



TYNESIDE LOIPERS

The NorthEast's Specialist
Cross Country Ski club

**Newsletter
May 2007**



Website: www.contraflow.com/loipers

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Club Events

Thurs 10 th May, 7.15pm	End of Season Meet, social & slide show (see page 3).
Thurs 24 th May, 6.15pm	Evening walk – contact Jane Forster (see page 2)
Tues 19 th June, 6.30pm	Evening bike ride - contact Alan (see page 3)
August (Sunday tba)	Bike Ride, Waskerley Way (see page 3)
Thursday evenings	Roller skiing. Contact Alasdair (see page 16)

Other roller ski events and SSE courses – see page 16.

Alasdair Wilson (Chairman/Race Officer)
Heather Dickinson (Secretary)
Paul Jameson (Treasurer)
Alan Mitcham (Membership/Newsletter)
Jackie Paice (committee member)
Charlie Fisher (committee member)

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Editor's Musings

The season eventually got going after a really poor start in Europe. Hopefully most of TL will have been away and found some good snow somewhere! I got away to the USA in March and to Norway at the beginning of April – a total of 4 ½ weeks – a bit less than usual, but I am not complaining. There was lots of early season snow in both places – a little more fresh snow would have made it more enjoyable.

The club trip to Norway was a great success and, as promised, an easy hut-touring trip suitable for less experienced skiers. We started off at Fondsbu (bus and snow weasel from Bergen) and spent 4 days skiing easy routes in wonderful weather. On our 4th day (not quite so easy) we skied down Lake Bygdin and finished with a long and tiring circuit back over the hills to Fondsbu – well done to Nuala, who more than kept up with Charlie and Keith and I on what turned out to be a 24km day tour!

The excessively warm weather had made the snow conditions quite difficult in places and we were unable to do some of the routes we had planned (some south facing slopes were just too slushy, or hard and rutted and crusty). On our 5th day, the sun disappeared and we had strong winds and poor visibility but still no fresh snow. Nuala and Pat and Jane and Rob then all headed home.

Vivienne arrived to join Charlie, Keith and I on a 4-day round trip to two unstaffed huts at Yksendalsbu and Tomashelleren. We battled to Tomashelleren against very strong winds (3 Danish guys in the adjacent hut had been marooned since the previous day) and, as the winds got even stronger, we were destined to stay there for over 36 hours. The Danes could just get a faint radio signal from one corner of their hut and they learnt that there were lots of road closures around Norway due to major drifting (albeit with little new snow). Vivienne was more than a little worried about husband Harry who was due to arrive at Fondsbu at about that time (lots more in Vivienne's article on page 4).

For my final week in Norway I participated for the first time in the SnowSport England Kvitavtn week – a superb week of top-level instruction from the best Nordic ski coaches in the UK. Alasdair Wilson was also at Kvitavtn representing Tyneside Loipers (more in his article on page 13). It was my first proper track skiing experience (leaving aside a Waymark holiday in 1992). As well as serious training every morning, we had lots of fun, especially the fancy dress races on the last day (see photos on pages 7 and 10). I will certainly be going again next year.

Summer Outings

Evening walk - Thursday 24th May at 6.15pm

Meet at The Boatside PH at Warden (near Hexham) for a 5½ mile walk over Warden Hill to Fourstones and back around to Warden for a drink and pub meal. Contact Jane Forster (ph: 01434 608321 or e-mail jbramtomforster@aol.com).

Evening bike ride (Tues 19th June) – Contact Alan (01661 823960).

Meet about 6.30pm (time to be confirmed) at the Keelman PH, near Newburn in the Tyne Valley. We will cycle about 15 miles, mainly on old railway paths and quiet roads. Finish at the pub for a meal washed down with some real ale from the adjacent Big Lamp Brewery.

Sunday bike ride (early August, details to follow) – Contact Alasdair or Alan.

