



# TYNESIDE LOIPERS

The NorthEast's Specialist  
Cross Country Ski club

Newsletter  
January 2008



Website: [www.tynesideloipers.org.uk](http://www.tynesideloipers.org.uk)

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### Club Events

27 March - 8 April	TL Norway Trip – contact Alan or Charlie – details page 3
Thurs 15 <sup>th</sup> May	End of Season Meet (social and slide show) – page 3.
7 <sup>th</sup> to 14 <sup>th</sup> April	SSE Nordic Skills Training, Kvitavtn Norway – page 10.
7 <sup>th</sup> to 14 <sup>th</sup> April	SSE Race Training, Kvitavtn Norway – page 10.
28/29 <sup>th</sup> June	SSE Roller Ski weekend, Hetton Lyons, Durham.
TBA	Evening walks and bike rides – page 16.

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### Editor's Musings

Happy New Year to Everybody! 2008 has started off as a great year compared to the European snow famine of last year. Hope everybody has had a chance to get away somewhere and get some practice on those skis. I have been lucky enough to have already bagged 11 days of great snow in the Alps already!

Keith Walker and Paul Gaines both got some local skiing in early January (at Allenheads and Yad Moss respectively) but, whilst there were good dumps of snow, it disappeared all too quickly. The best of local skiing may well have been at Weardale Ski Club (see pictures on [www.skiweardale.co.uk/photos.html](http://www.skiweardale.co.uk/photos.html)) where they had up to 6 inches of snow on 22 January.

Tyneside Loipers winter season has got off to a good start with a successful trip to Seefeld at the beginning of January (track skiing) followed by a very successful long weekend in Passo Tonale in Italy (telemark skiing). Read more in this newsletter...!

### **Tyneside Loipers has a new website**

It was decided at the AGM that we would pay for a new website address with our own domain name and Charlie has done a great job bringing the website up to date with more pictures and links to some relevant video clips on YouTube. The website is still developing and more pictures and video clips will go on soon. Do please add the new website to your favourites and contact Charlie with any comments and suggestions for things to add to the website.

[www.tynesideloipers.org.uk](http://www.tynesideloipers.org.uk)

In addition to the pictures and the information about the club, you will also find all of the recent Tyneside Loipers' newsletters, which can be downloaded in an easily accessible pdf format. Please note Charlie's new e-mail address on page 1 of this newsletter.

### New Tyneside Loipers Committee Members

Following the AGM in October, Charlie Fisher has now taken over as Club Secretary (Charlie is also webmaster) and Paramjeet Bhogal and Rob Forster have also joined the committee. Paramjeet has taken over the post of Child Protection Officer. Whilst we currently do not have any junior members, this is a position we are obliged to have by SnowSport England who are the governing body for our sport (hopefully the post will become more relevant in the future if the club starts to expand its membership).

Many thanks to our retiring Club Secretary, Heather Dickinson who has done a splendid job for the past few years.

## Member News

John Starbuck has just returned from a successful ascent of the Carstensz Pyramid in West Papua (Papua province Indonesia) on the island of New Guinea. At 4884m (16023 feet) Carstensz Pyramid is the highest mountain in Oceania (formerly Australasia). John has now completed six of the seven summits (highest peaks on each of the continents) – only Everest to go!

Charlie Fisher deserves a mention for his performance in the OMM (the new name for the Karrimor International Mountain Marathon KIMM). He and partner Colin made the ‘gold standard’ in the medium score event, which (in his words) is not bad with a partner recently rebuilt by medical science with a snapped Achilles. Charlie has ambitions to do even better and is looking for a younger and fitter partner!

### **Norway Hut Touring 2008**

Tyneside Loipers will be going this year to Dovrefjell, which is the area to the NW of Lillehammer. We will be flying out to Oslo from Edinburgh with Norwegian Air on Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> March and back home on Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> April. One night will be spent in each direction at Lillehammer youth hostel and we will start skiing at Kongsvoll, which is connected by the railway (about an hour to the north). Alan, Charlie and Keith are all booked to go – you would be welcome to join us.

The DNT huts are mostly unstaffed and are split between about 800m and 1300m altitudes. The area is dominated by the peak of Snohetta (2286m), which at one time was thought to be the highest peak in Norway. As well as the summit of Snohetta itself, there appears to be some great touring potential and good routes between huts. Dovrefjell itself is a National Park and has dramatic peaks, dark corries, sharp ridges and wide, open valleys.

YouTube has some great video of Dovrefjell and the herds of musk ox that roam the area. See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q6P-VCe3nIE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q6P-VCe3nIE)

These big hairy beasts are up to 1.5m at the shoulder and weigh up to about half a tonne. It may not be wise to ski too close to them!

