



TYNESIDE LOIPERS

The NorthEast's Specialist
Cross Country Ski club



Newsletter
April 2008

Website: www.tynesideloipers.org.uk

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Club Events

Thurs 24 th April	End of Season Get-together at Charlie's house (see page 3)
Sat 7 th June	Walk and BBQ at Allenheads, contact Keith (see page 3)
Sat 21 st June	Midsummer walk and pub evening, contact Nuala (page 3)
Thursday evenings	Regular roller skiing – contact Alasdair (page 16)
28/29 th June	SSE Roller Ski weekend, Hetton Lyons, Durham (page 16)
July (tba)	Eve pub walk, Allen Banks to Cart's Bog, contact Alan.
Aug (tba)	Bike ride, north Northumberland, contact Alan (see p 3)
6/7 th September	SSE Roller Ski weekend, Hetton Lyons, Durham (page 16)

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Editor's Musings

After almost 6 weeks of skiing this winter, I am starting with a big thanks to my wife who has let me thoroughly indulge myself in my favourite sport. Pam and I had a great week of skiing together in Les Arcs in January but for the most part I have been let loose to enjoy myself in the company of passionate nordic skiers – the TL telemark long weekend in Italy, the Norway touring trip with Charlie and Keith, and a great adventure ski holiday in the Canadian Rockies (more of that later).

For anyone keen to extend the ski season (and brave the conditions north of the border), most of the Scottish resorts have good snow cover and are open for skiing now (late April) and Nevis Range is planning to stay open until 5th May.

It seems most Tyneside Loipers have made good use of the winter. Many thanks to all of you who have contributed the several good articles in this edition. Sadly I have had to prune some of the articles to make room for everything and have been unable to make use of all of the many photos. But please do keep sending in those photos – I will try and make room in the next newsletter. There of course will be more photos and slides to see at the End-Season-Get-Together at Charlie's – do come along and join us then (see page 3).

Member news

Vivienne Brown and Harry Hall have now moved to Felton (off the A1 just south of their previous home in Alnwick). Vivienne now has a 400 ft long garden and is growing vegetables, whilst Harry is converting the top storey of the house for his photography. They have recently adopted a little girl Ebony (6 years old) and that has meant they have been unable to get away skiing this year. They hope to get away somewhere in Norway next year to introduce their little girl to the joys of skiing. Very best wishes from all of Tyneside Loipers and here's hoping that Ebony proves to be a better skier than her Mum and Dad!!

Congratulations to Heather and Helen Dickinson who both came away with personal bests in the Engadin Ski Marathon. Heather finally broke 4 hours (by a big margin!) – actually 9th British woman in 3 hours and 45 minutes! Helen finished in 3 hours 19 minutes and was 4th British woman (out of 14).

Club Skis and Boots

Do we have a volunteer to take over the club skis and boots? Ideally you should live not too far from Tyneside and have some space in a (dry) shed or garage. We have about 5 pairs of club skis (all with metal edges suitable for touring) and about 9 pairs of boots. Many thanks to Clare Woodall for looking after the club gear for the past few years.

Please contact Alan or Clare (soon) if you are willing to help!

End of Season Social Get-Together – Thurs 24 April

Charlie will be hosting the usual social evening at his house (26 Victoria Street, Newcastle) on Thursday from about 7pm onward. All loipers and friends are welcome – contact Charlie to let him know you are coming and to find out what food and drink contributions are required. See front of newsletter for Charlie's phone and email details.

Bring along your photos of various ski trips (digital projector available) and let us hear what you have been doing this winter. You will also see some great slides of the club Norway trip (and pictures of musk ox!).

June Barbeque at Keith's House, Allenheads

Join us at Keith's house in Allenheads on Saturday June 7th. We will be meeting between 10.15 and 10.30 at the Hemmel Café in Allenheads village (free car park opposite the café) and doing an 8-mile walk finishing back in the village – take a snack lunch. Then we will have a short drive to Keith's house (just outside the village) to start the barbeque. Contributions of BBQ food and drink will be most welcome (salad and jacket potatoes will be provided).