The route will be mostly downhill along the Waskerley Way (C2C) and Derwent Valley Walk. We plan to get transport to the start using Stanley Taxis (minibus and bike trailer) so that we can start somewhere between Blanchland and Stanhope and join the cycle route above Rookhope (top of the Bolt's Law Incline). Then we will join the Waskerley Way at Park Head station (good café stop for elevenses). We expect to be doing around 35 miles, almost entirely off road. The finish will be at Derwent Valley Country Park (or perhaps west along the Hadrian Way at Newburn or Wylam).

End of Season Get Together

Our usual end-of-season get together is at Charlie's house on Thursday 10th May from about 7.15pm. Everyone welcome. Bring along your photos or slides from this winter (we have lots of slides from this year's Norway trip). Charlie will be providing the food but any drinks contributions will be greatly appreciated.

Please contact Charlie to let him know you are coming (phone: 0191 261 7719 or e-mail: apdh05@dsl.pipex.com). His address is 26 Victoria Street, Newcastle (near to the Discovery Museum and near to the station if you are coming by metro). There are car parking spaces at the west end of Houston Street.

Heather's Fitness Tips

Heather has sent me a few links on the general subject to fitness...

www.britmilfit.com

www.getfitoutside.co.uk

<http://home.hia.no/~stephens/>

Heather has been going to BMF (British Military Fitness) classes twice a week at Leazes Park since December and feels she is getting a lot fitter: 'no more weedy wimps in the next ski race!' she says. Apparently Get Fit Outside is a very similar organisation.

The other website (run by an American qualified in Sports Physiology) is aimed particularly at runners, swimmers, cyclists and cross-country skiers. It has lots of excellent training tips and technical stuff on human physiology. Look out for the buzz words, Masters Athlete Physiology and Performance (MAPP).

Reflections on Norway 2007

by Vivienne Brown

“Harry, just occasionally I’d like to go on a holiday where I don’t wonder if I’m going to die at some point” I said, somewhat plaintively, as we sat in the comfort of the Slettningsbu unstaffed hut while listening to the wind rattling windows and doors and watching snow racing by horizontally. I was contemplating the journey we’d made from Tyin and, in particular, the final pass when we’d been battling into the wind and I’d seriously wondered if I could make the last couple of kilometres. At home family and friends were sweltering in the Easter heat wave which, sadly, had not followed us to Norway!

For the last few years we’ve taken the skis to Norway for the Easter holiday and had decided to go back to the Jotunheim, on the basis that the bits we’d glimpsed between snowstorms last year looked rather impressive and we’d like to have a look in good weather. There were a couple of complications though - Harry was recovering from a fairly serious back injury, he also had commitments which meant he couldn’t leave home as early as we’d like. We overcame the first problem by acquiring snowshoes for him, and I solved the second by joining in with the second part of the club trip and leaving him to follow on later.

In numerous e-mails to Alan I’d said “I really can’t ski” but had been assured there would be other less experienced members there and I’d be fine. I was a bit taken aback, therefore, to find that those less experienced members were en route home as I arrived and that I was left with the three very capable skiers, Alan, Charlie and Keith. No doubt they were equally taken aback when we came to the first steep downhill and I proved my point by taking my skis off to walk, but they were far too polite to comment. An additional qualm that developed in my mind as we traveled the 21km to Yksendalsbu was that they didn’t seem to have the concept of elevenses...

Sadly, the good weather the group had enjoyed prior to my arrival ended that night, and the next day we travelled through wind and snow to Tomashelleren where we were holed up there in a ferocious storm for about 36 hours.

Luckily I was unaware that Harry was undergoing a somewhat eventful journey from Bergen to Fondsbu – the (delayed) bus was escorted along the road in convoy to Tyinkrisset, where he then had to walk the 5km or so up the closed road to Tyin before taking the snow weasel along the lakeside to Fondsbu. His dreams of warmth and food at Fondsbu were rudely interrupted when the weasel slid off the track and overturned. Perhaps not the recommended treatment for an injured back, but luckily the only damage he suffered was a broken fingernail, holes made in his hat by the dripping petrol and a lost snow shoe tail. Others suffered bumps and bruises but, amazingly, no serious injuries occurred. Oblivious to all these events, I was playing cards with the three friendly Danes in the second hut and partaking of Charlie’s excellent and highly inventive culinary offerings.

