



TYNESIDE LOIPERS

The NorthEast's Specialist
Cross Country Ski club

Newsletter
October 2007



Website: www.contraflow.com/loipers

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Club Events

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| Mon 29 th Oct, 7pm | AGM and Social at Charlie's house – see page 3 |
| 5 th to 10 th Nov | 20% club discount at Wildtrak, Newcastle – see page 3 |
| Date tba | Norway planning meeting, Charlie's houses – see page 4 |
| Tues 11 Dec (tbc) | Xmas meal at Tisii (Whitley Bay) – contact Jackie, page 3 |
| 17-22 nd Jan 2008 | Telemark Long weekend, Italian Alps – contact Alan, page 4 |
| 27 th Jan to 3 rd Feb | (provisional) Track skiing week, Lapland – see page 4 |
| Easter (tba) | Norway hut touring – see page 4 |

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Editor's Musings

Keen loipers have already spotted the promising first signs for the coming season. Jon Mellor was on Cairngorm at the end of September in 4 to 5 inches of snow and snow falling heavily in the car park. Jon also alerted me to the following website www.webcamsinnorway.com/ which features over 600 webcams throughout Norway – ideal for anyone wanting to check up-to-date snow conditions and fixing a last minute flight to Bergen and beyond. For a good view of clear skies and snowy mountains, try checking Isfjorden (just north of Romsdal). Well – it was really was clear skies and snowy mountains at the time of writing!

I am pleased to say I have booked my first two ski holidays! The first is the club holiday 'Telemark Long Weekend' in Italy in January – see page 4. Four of us are already committed and we are hoping a few more loipers will be joining us in Italy for a fun weekend of telemark skiing.

I have also booked for a week at the Mistaya Lodge in the Canadian Rockies. That fulfils a long-standing ambition to do a week at one of these catered lodges with daily guided telemark tours. I will be joining up with a small group from London Nordic Ski Club. This is remote back-country skiing, far away from the usual mechanised ski resorts - between the Banff and Yoho National Parks (20 minutes by helicopter from the town of Golden) it is surrounded by big mountains and lots of powder. There are some great pictures and stories on the website www.mistayalodge.com/

Subs are now due!

It's that time of year again! For those paying by standing order, membership cards are being sent out with this newsletter.

Anyone not already signed up to a standing order is requested to send me a cheque for payment as soon as possible. Cheques should be payable to 'Tyneside Loipers' and sent to me *Alan Mitcham, 5 The Rise, Ponteland, NE20 9LJ*. Rates remain unchanged from last year. Alternatively it is not too late to set up a standing order as from this year, using the standing order form being sent with this newsletter.

Full member	£14
Joint members (same address)	£22
Juniors	£10
Country member	£5

Tyneside Loipers AGM and Social Evening

The AGM and social evening is scheduled for Monday 29th October at Charlie's house (26 Victoria Street, Newcastle) starting with food and drink from about 7pm onwards. As usual the club will provide wine and soft drinks and you provide the food. Charlie will be doing a veggie chilli or something similar. For more details or for instructions on getting to Victoria Street, or to let him know what food or drink contribution you will be bringing, call Charlie on 0191 261 7719 (or e-mail apdh05@dsl.pipex.com).

The formal business will begin around 8pm and end at 9.45 latest. After that you are welcome to stay for another glass of wine or mug of tea and more socialising.

Please contact Heather Dickinson if you have not already received e-mail details of the agenda (0191 281 0495 or heather.dickinson@ncl.ac.uk). Heather would also appreciate having nominations or volunteers for committee – none of the posts are too onerous! The AGM is also your opportunity to influence what the club will be doing over the next year (some of the options are listed on page 4).

Loipers Christmas Meal – Tuesday 11th December

After an excellent meal last year, we have booked to go back to Kisii, the Afro-Indian restaurant at Whitley Bay metro station. The menu includes a good range of vegetarian food, plus chicken and lamb dishes (Indian cuisine with an East African influence). Good food and beer and good ambience. Contact Jackie Paice as soon as possible if you would like to join us on 11th December (Jackie's phone and email details are on the front of this newsletter).

More Dates...