Please let Keith know that you are coming – email: jkeithwalker@hotmail.com or phone 01434 685119, or mobile 07969 021680. Also contact Keith if you would like to stay over on Saturday night (camping amongst the ducks and the hens!).

Midsummer Walk on the Roman Wall (21st June)

Nuala is planning an evening walk on Saturday 21st June, starting along Hadrian's Wall and finishing at the pub at Twice Brewed. Take champagne and sandwiches and we will find a high vantage point to eat and toast the evening sun (in theory!). More details by e-mail before the event (Contact Nuala on 07770 376732 or nuala.wright@lineone.net)

Evening Walk, Allen Banks to Cart's Bog (Thurs 17th July)

Alan is planning a Thursday evening walk finishing at the Cart's Bog pub (for good food and beer). The walk will be about 4 ½ miles of riverside, woodland and open country past Staward Peel – if the weather is bad we will go straight to the pub! The expected start is at Allen Banks, just west of Haydon Bridge, grid ref NY797641. Contact Alan Mitcham, details on front page, to confirm arrangements (car sharing etc).

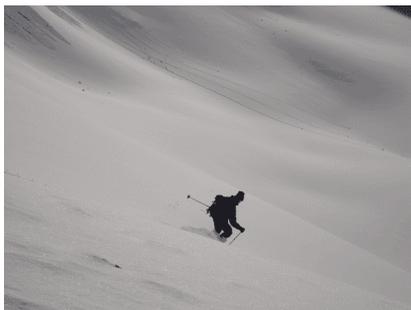
Bike Ride in North Northumberland (August, date to be confirmed)

Alan is also planning a bike ride for a Saturday or Sunday in August. Details are yet to be finalised (contact Alan nearer the date) but we will probably be doing a 21-mile route to the south and east of Wooler. The route, from the OS publication 'Bike Rides in Northumberland and Co Durham' is mostly off-road and is fairly tough (I can confirm that) though it is more undulating than outright hilly. A mountain bike or rugged hybrid bike is required. An alternative route can be found to bypass some of the tougher off-road sections (for those whose bikes or bums are not up to it!)



Alasdair with the M55 Great Britain Relay team at the World Masters in Idaho

Carolyn, Jane, Nuala and Pat in Seefeld
...blissful relaxation in the pool on the final day!



Wonderful snow and glorious weather in the Canadian Rockies

Tyneside Loipers on YouTube!

The latest version of the Tyneside Loipers website has links to our own web space on YouTube. Go to the photo gallery page of the club website www.tynesideloipers.org.uk and at the bottom of all the photos you will find the links to a number of videos which are hosted by YouTube. Or just google 'youtube' and 'tyneside' and 'loipers'!

The video clips from the January club telemark weekend in Italy have already received over 400 hits! I wonder if that is mainly from our club members, or whether there is a bunch of people out there just surfing the web for telemark videos (there are a number of good telemark videos on YouTube and many of them are well worth watching).

If you have any video material of interest to Tyneside Loipers, do let Charlie have it to add to that on the club web space (unfortunately we missed a great opportunity to get more video material on our recent Norway trip).

More telemark news...

Snowsport England Nordic Key Committee now have a Telemark Development Officer, Matt Higginson. Matt is based in the Midlands (Staffordshire) and has produced a development plan, which it is hoped will place telemark skiing higher up on the SSE agenda. There will be more events aimed at telemark skiers and better promotion of telemarking as a sport. Look out for more in future newsletters.

On 19th July there is to be a one-day Telemark Festival based at the Tamworth Snowdome. There will be a whole-day programme of instruction and competition events, for all levels, and there is a hardware swap shop. Seven hours skiing and full participation in the festival events will cost only £58 (hire of skis and boots if needed is £15). For anyone who would like to stay down in the area there is also a film and entertainment in the evening. Contact Matt Higginson (07813 268124) if you would like further details – or log on to www.telemark-skiing.co.uk

I would be keen to go down to Tamworth for the telemark festival if there is anyone else keen enough to go! Any offers? (Ed.)

