs just outside the hut.

### *Day 10 (2<sup>nd</sup> April) – Olavsbu*

Lots of wonderful touring opportunities – Charlie spotted a high pass running east-west, a couple of km to our north (on the join between two maps – it could easily have been missed). At the highest point on the pass we could access some gentle slopes up onto a high ridge. It was another day of blue skies and perfect weather as we headed north away from the hut.

The real adventure began as we reached the summit of the marked route and turned west – we had thought we could gain entry into the high pass without losing too much height but our shortcut proved unskiable. Heather and I cut back towards the marked route and eventually reached a point where we could go down a 25-30 degree broad gully to the lake below us (all our height was lost anyway). Rather too steep for narrow touring skis, we made it all the same and looked up to admire our tracks. A full half hour later, we were joined by Helen and Charlie who had tried to ski further up toward the pass but finally backtracked all the way to the marked route.

The rest of the day was perfect ski touring. We gained one of the lowermost summits of the ridge (1743m) and we feasted our eyes upon the high peaks of the Jotunheimen all around us – we even thought we could just see Olavsbu hut (about 3½ km away). From there, it was nearly 500m of glorious descent down an easy bowl into Simledalen and then a long and hilly circuit to the north and east eventually returning to Olavsbu at around 6.45pm, after 27 km of skiing.

Later that evening, we were joined by a group of Brits from the Eagle Ski Club. They arrived in ones and twos, fairly knackered, having done a big route (on alpine skis) over several glaciers. They obviously took their skiing very seriously (we played mountain hut scrabble and pretended we had had an easy day out!).

### *Day 11 (3<sup>rd</sup> April) – Olavsbu to Gjendsbu*

A very easy day – only 15km and it was nearly all downhill! We arrived at Gjendbu at 2pm after a race with several Norwegians whom we met at the junction of the routes from Fondsbu and Olavsbu (I gave up and waited instead for Charlie and Heather and Helen). At Gjendbu, there were lovely smells of cinnamon buns just out of the oven. We couldn't resist! I had a panic attack – I had changed the film in my camera the previous evening and I thought I had left the film at Olavsbu. I searched my rucksack to no avail. Anyway I was tired and I needed a nap! The others went out for an afternoon tour and I thought about my lost film.

### *Day 12 (4<sup>th</sup> April) – Gjendbu to Fonsdsbu*

Charlie and I started early having worked out a route that would take us over a high col to Olavsbu (to hunt for the missing film from my camera) and then on to Fondsbu. It turned out to be quite a challenging route with a steep climb (on skins) out of the valley and then a seemingly remote lake crossing and another steep ascent onto the col, which was shrouded in cloud. We doubted that anyone else had been that way that season. By the time we reached Olavsbu, there was a strong wind and fresh snow falling – the hut was a welcome retreat and somewhere to have lunch out of the wind (but no sign of the missing film!)

The fresh snow was a welcome bonus (the first we had had since leaving Finse). It gave a much better grip (with the base wax) and the skis performed so much better. But the visibility was not particularly good and it meant for some fun downhill sections, particularly negotiating patches of ice and sastruggi with little or no warning! We reached Fondsbu in good time for the evening meal, having done about 28km of challenging skiing. I searched through the gear we had left at Fonsbu and found one used film not accounted for – my film had not been lost after all!

Helen and Heather had taken the more direct marked route from Gjendsbu to Fondsbu but with the bad visibility had not enjoyed the steep descent towards the end.

### *Day 13 (5<sup>th</sup> April)*

The holiday was all over. The sprinkling of fresh snow persuaded us to squeeze in an hour and a half of skiing before we caught the *snow weasel* back to Tyin, from where we had to catch our bus to Bergen. Once again the sun was shining and we took more photos of wonderful Fondsbu and talked and dreamed of buying a holiday hut in the area. Needless to say we never followed up. If you want to follow the dream (or have just won the lottery and consider donating a holiday hut to Tyneside Loipers) look up the website [www.eidsbugarden.com](http://www.eidsbugarden.com) - a wonderful place, summer and winter. You might just be hooked!

### Alan Mitcham

*Logistics:* We travelled to Bergen (flights from Newcastle via Stavanger with an overnight in Bergen in each direction) and took the train to Finse. The return bus journey from Tyin to Finse took about 5 hours. The overall cost of flights, internal travel, hotel/hostel in Bergen, and accommodation and food in the DNT huts (staffed and unstaffed) was about £700 each.

We aimed to keep rucksack weight to a minimum (mine was about 10kg at the end of each day, with an empty flask – others were a bit heavier). We each carried some of the shared equipment (my 10kg included snow shovel and club shelter). Overall we carried 2 shovels, 2 down sleeping bags, copious supplies of bubble wrap (ground insulation), a leatherman, GPS, comprehensive first aid kit and 2 sets of maps. We also each had a book and we had 2 sets of cards and a set of scrabble tiles – the cards and scrabble were excellent – we spent much more time playing games than reading!

## **Glenfeshie Hostel Weekend (28-30<sup>th</sup> January)**

What a great weekend! Great weather, great food and great company! And we even got one day of skiing.

Eight loipers arrived at Glenfeshie on the Friday evening hoping for snow but equally prepared with walking boots should we be disappointed. On Saturday morning we made our way up to the Cairngorm car park and, deciding to save our money and avoid the queue for the mountain railway, we began the walk up to the halfway stage, which was where we fixed our climbing skins and started skiing. From there it was about 40 minutes of skinning up to the top of the ski area (including a stop to fix a pair of hired telemark boots which were falling apart).