The next day we made the long journey (by my standards!) to Fondsbu and the joys of the first wash in four days.

After waving off Keith, Alan and Charlie to their various destinations, my holiday experience changed considerably, even if the weather stayed much the same. The combination of snow shoes and skis was interesting – uphill Harry was faster than me, flat travelling depended very much on the snow conditions and downhill – well, he got down quicker when it was steep, as he didn't go through all the “I don't like the look of this, what shall I do? I'll try traversing, Ouch I've fallen over, I'll just take my skis off and walk”. He wouldn't, however, have been able to keep up with a real skier!

We ended up staying for four nights at Fondsbu and then moving on to Slettningsbu for our final four nights, where we holed up in another storm. So, in an activity that has me going through every emotion in the book (often in quick succession) why do we do it?

The real answer came in our final two days, when the weather cleared and we were left with idyllic blue skies and, on the last day, tropical heat. During that time I have memories of amazing views from the tops we reached, lovely runs down not-too-terrifying snow, the pinks of the sunset over the Jotunheim and the mauve of the earth's shadow in late evening. The two ptarmigan who landed near the hut just as we were going in and then proceeded to do a courtship display in front of us, and the triumph of successfully skiing down long slopes en route to the bus that had defeated me last year. But even in bad weather there are compensations – the snugness of the unstaffed huts, the companionship when you're holed up in a storm, the numerous games of cards I learned, the excellent food at Fondsbu and the excuse to slow down and read a book for a few hours and go to bed early. And, of course, even bad weather has its joys – the horizontal icicles hanging from the huts, the blanketing of snow that shapes the hills during the few hours of clearer weather, and on a day out from Fondsbu, the bonus of a few magical hours when the cloud unexpectedly lifted and, for the first time, we had a really good look at the landscape around. So, even though we missed the Easter heat wave, and even though the holiday wasn't quite as we'd planned, I'm glad we went, and I'm sure Easter in Norway will lure me back once more.

Vivienne Brown

That last paragraph says so much about the joys of ski touring in Norway and why we go back each year. Maybe that will persuade a few more loipers to give it a try! (Ed.)

The Alternative Norway Trip – by Ross Mellows

My trip to Norway this year was planned as a snow hole or camping trip, not too far from Finse, using the snow hole as a base for day trips. We have managed similar trips in previous years and not yet had to resort to using the DNT huts.

We arrived on the Friday and booked into the Finse 1222 hotel and then spent the afternoon recce'ing for a suitable spot to snowhole south of the lake. We set off Saturday morning to the chosen location in worsening weather, finding the place with GPS. We don't carry probes and it turned out our spot wasn't suitable. By now it was a total whiteout and blowing a gale, plus my friend Graeme was feeling unwell. He is diabetic and manages his condition superbly but his blood sugar had gotten high and even when he'd got it back down he felt a bit ropey. As a result we bailed out back to the Finse 1222 rather than digging in with the tent or searching for another snow bank (it was now virtually impossible to make out the snow banks anyway) and had another night of luxury (the DNT hut didn't open until the next day).

That night we were talking to a couple of lads from Yorkshire who were going home the following day & who'd had 10 days of mostly bad weather. They had seen a party of three Scots that day struggling with huge packs with one of the party on skinny track skis finding the going hard in the deep snow. The next day we were informed they been found by a passing Red Cross team on exercise and two of them were dead.

We set off on the Sunday afternoon back to a spot that we had used on a previous trip and dug a nice big snowhole. Monday & Tuesday were spent on day tours in the area, both cut short due to the weather. The temperature was hovering just above zero so it was pretty miserable. We bailed out of the snowhole after one night, as it was getting a bit drippy due to the warm temperature. We kept some gear in there to leave more room in the tent. I was just as well we moved into the tent as on Monday and Tuesday the snowhole entrance filled up by about 3 feet of its length with spindrift - easy enough to dig out from the outside but it would have been a pain from the inside!