Skiing in the Canadian Rockies

This is only a brief report as I intend doing a proper article in the next newsletter. But wow – what stunning scenery! And what great snow and wonderful weather!

It all came about after a chance meeting with Greg Buick at the Kvitavtn week last year. He and I kept in touch and 10 months later I joined Greg and 3 other Brits at Mistaya Lodge in the heart of the Rockies. We arrived by helicopter (a 20-minute flight from the town of Golden in BC) and no sooner were settled in than we were out on our skis and involved in an avalanche safety session – avalanche safety was a big issue with the guides at all times and, on several days, avalanche issues affected just what routes were open to us. On most days we did about 3000 to 4000 feet of climbing and 3000 to 4000 feet of exhilarating telemark descent – tree skiing, high peaks and cols, and open bowls!

It was an excellent week with great company, good guides and wonderful food. I will definitely be doing similar trips in future years. More in the next newsletter...

Alan Mitcham.

Tyneside Loipers – Ski Touring in Dovrefjell, Norway

Our 2008 trip to Norway was excellent and memorable – and not just for the strong winds, poor visibility and difficult snow conditions! We did indeed climb Snohetta (on our one really good day) and we did after all see the musk ox (on the last day of our trip). Also we stayed in some amazing huts!

Charlie, Keith and Alan went to as planned to Dovrefjell, which is about 80km north of Jotunheim, some 4 ½ hours by rail from Oslo airport (well north of Lillehammer). Keith and Alan spent the first night at Kongsvoll, a charming but expensive old coaching inn with its own railway station (the oldest present buildings dating back to 1720). Then we met Charlie off the train the following day and skied the 17km to our first hut Reinheim with good snow and occasional snow flurries along the way. We passed a group of young Norwegian lads with big rucksacks containing what we later learnt was boxes of wine and cans of beer!! Not surprisingly, we had organised ourselves to be as light as possible and soon overtook them. (They decided, because of the weather forecast, which was not too good, to ski no further than the first hut!)

The next day was a short ski of only 10km but the wind was against us and we had to ski over a very windy col at 1550m altitude. We reached our next hut Amotdalshytta at about 2pm and, as the weather improved slightly in the late afternoon, Charlie and I went out for a 6km ski tour. The map showed good touring options in the area and we agreed to stay here for a second night. But the wind returned with a vengeance and our 'day tour' was reduced to just 2 hours. At one point we were all 3 of us blown over at the same and struggling to get back upright and ski across a flat snow-covered lake!

The following day the wind had subsided and we left a note for Chris Ottley and his friend Paul (they were by then just one day behind us, having started with an overnight at the same hostelry as Alan and Keith) and set off on a 25km unmarked route to Grøvdalshytta. This was one of our best days for weather (in fact Chris and Paul took advantage of the improved conditions to do a traverse of Snohetta). Skiing out across the same lake on which we had experienced the previous day's storm, we encountered massive build ups of sastruggi (this was to be a feature of the trip from now on) but the visibility was good and at this stage it did not cause us a great deal of bother. Our route was quite spectacular and took us down into a deep valley and past some amazing frozen waterfalls (the hut is down at 840m). But our biggest obstacle along the route was the thick birch forest, which at times was quite difficult to find a way through.

Our next day turned out to be quite an epic! We had poured over the map and decided to take a route via a side valley which quickly got us out above the birch forest but took us onto steep icy terrain (no doubt the result of previous days of sunshine and strong wind on the south facing slope) and it was some time before we got out of the valley and onto safe ground. Charlie took over the navigation and we then had some challenging skiing in poor light over some difficult slopes with massive sastruggi. At one point late in the day, we encountered (first Charlie and then I) a sudden 20-foot drop that was completely invisible to us until we were directly over it! The col just ahead of us was clearly visible but both the sudden drop (due to drifting snow in the intervening gully) and the rocks below it were completely hidden. It was an unnerving experience! Then, just beyond the col, we could see our hut about 2.5 km away.