5th to 10th November is club discount week at Wildtrak (St Andrews Street, Newcastle). The 20% discount applies to most items (though probably not books and maps and GPS) and is off the original marked price. Remember that Wildtrak give 10% discount to members at other times of the year (as do the LD Mountain Centre). Don't forget to take along your TL membership card.

On Friday 2nd November there is a lecture by Doug Scott entitled 'A Crawl Down the Ogre'. It starts at 7.30 at Newcastle University and is sponsored by Tiso. Tickets at £10 are available from the Tiso website at www.tiso.com/whats_on or from their store in Grainger Street, Newcastle. Doug Scott was the first Briton to climb Everest and his lectures are truly excellent (editor's recommendation!) The title refers to the first ascent of the 24,000ft Ogre in the Karakorum with Chris Bonnington, an epic adventure as thrilling as Joe Simpson's Touching the Void.

Tuesday 20th November is the date of this year's Warren Miller film at 7.30pm at the Newcastle Empire. Look forward to the usual entertaining extreme skiing and snow sport sequences. Tickets at £7.50 can be had from www.warrenmiller.co.uk

Club Trip to Norway 2008

Discussions on next year's club Norway trip are already under way! We are contemplating a hut-touring trip as in previous years and possible venues are either the Rondane or Dovrefjell. The Rondane has a number of staffed huts and tourist hotels connected by prepared tracks, whilst Dovrefjell is a little more remote (more adventurous maybe?) with mainly unstaffed huts and few marked routes. Either area would be new territory for a TL club trip. The most likely date is just after Easter 2008.

Charlie Fisher will be hosting a get-together in late November (to be confirmed) at which we hope to agree the main details (preferred dates, outline itinerary, etc). Anyone wanting to take part a future club Norway trip should come along and join in the discussion.

See page 6 for some photos from last year's club trip to whet the appetite!

Telemark Long Weekend – January 2008

At the time of writing, four of us have already booked for this club trip to the Italian Alps. We will have four and a half days of skiing, based at Passo Tonale, which is a high altitude snow-sure resort (up to 3000 metres) with around 100km of piste and a well-established lift system. More details of Passo Tonale and the neighbouring resort of Madonna di Campiglio can be found on the Ski Club of GB website www.skiclub.co.uk/skiclub/resorts/gssg/resort.asp

If you would like to join Tim, Jon, Paramjeet and myself, please contact me Alan Mitcham (contact details on the front of this newsletter). We will be flying direct from Newcastle to Bergamo (Milan) on Thursday evening 17th January and returning on the following Tuesday evening 22nd. Flights are with Ryanair and are currently around £80 including the extra costs of ski carriage.

For any keen telemarkers, this could be your ideal start to the season!

Track Skiing in Lapland – January/February 2008

Remember the excellent article by Judi Webb in the last newsletter? Neil Aitchison is contemplating a trip to Yllas in Finland in January/February 2008 and this might be a trip that can be considered as a club holiday. Inclusive holiday packages to Yllas are available with either Crystal or Inghams (for details of packages with Inghams, see www.inghams.co.uk/ski/index.aspx). Neil is proposing flying from Manchester on or around 27 January (flights are not available from Newcastle).

This is what Neil says about skiing in Yllas....

I enjoyed the skiing very much during my visit three years ago. It can be very cold, minus 30C. The tracks are good but, when the temperatures are so low, skating is more or less impossible, the granular snow creating too much resistance. However, the waxing for classic is perfect. By the end of the trip, the temperature had risen to minus 2C. The area is at most gently undulating with one or two larger hills. It has a remote feel with most of the skiing within forest. From the top of the pistes you simply look across forest to the horizon. It is a unique environment.

The area boasts Finland's longest ski runs (downhill piste skiing). On a windy day it is very reminiscent of Cairngorm (but colder!). I still enjoyed two good days on the piste.

I stayed at the Hotel Akas where there is no single room supplement. Rooms were excellent with superb drying cabinets in every room. Food was adequate and always buffet in style. No lunch is provided but there is a supermarket in town and there are opportunities on the trails to purchase drinks.

If anyone fancies a track skiing trip to Lapland, please contact Neil on 01896 750751 (or e-mail neil.aitchison@virgin.net). You can look forward to vast kilometres of superbly prepared tracks and wonderful displays of the Northern Lights (comment from Judi Webb!)