If you would care to join us, or would like to know more, contact Alan or Charlie.

### **End of Season Get-Together**

We are planning to have our usual social get-together at Charlie’s house on Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> May – time for a good old natter and a drink or two (the club will provide the wine as usual). Food contributions would be welcome. Bring your slides and photos and see what other loiper members have been doing this year (a digital projector is available). We expect to have lots of slides of the club Norway trip too and some video clips from the TL Telemark Weekend in Italy!

Put the date in your diary (15<sup>th</sup> May) and watch out for more details by e-mail.

## Awards for All Application

Good progress is being made by our Chairman Alasdair, aided and abetted by members of the committee, with an Awards for All application to fund purchase of roller ski equipment and to hold a number of come and try it events over the coming year. Using Hetton Lyons as a key venue and bringing in instructors and additional equipment from Yorkshire Dales X-C ski club, at least in the first instance, this will be an opportunity to attract new members to the club and raise the profile of nordic skiing in the region.

Alasdair has qualified as a roller ski instructor to help take this initiative forward and hopes to add the on-snow instructor award following attendance at the SSE Kvitavtn week shortly after Easter - see elsewhere in newsletter for details. We'll be looking for volunteers to help with the events to help hire out the skis and promote the club to the participants - watch out for further news towards Easter.



## Tyneside Loipers Telemark W/E Italy - January 2008

**Tim, Jon, Alan, Rob & Paramjeet**



## **Tyneside Loipers Telemark Weekend to Italy (17-22 Jan 2008)**

It was billed as a 'long weekend' and it was 5 days of great telemark skiing in glorious weather and superb snow. My wife Pam still remains to be convinced that 5 days constitutes a 'long weekend'!

We started off from Newcastle airport at 20.35 on Thursday evening and enjoyed the dubious hospitality of Ryanair en route to Bergamo near Milan. Bergamo airport was fairly deserted and there was a worrying shortage of taxis (we were the last flight to arrive, at about midnight) but finally we made it to the youth hostel before the 1.00am hostel closure.

Tim had masterminded the weekend to perfection... At 9.30 on Friday we loaded ourselves and skis into a minibus and enjoyed a comfortable transfer to Passo Tonale. By 1pm we had checked into our hotel, changed into our ski gear and were lining up at the ticket office for lift passes. The sun was shining on the righteous! And it continued to do so for the entire 5 days.

Passo Tonale has about 100km of piste. The village is strung out along the highest point of the main road (the pass or passo) at about 1900m. The hotel Albergho Eden was very quiet apart from the noisy group of English youngsters from Crystal Ski who came back very late after their first night on the town. And it was exceedingly good value (less than £40 per night including evening meal and choice of wine). It isn't the place to go if you are seeking après-ski and entertainment but we did find one decent bar not too far from the hotel.

The skiing was ideal. There were plenty of blue and red runs (mainly east facing) on one side of the resort, all accessed by chairlifts, and great for telemark skiing. On the other side there was a gondola going up onto a high plateau and a T-bar giving access onto the glacier at 3000m (a big wide steep red run). And to the south there was a long run down to another village and another network of pistes and chairlifts. There were lots of good mountain cafes with a good choice of lunch fodder.

There was also some great off-piste skiing! The recent snowfalls had created a deep powder paradise, which was immediately evident from the chairlifts. (The depth of powder was apparent on the first sortie to retrieve Rob's ski pole dropped from the chairlift!) The best of the off-piste snow was to be had in the first 2 days.

Our lift pass also covered the nearby resort of Madonna di Campiglio, to which we could get using the free ski bus (a 40 minute ride early Monday morning). This too was an ideal resort for telemark skiing and it gave us another full day on great snow.

On our last morning we were surprised to find that we were sharing the piste with 45 telemark skiers from Denmark! We of course thought we had more style and better technique (and we have some great photos and video clips to prove it!) It was nevertheless good to see lots of other telemarkers out on the slopes.

Altogether it was a great 'long weekend' so don't be surprised to be hearing about another telemark weekend in 2009!

Rob, Tim, Jon, Paramjeet and Alan

## **Skiing in the Black Forest**

Charlie Fisher reports that the Black Forest has had great skiing since December! He is still keen to hear from anyone who would like to go for a week or a few days of track skiing (probably in early March). Charlie will advise on cheap flights and other essential information. Contact [charlie.fisher@phonecoop.coop](mailto:charlie.fisher@phonecoop.coop) for more details.