Raubergshytta was a real treat. It is quite remote and, looking at the hut book, seems to be hardly visited. But it has the best-stocked food store in all of Norway! And it has

indoor toilets (ok they are not the flushing variety) and it also has a wonderful lounge area with a bay window overlooking a wide elevated valley to the south (even a pair of binoculars by the window to watch the wildlife – assuming reasonable visibility and some wildlife to watch!).

Chris and Paul finally caught up with us on the following day (we unfortunately had experienced another day of poor visibility and made do with an afternoon tour of just 9km taking in a small local peak of 1499m with a handsome cairn). It was good to compare notes with the two of them – they too had had some scary moments on the way over from Grøvudalshytta but we reckoned that they had chosen a slightly better route than us.

On our next day we were hoping for better weather so that we could get onto some of the peaks near to Raubergshytta but the view from the window was not promising as we sat and ate our breakfast. As the day wore on we were forced to change plan (several times!) and for various reasons in the late afternoon we found ourselves heading back up Grøvudalen and returning to Grøvudalshytta. By this time the weather had improved and it was a wonderful evening's skiing and we were following a good track (much preferred to the dodgy route that we had taken several days earlier).

By now we were familiar with the fickleness of the weather. True to form the previous evening's good weather turned to snow and sleet and more high winds and for the middle third of our route back to Amotdalshytta (25km and 600m ascent) we skied against a blizzard of snow before the weather cleared again and we had a glorious sunny evening! And the following morning... more snow showers and poor visibility (and another morning playing cards) until the weather again turned fine enough for a late afternoon tour.

On our penultimate day we were lucky enough to have some settled weather at last! This was our big day and we got out at a respectable time and started on the ascent of Snohetta, en route to our final hut night back at Reinheim. By about 1pm we were on the summit ridge (which is very dramatic) and by 2pm we had climbed across to the main east summit having dipped down to a deep notch in the ridge. It was a satisfying peak to bag – at 2286m it is the highest in Norway outside of the Jotunheim area. From the other side of the radar station on the summit we could see that the east shoulder was swept bare of snow and we decided to return along the ridge to the notch and ski down a long steep glacier to the sticked route leading back to Reinheim. We had beaten the weather at last and it really was a memorable day! In fact, by the time we were half way down the glacier, the weather had closed in and the top was no longer visible.

Our final day brought snow showers and poor visibility as we skied against a moderate NE wind. But we did at last see the musk ox for which Dovrefjell is justly famous. I have a photo to prove it, with 5 of these magnificent hairy beasts about 400m away and Keith skiing past in the foreground (we wouldn't have wanted to be too much closer).

All in all it was a very enjoyable trip, despite weather and snow conditions that were amongst the most challenging I have experienced. Dovrefjell has some dramatic scenery and some of the best huts in Norway. When the weather is not so good, it is amazing how quickly the time passes with games of cards and mountain hut scrabble! And we still managed to do lots of good skiing!

Alan Mitcham

What a difference a stick makes...!

In previous years most of the route finding has been fairly elementary, as we have used the 'sticked' routes, which are marked out for the season and lead the way between huts and other key transit points. These routes are not entirely risk free – you can always have a mishap on a descent – but they at least offer a skiable route and in poor visibility you only have to find the next stick to stay on course.

Navigation without sticks requires that you get some visual clues from the surroundings. Most of the time we were able to see some of the features around us, and get a good enough idea where we were, but in bad weather navigation becomes more demanding and even map and compass may not suffice – GPS as backup is really a requirement here.