Or The Black Forest...?

Charlie Fisher is keen to point out that the Black Forest has excellent network of cross-country ski tracks and, in a good snow year, this would be another good venue for a loipers club holiday. Furthermore there are lots of good cafes and refreshment stops where you can stuff yourself with cakes and generally soak up the good life while excusing yourself with the thought that you will ski harder and burn off the calories the next day.

The down side is that Black Forest has not had the best snow record in recent years (2006 was a really good year and the season went on and on – but this year the snow was quite poor). Anyone interested should therefore be prepared to set aside a week and book flights at short notice depending on the snow conditions. Contact Charlie if you are interested (or come to the AGM and find out more).

Charlie would also like to hear from anyone interested in a long weekend of roller skiing in the spring or early summer. The Black Forest has lots of well-prepared paths and would be an excellent venue for roller ski touring once the snow has vanished. There is a choice of cheap flights and good value accommodation (and lots more cafes and irresistible black forest gateaux!).

TYNESIDE LOIPERS – NORWAY 2007



Photos by Nuala Wright



Hetton Lyons Park, near Durham, Sept 07
SSE Roller Ski Coaching and Classic 10km Race

(photos by Alastair Brown)



Loipers Summer Meets 2007

We haven't just been roller skiing all summer!

We had two very enjoyable evening events, both ending with a good pub meal. The first was an evening walk organised by Jane Forster (thanks Jane!) from the Boatside PH near Hexham – a lovely 5-mile walk over Warden Hill, with great views over the North Tyne. The second was a 15-mile bike ride, mostly off-road, in the Tyne Valley (led by myself) starting and finishing at the Keelman.

However the best Loipers summer event (for me) was the Sunday bike ride in September. Six hardy mountain bikers, Keith, Paramjeet, Tim, Charlie, Alasdair and Alan availed themselves of the 'taxi' service provided by Tyne Bridge Bike Hire to get to our start near to Stanhope. Starting on the cold windswept road between Stanhope and Blanchland, I was already questioning my decision to cycle in shorts!

We were soon off-road and cycling westwards along the old wagon way towards Rookhope. Bolts Law summit was just off the track and three of us managed to cycle to the top at 540m above sea level (with the occasional carry over the rougher patches of heather). Then into the teeth of the wind and towards the top of Bolt's Law Incline, we paused to put on waterproofs at the ruined engine house and contemplated cycling down the incline to Rookhope. It is a steep and rough track but it didn't stop Paramjeet riding down at a cracking pace.

After the exertion of climbing back up from Rookhope, we cycled east again towards the café at Parkhead Station. Catastrophe! Tim's bike was causing him a great deal of trouble and he quickly realised that the frame had broken and there was no prospect of him continuing. Fortunately he managed to get a lift back to Newcastle in a minibus (support van for a Newcastle Police mountain bike outing!)

The rest of us had a splendid great-value lunch at Parkhead and a great ride back down the Waskerley Way and the Derwent Valley Walk to the car park at Derwenthaugh Park. Commiserations to Tim... the rest of us had a great day!

Alan Mitcham

Member News

Congratulations to Alasdair Wilson who successfully qualified as SnowSport England Roller Ski Instructor at the Lancaster roller ski course in September. TL members can now look forward to some expert coaching from Alasdair at Hetton Lyons Park or on Town Moor.

Commiserations to Rob Forster, recovering from an 'accident with a supermarket trolley'! You missed a great bike ride (though maybe it was a bit tame compared to riding the supermarket trolleys).

Holidays and Tuition

The big news this year is that Waymark Holidays (everybody's favourite XC ski holiday company) no longer exist! It seems that the parent company First Choice Holidays were not prepared to support both Waymark and Exodus. In effect, Waymark has been absorbed under the Exodus umbrella and Exodus Travels claim that 'most of the very same award-winning cross-country holidays are offered within their Winter Activities brochure'.

Let's hope that Exodus are true to their word and can maintain the excellent Waymark standard. Here are the contact details for the main companies that are still running!