By Wednesday we'd had enough of the winds and wet weather, so we got the train to Geilo and ended up the only tent on the campsite in town. We hired some downhill skis & boots (we got a bargain - 300Krk for the 2 of us plus lift passes!) & spent the next 3 days skiing the piste. In comparison to Finse the weather was great - sunny & a lot colder.

So it didn't go to plan - but we made the best of it!

Ross Mellows

*website info www.finse1222.no/Engelsk/index.htm



Ross Mellows in the SnowHole



Digging out the blocked entrance tunnel



Good weather for camping.... Or is it?



Alasdair - halfway in 10km skate

Alasdair Wilson at the World Masters Championships, Finland



Leading skiers battling in the M5 category

Kamben, Norway (Waymark Holidays, Feb /March 2007)

After breaking my left leg in January 2006, it was with some trepidation that I booked this holiday in October 2006. Cycling and Roller Skiing had given me some confidence that the 'dynamic hip screw' would be up to the task and I had a letter from my doctor saying he had no problems with XC skiing for insurance purposes. Another problem, insurance – having passed the magic age of 65, my insurance company for the last 20 yrs just would not insure me for skiing anymore. However after trawling the relevant websites, I managed to get a yearly insurance, including cross-country skiing, with Marks and Spencers at a very reasonable premium.

Another possible problem could have occurred as I passed through security at Newcastle Airport on Feb 23rd, would the metal detectors sense the new metalware in my leg? – not even a beep – a clean sheet at Heathrow and Oslo too.

At least 2ft of snow greeted us at Oslo and after the 3hr bus journey to Kamben the depth here was at least 4ft and -12°C to boot – it looked like a good start to the holiday. The following day saw the temperature at -10°C so blue wax was the order of the day. Those new to XC on this Grade 1/2 holiday were soon introduced to the delights of waxing and corking prior to some useful warm up exercises. Soon we were in the tracks and those of us with previous experience were exercising those leg muscles that only seem to be activated during a snowplough. It was a nervous time for me but after a couple of hours my leg had passed all relevant tests so this gave me the confidence to carry on as normal for the rest of the holiday.

Kamben Høyfjellshotell at 920m is centrally located in the Golsfjellet area of Norway and is 20km north of the town of Gol which is on the main road and rail link between Oslo(200km) and Bergen(300km). It has been run by the same family since 1922 and has been modernised without losing its essential Norwegian character. The food is good with the breakfast buffet being quite outstanding. It is surrounded by 150km of prepared loipe whose maintenance is shared between the various hotels in the area. There are fairly easy tracks to the south of the hotel but these become progressively more challenging heading up toward the Gollsfjellet Plateau.

Once on the plateau, a central point from which tracks radiate is the Grillehytte – this is a wooden conical structure, built by the Red Cross for use by anyone who wishes to eat their lunch undercover or even cook a meal on the central grill – wood, matches and a bottle of white spirit provided! The views from the plateau are quite spectacular with Jotunheimen to the north and Hemsedal fjellet to the west being the most prominent. There are some opportunities for off track skiing around Veslefjell (1126m), Storefjell (1149m) and Ørterhovda (1117m). There is also a downhill slope adjacent the Storefjell for those who wish to improve downhill and telemark skills.

Descending from the plateau can be a little hairy at times with tracks to Oset Høyfjellshotell (4k) and Ørtestolen Sporthotel being the most exciting. There are some skating tracks adjacent the loipe with the best of these being at Solseter about 8k south of Kamben. At Solseter there are several competition standard circuits maintained by the local ski club and are floodlit until 2100 hrs. You can eat your packed lunch in all the local hotels and the self-made waffles at Hallingen are particularly recommended.

This is definitely not a holiday for the Tyneside Loipers Hard Nuts but would be suitable for the Soft Nuts and those of us who require more leisurely skiing with a hot shower, good food and a comfortable bed at the end of the day.

A good Loipe map is available at the hotel for 20kr. The Norwegian 1:50 000 Ordnance Survey map which includes the area is 'Statens Kartverk' no. 2231.