More alarming, on unsticked DIY routes, is what might be hiding in between the contours on the maps. Even the 1:50,000 scale maps have only 20m contours, and you can fit a nasty surprise into the landscape without it showing on the map. On three occasions during the trip I was a bit shocked to see that in the middle of harmless looking terrain you can suddenly come across a big 'hole', perhaps part of the streambed where it becomes a gorge or goes over a small waterfall, or just a huge scoop in the snow created by the weather conditions. You really do have to remain alert at all times, even in good weather, when following watercourses in particular. Hillsides seem to be more predictable.

A particularly alarming story was told us by a couple from Buxton, who a few years ago toured in the Rondane, and devised a route to a particular unstaffed hut. They were only a few hundred metres away from the hut in the late afternoon, when they came across a small stram gorge that had to be crossed. They skied some distance both up and down the valley, and at times the gap across the gorge was so narrow they could touch the other side with their poles. But nowhere did they find a safe crossing and, some hours later, ended up digging a snow hole for the night.

Lessons to be learned from this: plan routes carefully, picking up all clues you can from the detail on the maps, thinking about watercourses, and watching gradients too. In bad weather, routes should have some distinct 'landmark' features that won't go unnoticed, like cols or places where a valley changes direction. And then: stay alert!

Charlie Fisher

What about the new skis, Alan?...

Anyone who read my article in the last newsletter might be expecting more words of wisdom (or maybe not)? On the whole, I was glad I had gone for non-waxing skis. But I confess it is a difficult choice (my comments only apply to touring and for track skiing and racing the argument is clearly in favour of waxing skis.) With non-waxing (fish scale) skis it was so much easier, having no need to worry about waxing each morning (or during the day!). But I also found it frustrating that the skis were a lot slower downhill (the fish scales were new and added lots of friction) and in some conditions I don't think that they gave me as much grip as my waxing skis would have done – clearly you can't win them all!

Masters World Cup in McCall Idaho – Gold medals for GB

In what has become a habit, Alasdair Wilson again took part in the annual Masters World Cup in Cross Country Skiing, the only event in the calendar to allow masters skiers to compete directly against their own age group (a week of races from 5k to 45k in either classic or free technique). This year at the end of February he flew out to the State of Idaho for a few days of practice at Sun Valley, staying with fellow team member Norman Clark, of whom more later. This is a grand resort in more ways than one. One of the first skiing resorts in the States, promoted by Union Pacific railway tycoon Averill Harriman from 1936 by bringing in stars such as Errol Flynn, Claudette Colbert and Bing Crosby, Sun Valley continues to attract the rich and famous such as Arnold Schwarzenegger and Senator Kerry. At 2000m the valley air is very clear but rather thin for hard training but that meant it was easier not to overdo it. Having Norman around to guide and coach was a bonus on top of his (and his wife's) hospitality. We met up with another of the team, Chris Richards and his wife, members of the London Region club, and enjoyed the trails together. The short time wasn't enough to fully explore the area but a little up the valley towards the main peaks of the Sawtooth Range were many more km of groomed trails, often almost deserted according to the friendly man in the Elephant Perch outdoor shop. A good reason to go back sometime. Sun Valley is also where a high proportion of the best masters skiers in USA live and train so there are many role models out on the tracks to emulate.



The Masters event was being held in McCall, Idaho about 5 hours scenic drive from Sun Valley, and 2½ from Boise, the local city. McCall is a small town of about 1500 inhabitants situated at the southern end of Lake Payette and a large area of old growth forest comprising massive ponderosa pines and Engelmann spruce. The race trails were to run through the forest beside the lake and amongst those 300year old trees – awesome! The area is also well endowed with downhill resorts within a few miles and it is a mecca in the summer for fishermen and hunters. For this reason the town (called the City of McCall on the map) was able to absorb the 1200 or so competitors and companions in the many condominiums (holiday homes) nestling amongst the trees. The townsfolk were very proud of hosting the event and we felt most welcome. This was highlighted at the opening ceremony when it seemed like half the town came out to cheer the teams the quarter mile through the town to the Manchester Ice Centre. There we were treated to packets of chips (crisps) made from the famous Idaho potatoes before the speeches and then some spectacular dancing from the local Native Americans, the Nez Perce.