Exodus – www.exodus.co.uk

Headwater – www.headwater.com

HF Holidays – www.hfholidays.co.uk

Ramblers Holidays – www.ramblersholidays.co.uk

XCuk – www.xcuk.com (run by ex Waymark director Stuart Montgomery)

Norsc Holidays – www.norsc.co.uk (specialist company for independent travellers)

InnTravel – www.inntravel.co.uk

If you are after a telemark skiing week with instruction, you should try one of the following.

The Telemark Ski Company – www.telemarkskico.com

Telemasters – www.tele-masters.co.uk/main.html

Telemasters now have a winter base at Champéry in Switzerland and have courses starting in mid-November. The Telemark Ski Company run week-long telemark courses at various European venues and also run nordic and telemark touring weeks. Both companies have good web sites with lots of good photos.

Fancy having a go at Indoor Climbing?

Charlie fisher and Alan Mitcham have recently been going to the excellent 12-metre high indoor climbing wall at Newburn Leisure Centre. There are a good number of top-roped routes with a choice of climbing grades. Anyone with a reasonable amount of experience would be welcome to join us (you will first have to fill in a form at the centre to demonstrate that you know how to belay safely). Those who have not tried climbing before will have to enrol first on an induction course.

Climbing sessions will be followed by a compulsory pint at the nearby Keelman PH.

Roll on climate change! (A Newcomer's Guide to Roller Skiing)

There are more arguments against roller skiing than for. Asphalt does not begin to compare with snow for the fun of falling and other mishaps involving people or the scenery are no less hazardous (thanks Alan for the demo). In addition, it means yet more clobber to be bought and stored, further dilution of off-season energies, and it is by no means obvious where to do it. You need a good smooth surface and the relative absence of other users of the same space.

All the same, I have finally got round to having a go – the club was able to provide the loan of skis and poles. The boots are the just as you would use for XC skiing, assuming yours fit a Salomon track ski binding. A helmet and knee and elbow pads are also recommended (but many roller skiers seem to do without).

The usual XC skiing skills (or absence thereof) clearly apply. I have now skied on the Town Moor and also down on the Gateshead side of the Tyne between the Swing Bridge and the new Staithes housing development – both are great venues. I have tried classic technique (thanks to ratcheted wheels which don't go backwards) and a bit of skating too. It actually is fun – not as much as the real thing but a lot more stimulating than many other things one can do with the time.

So far, I have borrowed club skis. Observation of club and personal equipment reveals a range of lengths (dependant on whether for classic and/or skating) and some differences in wheel radius, width and composition. Otherwise it's a binding on a plank with a small wheel on either end!

Now for something rather bizarre... I thought about buying my own kit, and set about a look on the internet via the usual means, concentrating on the German world, where these things are bound to be in greater abundance, and cheaper. What an eye opener – not the fact that they are out there and cheaper too, but the variety of roller ski forms. These include variations on what I had seen so far in the UK, and which were at least credible, e.g.: (i) very short skis only slightly longer than the binding, for skating at speed, not so different from 'nordic blading'; (ii) rather long skis with inflatable almost pram-sized wheels, for classic technique on rough trails, the point of which I really do doubt. I could go on, but instead I will leave you with three notable examples of what is out there and for sale, with pictures to prove they exist.

Skikes!

Skikes appear to have been invented by a visionary/harebrained Austrian chap. These are short, with fairly large inflatable wheels, and a sort of clamp that attaches to your shins. Instead of a binding, you lash yourself in on ordinary sports shoes. Pictures on their website seem to indicate both classic and skating.

Grass skis

The model I saw on eBay is endorsed by the world grass kite skiing champion (I think I know how he feels – I am the world champion at Victorian-terrace-backyard-jumaring, unless someone else knows better). These seem to consist of a caterpillar-track like assembly, with no fewer than 19 wheels per ski.

CAT skis

CAT = Classic All Terrain – and they do seem to mean all! The makers claim these skis will do more for technique than any skiing on snow, and get you very fit (converts who regularly thrash their way through the undergrowth go on to record great times when back on snow!). The ski consists of two moving parts, with a bungee cord opposing the sliding of carriage (where the binding is) over the other bit (which has wheels). There's no gliding, and you have to force the things along uphill or down, hence the fitness improvement. Personally I will continue to stay in terrific shape by cycling with the brakes on.