Hotel Kamben Høyfjellshotell, Golsfjellet 3350, Gol, Norway

Info: Telephone (+47) 32 07 39 00 Fax (+47) 32 07 38 66

Web: www.kamben.no

Prices: 625 Kr per night, plus 150Kr single room supplement (2006/7)

Prices are for half board plus a packed lunch which you make yourself from the breakfast buffet

Beer – 33cl glass for 35Kr. Skis can be hired at Hotel

Flights: Newcastle/Bergen - 2/3 times weekly with Jet2.com

Newcastle/Amsterdam/Oslo with KLM

Newcastle/Heathrow/Oslo with BA

Trains: Oslo Airport-Oslo-Gol & return, 3hr 50min at 500kr return

Bergen – Gol & return, about 4hrs at 600kr return

Train prices based on advance booking Economy 'minipris' tickets

Train website www.nsb.no/internet/en

You can get a taxi from Gol to Kamben or arrange, if available, for the Hotel Minibus to pick you up at Gol station.

Waymark 2007 Costs from Heathrow: £699 + £100 for single room. Cost includes flights and transfers and also includes ski hire and services of 2 leaders (Grade 1 & Grade 2).

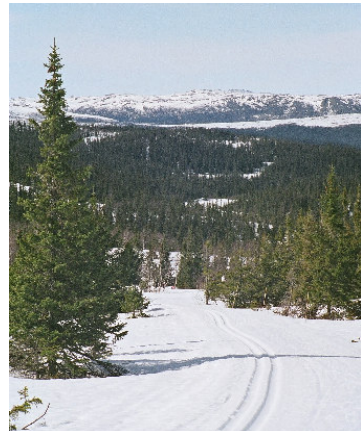
Frank Cauley

Frank kindly passed on details of the Midnight Sun Marathon, which takes place overnight on Saturday June 16th at Tromso in Norway (at latitude 70 degrees north). See www.msm.no Anyone interested? I don't know if Frank had any particular TL member in mind for this one!

Frank also sent in another quirky item (photo) of moose racing, also from Tromso area, I think. The photo shows skiers racing around towed by moose! Unfortunately there is no room to print the picture in this newsletter.



Skiing in Lapland... the picnic site... and the ice hole next to the sauna



Kvitavatn... Gausta (1883m) from across the lake... On the loipe



Fancy Dress Day (from left) Alan, Mike Dixon, Patrick Winterton and Ian Ballantyne

Kvitavatn photos by Alasdair Wilson,
Fiona Crossley and Alan Shephard

SKIING IN LAPLAND

This year was our 6th visit to Lapland in March. Why Lapland, why March, and why keep returning? Answer to the first two is that there are hundreds of kilometres of superb tracks, there's security of snow at this stage in the season, the days are longer and temperatures not as extreme as January or early February. But why return... read on!

Finnish Lapland has the most astoundingly beautiful countryside with 100s of kilometres of groomed tracks for both classic and skating skiing. The tracks are all well signposted and have fantastic cafes en route, and failing a café there usually is a "cooking shelter" where there is a fire by which you can warm yourself, cook a sausage and enjoy the company and the ambiance.

The tracks take you through the woods around the village, studded with log cabins and out into the wilder landscape of birch and pine woods, across frozen lakes and marshes and out to the rounded fells. At times you have the place to yourself, seemingly endless acres of silence and uninhabited beauty and then you arrive at a café or a cooking shelter and the place is humming with life and activity. Siberian jays swoop down to take any crumbs and will even take from your hands. You see reindeer and huskies, taking safaris or just in enclosures near the Sami settlements, though sometimes the reindeer are seen walking on the roads. We saw a sauna beside a café with a bathing pool cut in the lake for the brave to take a dip after the sauna - and a couple doing just that! At night you often see the Northern Lights, shimmering and illusive in the still and quiet except for the crunch of your footsteps in the snow.

The cooking shelters are an experience! They look like wooden bus shelters with a fire in front and a well-stocked woodshed beside. Here the Finns gather, take out their flasks, delve into their packs for their sausage, which they spear on a stick and cook. Then, another delve into the pack to produce the tube of mustard! After watching this procedure we followed suit and bought our sausages at the supermarket and joined the locals when we stopped. The cafes all have their individual character, often attached to a Sami farm or settlement, selling tea, coffee, "mehu" (hot fruit juice, a bit like Ribena), doughnuts, cakes, pancakes and a few savouries and they don't object if you bring your own sandwich (or sausage to cook over the indoor fire). Some sell local goods, socks, hats, scarves and local craft items.