Overnight we had a few cm. of snow and the temperature was rising from well below zero up to that dreaded crossover point but with cloudy skies the snow would stay fresh. To make it worse the first races were in the classic style and the waxing (carefully done the night before) was proving to be a problem. What seemed a good choice for the grip wax quickly started grabbing the new snow. But the use of a metal scraper to remove compacted snow and then

half the wax at least got Alasdair to the start without further problems. The race was a different matter with regular stops to kick off accumulated ice ending up with a disappointing time. After the race it turned out that the optimum solution to the waxing conundrum was "hairy skis". This is a no-wax grip zone created on a waxable ski by roughing it up with 100grit sandpaper then spraying the area of raised polythene hairs with silicone spray to prevent the base icing up. A tip to remember! Also, maybe, a case of getting the wax-service to do them for you as did Sara Cox-Conklin, starting her first Masters for GB although she is living in Park City, Utah. She finished her 15km race in class F3 only 10mins behind the winner – not bad for only her third year skiing.

The next day the wiser skiers were doing the skating races. The now sunny weather highlighted the bright colours of the national banners lining the road to the start, 23 in all including Peru. The stadium was fully operational, the practice tracks were pisted in and there was a well-designed race layout for spectating. There were seven of the GB team competing today, the women doing 15km, including Wendy McCrae from the Yorkshire Dales club in her first Masters, capitalising on her well-developed roller skiing skills. The younger men, up to 60years old were doing 30km and the star of our team Norman Clark, in the 75 to 80 class, doing 10km. Norman had doubted his chances; six of his rivals he hadn't beaten before were racing too. It was looking to be tight race as all the main contenders were in a bunch as they approached the start of their second 5km lap with Norman tucked in behind. That was the same state of affairs as they looped round to the next spectating point but as a smaller group sped through the trees with only 200m to go there was Norman in the lead maintaining a few metres gap. He managed to stay ahead and won Britain's first ever gold medal at cross-country skiing, trumping his silver medals from Brusson and Rovaniemi.

The Masters programme is quite packed and next day (another sunny day after a cold night) were the 10km races, classic in the morning and skating in the afternoon. The question was how much would it warm up by race time and hence what glide wax to use. Also, for Alasdair, was how his ribs would stand up to the race. Winding down the previous day he had rashly decided to stay in the track down a steep bump called Tamarack that turned out to be twice as fast on his skating skis as the day before. An attempt at a stem turn at the 90-degree corner at the bottom failed as his left ski caught in the icy track. A creditable impression of Superman flying was quickly brought to an end by a chest plant and a minute or two deciding if he was still in one piece. Happily nothing seemed to be broken but the aftermath rather spoilt the rest of the week for him. The 10km races seem to be where our Brits do our best times, particularly relative to the winner's time. Brian Adams, from Glasgow and frequent visitor to Hetton Lyons, managed to record his fastest time for many years and Alasdair, despite his woes, also recorded a PB both in time and FIS points. Norman, in his 5km race, also excelled winning his second gold medal, this time burning off most of the opposition before maintaining his lead in the sprint finish with his Norwegian arch-rival.

The event is not all racing and on the rest day there was the opportunity to see the sights of McCall and environs. In the area several entrepreneurs, in one case the community ski club, have set up trail systems in the foothills of the surrounding mountains. One such is the development of Tamarack Lodge

about 20 miles south. Here the ramifications of the global credit crunch and rogue traders were laid bare, as the developer had filed for protective bankruptcy as his major loan had been withdrawn. It was rather quiet for such an ambitious place, backed by Steffi Graf apparently (a massive block of apartments and retail centre, extensive alpine runs and a plush hotel and spa). However the trails were fun and varied and well groomed. We were soon immersed in the swish of the snow beneath our skis and the dramatic scenery around us.