The Black Forest has abundant prepared trails for cross-country skiing and plenty of café stops with irresistible cakes and gluwain. There is lots of good value accommodation and the area would also be a great venue for roller ski touring in the spring or early summer.

Whilst on the subject of cakes and gluwain...! Thanks to Jackie Paice for organising the Xmas meal at Kisii in Whitley Bay. We had a great turnout of 17 people (16 members), which must be a record! It was a good social occasion as usual and the food was very good too (though it was a pity the service was so slow). Thank you Jackie – here's hoping you can find somewhere as good for next year, and ideally where they can cope with the larger numbers.

## **Cross-Country for Blind Skiers**

*I was interested to read the following article that appeared in Stuart Montgomery's recent e-mail newsletter. It is reproduced here (slightly edited) with his permission. Stuart runs the specialist cross-country ski company XCuk and previously ran the cross-country ski programme at Waymark.*

On our New Year week at Dalseter, in Norway, we shared the hotel with a group of blind and partially sighted skiers and their sighted guides. They had come up from Denmark on a trip organised by "Dansk Blindesamfund". This was their first visit to Dalseter. One of their guides told us that they liked the straightforward layout of the hotel. Because all the rooms are in one building and because the main floors have a similar floor plan, the place is easy to get to know. The more confident of the blind guests were therefore able to find their way around alone after a short time.

The skiing seemed to suit them too. Most days we would pass some or all of them on the tracks just to the north of the hotel. Most skied in classic technique, letting the tracks do some of the steering for them. But a few skated - on the Peer Gynt Loipe that links Dalseter to Fefor. One of the skaters was a former paralympic athlete and he was exceptionally quick.

In such groups the arrangement is that for each blind skier there is at least one sighted guide. Often a group will contain more sighted guides than blind skiers, to allow the guides some free time. Out on the snow, the guide skis ahead of the blind

skier and constantly relays information about the track and terrain. To help communication, the Danish guides wore nifty microphone headsets that connected to little amplified speakers on their bumbags.

From time to time you will encounter visually impaired British skiers out on tracks in the Alps or Scandinavia. Mainly they will be on trips organised by Vitalise, formerly known as the Guide Dogs For the Blind Association. This winter, for example, they have an early-April week in Finnish Lapland, based in Ylläs. Just like the Danish group at Dalseter, Vitalise groups rely heavily on the services of sighted guides. The guides are unpaid volunteers who receive a subsidised holiday in return for their work.

The nature of that work depends on the level of experience of the blind skiers. If they already have good skiing experience then the guide's task is mainly to "see" the upcoming ground for them and tell them what to expect. But if the skiers are complete beginners then of course the task also includes the teaching of basic skills. And for that the guide needs to be a very good instructor who really understands how basic techniques are made up. An instructor working with sighted clients will rely heavily on giving demonstrations, on showing how techniques should be performed and then asking the students to copy what they have seen. With blind skiers the instructor can't do that. Instead he or she has to be able to "deconstruct" a technique into its component parts, to describe each part clearly, and then to identify and correct faults. It's quite a job.

If you want more details about sighted guiding, go to [www.vitalise.org.uk/Visually-Impaired-Holidays/Sighted-Guiding.aspx](http://www.vitalise.org.uk/Visually-Impaired-Holidays/Sighted-Guiding.aspx) The organisation uses sighted guides for all its active holidays, not just the skiing ones. As the website says "Sighted guides are an essential part of Vitalise Holidays. You could make the difference between a visually-impaired person having a much needed break or no holiday at all. Not only that, but as a sighted guide you are able to add a whole new dimension to the holiday for our visually impaired customers, whether you're describing the Sistine Chapel, navigating the Lochs of Scotland or narrating the final moments of the Cup Final."

Being a sighted ski guide is hard work, as the guides themselves will tell you. But most of them will also be able to tell you an inspiring tale or two, which will help you to understand why they do it. I like the one about the visually-impaired beginner on her first morning at Sjusjøen. The guide walked with her out on to the frozen lake, helped her clip into her skis and said "Okay, you can set off in any direction you choose." The skier burst into tears. When she had regained some composure she said, "It's the first time in my whole life that I've had that kind of choice."

*If you want to subscribe to Stuart's e-mail newsletter, you can sign up at <http://sports.groups.yahoo.com/group/xcuk/>*

## **The Masters World Championships 2008**

This year's Masters World Championships is being held in the USA at the beginning of March. Alasdair Wilson is planning to be there, along with a select band from the British Masters Cross Country Ski Association. From previous newsletters you will recall that this is a week of competition for Masters skiers, men and women, from 30 years of age to over 90, competing in free technique, or classic, over various distances up to about 45km.