Our first Lapland trip was to Akaslompolo (also known as Yllas), which has over 300kms of groomed tracks, plus fell routes for those looking for off-track routes. Great variety of routes; across and around the lake to get your ski legs

in at the start; shortish circular routes from the village - blues and reds; longer circular or linear routes - blue, red and black as you get used to the terrain and the temperature. We enjoyed it so much we returned the following year - still plenty to enjoy without too much repetition.

Next year we tried Levi (the other resort close to the airport Kitilla) - more for downhill skiers and snow-boarders, but still a huge range of cross-country ski tracks, again both for classic and skating. Yet again we enjoyed it so much we went back the following year!

The next year we tried Ruka, not as far north as the other two, but still excellent snow in March and over 200kms of groomed trails. Ruka also has a downhill centre with plenty for downhill novices (like us) and lots for snow-boarders. It also has a ski jump (not something we tried!), but fun watching people practice.

This year we returned to Akaslompolo and thoroughly enjoyed the week: we did some trails we had done in the past and still found new ones. Conditions this year were different - much warmer; in fact it was unseasonably warm - up to +9 on several days! Previous years have seen us at -20! Those on classic skis did have problems with the wax, as it was icy in the morning and quite slushy in the afternoons. We stuck to skating and so avoided the klister factor!

You can fly direct to Lapland with both Inghams and Crystal - on price and ease they beat the X-country specialists and do-it-yourself where you have to fly to Helsinki and then transfer on to Lapland. We went to Akaslompolo and Levi with Inghams and to Ruka with Crystal. You can get good deals if you do the Early Bird booking - about £100 discount on-line. We decided to go self-catering in the log cabins, these are superb - very well equipped and you even have your own sauna! The supermarkets have all the basics and more - not just tins of reindeer meatballs!

The London Club made Akaslompolo their club holiday this year - same week as we went - so we met up with some of them at the airport and a couple of times on the tracks or cafes, even met up with friends of Frank!

All in all, I would suggest Lapland as the best place to track ski late in the season. Just now we're trying to decide where precisely we'll go in 2008!

Judi Webb

See some of Judi's photos on page 10 (Ed.)

SnowSport England - Kvitavatn Week - Norway, April 2007

For the past 6 years ESC-Nordic has been putting on a skills course at Kvitavatn in the Telemark region of Norway. It has gone from strength to strength and this year 42 participants gathered at the Kvitavatn Fjellstoge on Easter Saturday to begin a solid week of instruction, inspiration and good old-fashioned fun. We were from all over the UK with others from the Pyrenees and Australia via Brussels, of various levels of experience from novice to expert. Alan Mitcham and I were there from Tyneside Loipers. All of us were aiming to improve our techniques and skills, some mainly telemarking, others doing track skiing (classic and skating), and others were there to qualify as SSE Club Coaches.

Instruction was provided by six excellent coaches, Patrick Winterton, Mike Dixon, Alan Eason (UK's only World Cup XC skier) and Iain Ballantyne for track skiing, plus Andy Stewart and Ian Johnson for telemark and Nordic downhill. Alongside them the Fjellstoge's in-house instructors were holding a concurrent course with more of a touring bias. All in all sixty or so Nordic ski enthusiasts – wonderful!

The area is ideal, as there is a range of pisted tracks running around the undulating terrain and over the lake and several downhill slopes graded from green to black. Touring tracks are also maintained to allow access to local peaks (to 1200m or so) and for the brave, or lucky, up onto the summit of Gausta (1883m) which dominates the landscape.