The weather was beautiful (blue skies and little wind) with magnificent views from the top over Loch Morlich and beyond. The snow fences were covered with growths of ice that sparkled in the sun and made you want to play them like a xylophone.

After refreshment in the Ptarmigan café, we skied on up to the top of the ski area with the intention of going to the top of Cairngorm or going over into the snow-filled bowl overlooking Loch Avon (investigated by Paul and Chris). We had noticed the icy and crusty conditions on the way up. But conditions on the top were quite horrendous due to overnight rain that had immediately frozen to form an icy-lumpy terrain (lumps varying from tennis balls to footballs!) Paul, Chris, Paramjeet and Tim set off to ski to the summit (they eventually skied down from the summit with their skins still attached to the skis – the only way under those conditions) whilst myself and the 3 women, who only had narrow touring skis, skied into the ptarmigan bowl. By the end of the afternoon, lower down in Corrie Cas, the snow had softened quite considerably and so Tim and I enjoyed a few runs alongside the Cas T-bar (until it closed for the day) keeping pace with another two telemark skiers from Edinburgh Nordic ski club.

Saturday evening – the 3-course hostel meal (washed down with quantities of wine and beer):

Soup of carrot and Jerusalem artichoke

Venison Casserole

Pear and almond tart

On Sunday morning, we needed a good walk to counter the previous evening's indulgence. The weather was once again very promising (though we would have preferred a big fall of fresh snow) and we went our separate ways: Paul and Chris and Paramjeet to climb Sgor Gaoith (1118m) and the ridge to Sgoran Dubh Mor (1111m) to the east of the hostel and Tim, Alan, Nuala, Pat and Pat to climb Craiggowrie, Creagan Gorm and Meall a'Bhuacaille (810m) to the north of Loch Morlich. Ours was an excellent walk of about 10 miles with more wonderful views, although the Cairngorm summit was obscured by cloud. Paul, Chris and Paramjeet had to contend with sheets of ice (Chris tried out his new crampons bought in Aviemore the previous afternoon) but they also enjoyed fine views below cloud level.

A very good weekend! Thank you, Nuala, for the photos on page 6.

Alan Mitcham

## **New Zealand! And the Art of Navigation in the Southern Hemisphere**

I have already said it – NZ was great and I could happily live there! There are some amazing walking trails (some of them quite famous) and there are some wonderful birds unlike anywhere else in the world, although some of them including the national symbol, the kiwi, are having a hard time surviving amongst the various introduced species. The kiwi is nocturnal and very rarely seen but we were lucky enough to at least hear them – they have a very strong call which is difficult to miss (though we did have the help of an expert). Surprisingly, apart from two species of bat, there are no native indigenous mammals (the Polynesian dog and the Australian bush-tailed possum were amongst the first to be introduced).

The trails are stunningly beautiful and are very well signed and maintained by the NZ Dept of Conservation. In truth, they don't need much navigation. However... just in case you are lost(?), here are a few tips....

1. *The sun is in the north!* It seems obvious but it really fooled me the first time we were out walking on our own, *walking north into the sun*. I kept thinking 'when will this track must turn around to the north?' and then I realised!
2. *The sun sweeps around anti-clockwise!* Sun too hot? Then find your piece of shade – but don't expect it to go around clockwise like it does at home.
3. *That northern hemisphere compass is no good!* Why not? We are used to having a compass with a needle weighted at the south end to compensate for the dip in the earth's magnetic field which otherwise would pull the needle downwards at the north end. Take it to the southern hemisphere and the weight compensation on the south end of the needle makes matters worse and the compass is a rather temperamental instrument. Get yourself a proper southern hemisphere compass instead!
4. Once you have the right compass, *don't forget magnetic deviation*. In Britain the deviation is about 4 degrees west and small enough to be ignored. In NZ the deviation is a massive 24 degrees and increasing! Enough for a monumental navigation cock-up!
5. Walking at night, *look up at the stars!* Look for the Southern Cross (not the Plough, that isn't visible). But don't expect to see a pole star equivalent to Polaris – the celestial South Pole is a long way from Southern Cross and it requires some complicated geometry to get to find it. By the way, the thing that you recognise as the constellation Orion is actually upside down!!

Alan Mitcham

## FOR SALE

Pair of Garmont leather boots, size 9 ½ (unused),  
Pair of Scarpa plastic telemark boots, size 9 ½ + (used about 6 weeks),  
Riva cable bindings,  
Rotterfella Red Chilli cable bindings (new).

Open to offers – all proceeds to charity. Contact Peter Quigley 01207 542723, or e-mail:  
[peter.quigley@virgin.net](mailto:peter.quigley@virgin.net)

### Club Equipment

Remember we have the following club equipment for hire to members of Tyneside Loipers at modest rates.

Metal-edged touring skis  
Stiff leather touring boots

Roller skis with Salomon bindings  
Salomon boots

Club throw-over emergency shelter  
Edging file

Contact Alan Mitcham 01661 823960

### Items for the next newsletter

Articles or photos (or just items for sale) are most welcome. I intend to be issuing the next newsletter in early October (or maybe late summer, if there are enough articles to print). Thanks to contributors past and present. Keep the contributions rolling in. The newsletter needs you!!

Newsletter Sec – Alan Mitcham.