The venue McCall, Idaho is known as "Ski Town USA" for its great snow conditions. McCall has hosted various international, national and regional events over the decades. The town got its beginnings during the early 1920's and 1930's when Finnish settlers introduced not only cross country skiing to the area, but also ski jumping and alpine skiing. The area now known as Ponderosa State Park attracts visitors in summer and winter that come to see the 150-foot ponderosa pines and many other old trees that grow here.

Nordic ski trails run the length of a 1000-acre peninsula that splits Payette Lake, just 2 miles north of downtown McCall. The combination of great scenery, good terrain and great snow has been attracting skiers since the park's beginning in the mid 1960's. The ski trails look to be a bit less severe than in previous years and are designed to be technically challenging but safe for all ages, so that competent but not expert skiers can compete alongside past Olympic champions!

Good luck to Alasdair. Have a great time and bring back a trophy or two (or at least a good story for the next newsletter).

## **The DNT in its 140<sup>th</sup> birthday year**

DNT (The Norwegian Trekking Association) is 140 years old! The celebration concert in Oslo in January was not attended by any Tyneside Loipers, as far as I know, but it was sure to have been a good night (at least based on my experience at the end of season party and Easter weekend shindig at Fondsbu).

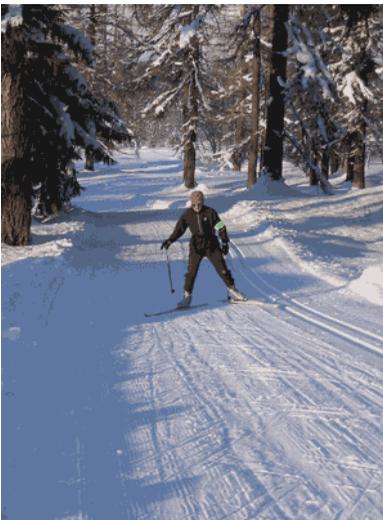
The DNT have 440 cabins (huts) across Norway and a 20,000km network of marked trails for summer hiking. There is also a substantial (but rather less extensive) network of marked trails for ski touring in winter. Many of the huts are staffed over the main busy period of the summer and winter seasons. Others are unstaffed but have a cache of food and other supplies (fuel and candles, etc) always available and a few others are unsupported. Touring from hut to hut is a great way to see this wonderful country. The website [www.turistforeningen.no/english/](http://www.turistforeningen.no/english/) gives more details. Annual membership of the DNT costs 480 NOK (about £45).

**STOP PRESS** Anyone planning a DNT hut trip in the Rondane should, for the time being, avoid the self-service hut at Rondvassbu – it has recently burnt down!



Nuala, Carolyn, Jane and Pat in  
Seefeld – January 2008

(article promised for next newsletter!)



Heather in Goms Valley, Switzerland, Xmas 2007 (dynamic skating!)

## 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 and there are talks, slide shows and quizzes in the evenings.

For more detail and to book your place, contact Helen Bell on 01274 875680 or e-mail [helen@hebell.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:helen@hebell.fsnet.co.uk)

During the following week (5<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> April) there is a Race Training and Coaching Awards week, also based at Kvitavatn. This is aimed (obviously) at those wishing to improve their cross-country racing technique and those who are working towards one of the SSE coaching qualifications. Contact details are the same as above.

*Alasdair Wilson will be participating in the Coaching Awards week. Alan Mitcham was planning to participate in the Nordic skills week again but unfortunately the event clashes with TL Norway hut-touring trip (much to my disappointment -Ed).*

More details of SSE events including the summer roller skiing training and racing calendar and a wealth of other information are given on the SSE Nordic website [www.escnordic.org.uk/](http://www.escnordic.org.uk/)

### Club Equipment

The club has a stock of metal-edged touring skis and leather boots of various sizes, which can be hired by club members. The equipment is looked after by Clare Woodall who lives in Whitley Bay. She may be contacted on 0191 297 2557 or 07950 075966, or e-mail [clarew88@hotmail.com](mailto:clarew88@hotmail.com)

We also have a small number of roller skis and boots (the boots in this case are Salomon track boots), which are kept by Alan Mitcham.

There is a small charge for hire of equipment, which currently is  
£10 per weekend for skis and boots, and  
£4 per day (or £2 per half day) for roller skis and boots.

Anyone wanting to try roller skiing for the first time is recommended to contact Alasdair Wilson (details on the front of this newsletter).