I am new to roller skiing – is this as weird as it gets?

Charlie Fisher

Editor's comment... I would recommend the tried and tested conventional roller skis as used by Tyneside Loipers and the other nordic clubs. The main manufacturers are Start, Swenor and Marwe. The grass skis referred to by Charlie are downhill alpine-style skis (not cross-country), which became quite popular for off-season grass skiing about 20 years ago. Sorry there was not enough room to publish the pictures. (Ed.)

We have had some good summer evening roller skiing this year. Hetton Lyons Park (near Durham) is still our best venue for width of track and variety of terrain. But for sheer convenience, it is difficult to beat skiing on Town Moor and along the south side of the Tyne. All of the venues have a good surface (the main cross-cross paths over Town Moor have been newly tarmaced in the past couple of years). In the early summer on Town Moor there were skylarks singing and house martins swooping overhead. There are also cows (lots of them!) – the cowpats on the paths tend to be rather a hazard as they are quite slippy.

The cowpats are easily avoided and the lampposts too (though I can vouch that the consequences of hitting the latter are quite painful!). If you would like more information about roller skiing or you wish to come and try it sometime, have a word with Alasdair, Heather, Charlie or myself.

Alan Mitcham

The recent Guardian guide to Adventure is packed with great ideas for adrenalin seekers. I really fancy a go at blokarting – an updated version of sand yachting, or windsurfing on wheels! The guide also has a feature on mountainboarding – the snowboard equivalent of grass skiing. And it has a good feature on roller skiing, which it says is the perfect sport to build up your stamina and condition the body for XC skiing. It rates roller skiing as 4 out of 10 for thrill factor, 2 out of 10 for danger and 6 out of 10 for fitness.

SnowSport England -Nordic Skills & Multi-Activity Week Kvitåvatn, Norway - 29 March to 5 April 2008

This will be the eighth year of this highly successful 'On-Snow' coaching week at Kvitåvatn. It comes much recommended by Alan Mitcham and Alasdair Wilson (both were on the course last year). Accommodation is at the welcoming Fjellstoge and coaching is provided by a top team led by Patrick Winterton and Andy Stewart.

The course is for XC skiers who wish to improve their skills whether their interests are in touring, racing or freeheel downhill. It is also for Alpine skiers who wish to improve their skills and convert to freeheel downhill and telemark skiing. The XC groups will concentrate on classic and skating technique on the prepared tracks whilst the downhill group will practise techniques, up to including telemark turns, on the piste.

Other snow related activities in the past have included ski orienteering, snow holing, crevasses rescue, fun races and games. There is also an opportunity for some touring. There are also talks, slide shows and quiz evenings.

For more detail and to book your place for 2008, contact Helen Bell on 01274 875680 or e-mail helen@hebell.fsnet.co.uk

London Region Nordic Ski Club are organising a trip to Japan 6-18th February to coincide with the Sapporo International Ski Marathon (distances of 25 and 50km). Members of other SSE nordic ski clubs are welcome to join the LRNSC tour – contact Paddy Field for more details paddyfield@ski-nordic.co.uk.

LRNSC are also organising a ski-touring holiday in the Rondane 9-16th March. This is pre-Easter, so you could go on the LRNSC trip before Easter and still manage to go on the TL trip (page 4). Contact Paddy Field as above, or contact me (Alan Mitcham) for more information on both these trips.

Nevisport

Readers may have noticed that the Nevisport outlet in Newcastle is now closed! The company was bought by Newcastle United owner Mike Ashley at the beginning of this month and immediately went into liquidation. Seven of the original twelve Nevisport stores remain open at the moment but the Newcastle store has gone.

Cheap Flights – what cheap flights?

If you are taking a return flights to the Alps with Ryanair (the bad boys of the cheap airline world) you have to pay a whopping £31 for the privilege of taking your own skis and boots. And you also have to pay £14 to take a mere 15kg of checked luggage! EasyJet charge £30 for skis and boots and £4 for 20kg of checked baggage.

Remember that the regular scheduled airlines and some charter companies still do not charge for skis (and they do not charge for checked baggage!).