Normally snow is virtually guaranteed to the end of April. But as we know, this was not a normal year, there being little snow since early season and extremes of temperature. So we arrived to icy tracks and even icier hills. For the first lesson of Alan Eason's group this was ideal for teaching us how to cope with ice. The key is keeping the skis flat in the glide and the placing of the new pushing ski flat onto the track. An edged ski is a slow ski and also, particularly on ice is an unstable ski. Alan taught us a 4-step progression to ensure we got our skis flat on the snow. I can recommend it for whenever you start a skating session and it also works with roller skis. I won't describe it here, but ring me if you want to find out more.

Luckily snow started to fall that night but unluckily the track machine broke down so the new snow wasn't consolidated. However classic technique is good for vorlaufing, making our own tracks, so next day's lesson was on classic and uphill. We learnt that if you get your ankle flexed so the knee is forward, and hence the hip too, then it is possible to stand still on one ski on a steep uphill slope – even on dodgy wax! This reinforced Alan's teaching point that maintaining the weight forward ensures a good strong kick. This work was preceded by exercises to ensure good alignment of the arm movement – forward and back along the line of the track and scootering to develop a downward kick with the kicking ski staying low and the body upright (rather different from my old technique which was forward leaning and with a high trailing leg after the kick - see picture in the Jan/Feb newsletter). Later

in the week we were able to reinforce these good techniques and I certainly felt the benefit as the week went on.

It wasn't all formal lessons. Other activities were organized for the afternoons – like introduction to telemarking, downhill skills for track skiing and ski-tours, but many people did their own thing. Most however took part in the ski-orienteeing on the Tuesday afternoon (in brilliant weather) and the 5km skate race on Wednesday morning (in gale force winds) and the fancy dress relay on the final day in sweltering weather as the snow melted by the minute. The evenings were equally packed with things to do, an avalanche safety talk, quiz, videos and a very impressive film by Patrick of his solo kayak around the Western Isles of Scotland including the first solo unsupported crossing to St Kilda. All in all it was an excellent event, not to mention the food, which was wholesome, tasty, varied, and in quantity. I felt privileged to have taken part and now I'm trying to organise my time to go back next year – the dates for your diary are provisionally 29th March to 5th April. It would be good to have a few more TL members along next year.

Footnote: I first stayed at Kvitavtn as part of my gap year in 1976 and learnt to ski there, so it was rather nostalgic to go back after so long. Compared with my distant memories of 1976, there are now hundreds of huts and chalets built in the forest, as people realize what a special place it is.

Alasdair Wilson

Rovaniemi, Finland –home of Santa Claus and the World Masters 2007

Finland, land of lakes, trees and snow, and, of course, home of Father Christmas - having never been to Finland, I decided I couldn't miss the opportunity and continue my run of attendance at the Masters World Championships in cross country skiing. Last year I was at Brusson in Italy, the year before near Moscow, and next year..... it will be all the way to McCall in Idaho, USA? The events each have their own particular feel – a mixture of the place, the snow conditions and the organisation. What doesn't change much is the general friendliness of fellow competitors and the atmosphere of striving to maintain or improve performance as the years go by and people progress through the age classes (5 year divisions from 30 to over 85 for both men and women).

This year was no different. Rovaniemi, the host town, is just south of the Arctic Circle, Napapiri in Finnish, with a history of timber exploitation and salmon fishing before being raised to the ground as the Germans withdrew towards the end of WWII. Rebuilt and thriving on tourism, science and technology, it welcomed us at the opening ceremony in Lordi Square (named after the home-grown winners of the Eurovision Song Contest) with traditional singing, modern dance and Father Christmas himself.

The British team was smaller than usual, just seven of us, but as enthusiastic as ever. Accommodation was in a very impressive sports complex called Santasport Center that is used for training by national teams and has several world class alumni. This was ideally placed for the tracks and had a state of the art waxing room that proved essential, as conditions varied hugely over the week. We weren't far from the hotel at the top of the hill where the North Americans and Aussies were staying, so had a chance to meet up with old friends.

Despite the latitude, snow was a problem. Very little had fallen over the winter and the race tracks were ill-prepared at lower levels and only slightly relieved by a midweek snowfall, after temperatures rose from the -15 to 20C early on. However the tourist tracks on the hill of Ounasvarra, up from the very impressive ski stadium backed by a family of ski-jumps, were excellent, and used by us for practice.