## **Buying Skis for Touring – To Wax or Not?**

Is it really 4 years since I bought my last pair of skis? I decided this year I must have some new touring skis for the Norway trip and I was keen to upgrade to wider skis with more sidecut for downhill performance. It seemed fairly obvious that I needed to have the Fischer E109 which are just that bit wider than my present touring skis (whilst I may have to work a bit harder going along the flat, I am sure that I will have a lot more fun going downhill).

That was the easy bit! But the E109 comes in either the waxing version, or the non-waxing version with a fish scale base. It really is a difficult decision. For several years I have had the problem of keeping up with Charlie and others whilst touring in Norway. Many times I have been struggling with imperfect wax whilst he has been getting a perfect grip with his fish scale base, though every now and again, my waxing works a treat and I actually feel I have the advantage.

Well the decision is made! I am going for a non-waxing fish-scale base. I know that the glide will be compromised and sometimes I will not get as good a grip as I get with good waxing. But touring at Easter time is always a compromise. Often we are skiing on old warm snow and waxing can be a real nightmare! At least I will be able to start each morning without having to make that decision (so often wrong) about which wax to use.

That said, I do feel a little sad about leaving the wax behind. Just over the last year I learnt a lot more about using klister (which may well be the answer to waxing on old warm snow). One trick that I learned at Kvitavtn last Easter was to apply klister to the skis in very thin layers using the heel of the hand or the thumb. Yes – klister is about the most horrible sticky substance you will ever come across and is impossible to get off without the appropriate solvent. But don't worry about getting it on your hands – ten minutes later it has disappeared without a trace (probably into your gloves) and it doesn't seem to do any lasting harm!

Another trick of the trade is to crayon on a thin layer of (blue) grip wax on top of the klister. The extra layer of harder wax prevents that most awful of problems – balling up of snow underneath the ski (another nightmare scenario that makes the ski heavier and heavier and eliminates any possibility of glide).

So I am committed to a future of waxless touring. Even so, I look forward to the joys and complications of wax and klister when I inevitably return to track skiing!

## **Are your skis the right length?**

Having the right length ski is just as important for touring as it is for XC track skiing. On recent trips to Norway a few people have skis that are too short and others have skis that are too long (names are withheld to avoid embarrassment!) although it seems most people have got it about right.

With skis that are too long it can be really difficult to push the central waxing (or fish scale) section of the ski into sufficient contact with the snow for a good grip and

forward kick (and of course the extra length also impedes your ability to turn the skis when going downhill). On the other hand, with skis that are too short, you will experience lots of grip but will lose out on the glide (and when the snow is very soft you will sink horribly with each stride, so the skiing can become very hard work indeed).

Getting the right length of ski is quite a difficult problem, even after taking specialist advice. However I was particularly impressed with the service at Braemar Mountain Sports who, after giving me their best advice and recommending a 188cm ski, have told me that I can swap them for a (brand new) shorter pair if I am unhappy with their performance. That is good service indeed!

### NEWS IN BRIEF

More telemarking.... Telemark fanatics can have a great time at the 14<sup>th</sup> International Telemark Festival in Livigno, Italy, 5<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> April. See [www.livgnofreeheel.it](http://www.livgnofreeheel.it) The week includes included lessons, day touring, competitions, ski workshops, films, and lots of fun skiing and parties.

Last year over 1000 telemarkers attended from Europe and North America. I enjoyed a superb telemark festival week in 1998 and I would love to return for another year (not this year unfortunately).

Nevisport Newcastle store has reopened having been taken over by the owners of clothing retailer Trespass. The Newcastle store was one of two Nevisport stores closed for about 6 weeks after being taken over by Mike Ashley. Not much has changed since the recent reopening. Tyneside Loipers can still obtain a 10% discount in the store.

Roller Ski Touring – The Manchester, Yorkshire Dales and Lake District clubs are organising some great day tours on quiet country roads and traffic-free paths over the coming summer. Distances are typically between about 7 and 12 miles. This is a good way to roller ski in a relaxed and friendly environment and meet up and talk about skiing. More details are on the SSE Nordic website [www.escnordic.org.uk](http://www.escnordic.org.uk) (or talk to Alan Mitcham).

#### For Sale – Berghaus rucksack (£20)

Pat Lynch has a 55-litre Lady Pulsar rucksack for sale “in good nick”. Contact Pat on 01661 853475.

Alan is also selling a men’s 55-litre rucksack and 40-litre Lowe Alpine rucksack (both little used). Reasonable offers – phone Alan Mitcham 01661 823960.

Tyneside Loipers Summer Outings – Please contact Alan if you are willing to organise a bike ride or evening walk or other activity for this summer. Look out for more details in the next newsletter...