Race day 1 came – 30km and very cold, snow was either very icy or stiff sugar, hard work and the layers of life tops and legging were essential. Two days later I had to unzip my ski suit collar as I was too hot for the 10km! Relaxing on the rest day I skied to the Arctic Circle along the frozen river and up a freshly pisted track through pinewoods and past backs of tasteful housing estates. Signing wasn't good but I got there in the end and posted my obligatory postcard from Santa's grotto in Santa's post office. Actually the venue was quite restrained and the tourist shops sold a good range of high quality Finnish crafts and produce. The main visitors had come by skidoo – a big money earner for the area but not too environmentally clean! Once I'd found my way, a network of ski-tracks/cycle tracks took me back to the river and a shuttle bus home.

We nearly had a men's relay team but resting for the 45km races was judged to be appropriate. By now we were coping with zero conditions, new snow and cloud. Luckily, one of our Finnish residents, Mike Bangle, had sweet-talked the Start company to sponsor our team with a collection of their latest waxes and ski hats. This should have given us a fair chance of levelling the playing field and perhaps it did, as everyone seemed to struggle, except the guys always at the front. We will always be disadvantaged by lack of time on snow and waxing experience however a number of us improved on last year, or at least kept the advancing years at bay.

I was particularly pleased to finish all three of my races and to get two PBs (if not in absolute time but in FIS points, by which you are rated against the winner's time).

Results at <http://personal.inet.fi/private/tanu/mwc2007/results.htm>)

I think my improvement is due to roller skiing in the summer and attending the skills courses at Hetton and Lancaster. Hopefully the on-snow skills course at Kvitavtn will bring yet further improvements (see separate report).

Alasdair Wilson

See photos of Kvitavtn week and World Masters in Finland on pages 7 and 10.

More Racing News...

Heather Dickinson did the Engadin Marathon this year and once again got close to the 4-hour mark. Apparently the conditions were quite icy, especially skiing over the lake, and she had arrived only the day before which was not quite the best of preparation.

Well done to **Helen Dickinson** who finished in 3 hr 34 min she was the 2nd British woman to finish. Results on

<http://services.datasport.com/2007/winter/esm/esmrang/LANDGB.HTM>

Global Warming

I had a couple of responses to the item in the last newsletter – I had hoped for more! Heather sent me the following link www.seat61.com/ which tells you all about travelling by train and ship. It is a great website (privately run) with lots of information about journey times and CO₂ emissions. If you care about the environment and want to save the planet, this website is definitely worth a look.

Heather says that she went to the Jura by train in January and it was a great experience – much less stressful than by plane. Trains can produce as little as a tenth of the CO₂ per passenger-mile compared to flying (details on the seat61 web site). Heather also notes that trains don't damage the upper atmosphere. Carbon and water vapour emitted by a plane is much more damaging to the atmosphere (and future climate) than similar amounts emitted at ground level by a train.

Roller Skiing

Several of us are regularly meeting up on Thursday nights for roller skiing practice at Hetton Lyons Park (near Durham) from about 6.30 to 8.00pm. The club has a few pairs of roller skis for hiring out to members, so do come and join us (contact Alasdair for further details). If you have not tried it before, we can help you get started – or you can come and join us at one of the SnowSport England training weekends at Hetton later in the summer (see below).

30th June/ 1st July 2 weekends of first class roller ski instruction at Hetton Lyons
1st & 2nd Sept (hopefully including Mike Dixon, ex GB Olympic biathlete)
 Contact Adam Pinney – phone: 01582 602995 or email: aapinney@ntlworld.com

Sat 2nd June – 11 mile roller ski tour, starting near Cockermouth and following well-surfaced paths (mainly disused railway lines) to Workington and Whitehaven Harbour (returning mostly by train).

Sat 14th July – 12 mile roller tour (6 each way), starting at Escrick village and following a well-surfaced track along the *Interplanetary Sculpture Trail* to York. Contact Mike Smith (Lakeland XC Ski Club) on 015395 64742, or email mh.smith@ktd.broadband.com