That evening we adjourned to the local microbrewery and restaurant to avoid another lot of home cooking and to celebrate Norman's achievements. The beer was pretty good if a bit reminiscent of home-brew but watch out for the strength, 5 to 6% was the norm. Their idea of steak was a bit weird too, the steaks looked as if they had been cut from a whole side of beef since they were cooked round the rim and pink front and back. Despite its size McCall has a varied range of eateries and despite the redneck population there were signs of liberalism in the organic veg shop, the craft shops and the convivial bookshop/drugstore. Back at the ranch it was an anxious evening watching the Weather Channel because we had decided to enter an M5 team in the relays next day – so four sets of skis to get the wax right. The ladies also had a stake in the F3 relays with Sian from Boise, via Wales, due to race in a combined Aussie/GB team. The relays are contested hard at the top but are more a bit of fun for the less strong teams. Legs are 5km each, the first two being classic and the final two being freestyle on a different 5km loop. Hard and fast! The women's team did well coming 4th, the men's not so good but still ahead of a combined Aus/USA team that DNF'd and a Czech M6 team.

The finale of the week for most people is the long race. This is 45km for men under 60 and 30km for women in the same age groups going down to only 15km for the oldest classes – a bone of contention for the top skiers of that age range. Thinking when he entered that nice extra blue snow would lead to a PB in the 45km classic, Alasdair was cruelly let down by the weather, it again being a touch above zero but not true klister conditions. The ribs were still sore so he bowed out after 15km in a creditable time on draggy skis. Next day the freestylers had colder, more consistent snow and we had some good results with Chris Donnelly (from Munich) skating very well throughout his 45k and Wendy surviving her first 30km race narrowly getting a British bronze medal in a time of 1hr 55min. Sadly Norman, already with two gold medals, didn't make it a hat trick in his race.

All in all it was a successful Masters – good snow, fair tracks, stunning scenery, good organisation, friendly people (for example our shuttle bus driver made it his business to get to know everyone's name and stop) and a very high standard of skiing, including us Brits. Next year's Masters is much closer to home on the Vercors Plateau near Autrans. It should be good. Take the plunge – try some intimate racing rather than your anonymous citizens race!

Details of McCall are on www.mwc2008.com, which has a link to a video that well presents the action and atmosphere of the week. For Vercors go to <http://wma.autrans-sports.com>. To enter you just need to be a member of the British Masters Cross Country Ski Association, a modest £5 per year, and over 30. Contact Alasdair if you want to know more.

SnowSport England Coaching Week at Kvitavatn, Norway

This is Helen Dickinson's account of the race-training week at Kvitavatn organised by SSE a week or so after Easter. Unlike those of us skiing further north at Dovrefjell, she seems to have been blessed with good snow and reasonable weather!

I arrived for the course feeling rather nervous. We all got a pre-course letter telling us not to bring our best race skis in case the snow was bad, and of course we needed both our classic and skating skis. Given that I only have one pair of skis, and had not done any on track classic in about a decade, this scared me rather (as did the ominous mention of bringing trainers to do circuits in the evenings). I got even more nervous when the first person I met from the group on arrival in Oslo was wearing a GB skiing jacket. At this point I was seriously considering taking myself (and my single pair of well-loved skis) away to a quiet corner of Norway where we could continue to be mediocre in peace. But it was actually a really great week. I was doing the race-training week and was at the bottom of the group in both technique and speed, but not by a long way so I didn't feel I was holding anyone up. It took me a few days to get into the spirit of trying to ski fast.

Until this year, all my ski instruction had consisted of Swiss ski instructors telling me to relax, slow down, and get the technique right at a gentle pace in the hope that this would carry through to going fast. This course was the other way round; it was all about trying to get the technique right while going fast, on the assumption that this would then carry over to when we were going at a moderate pace. So we spent a lot of time on hill technique and I learnt that rather than being a time for recovery and admiring the view, going downhill is a time to double pole madly in the hope of eking out a few extra milliseconds. If I could only join up everything I learnt that week I could now ski very fast. But unfortunately my fitness level isn't good enough to be able to keep up that kind of speed for more than 5 minutes.

Our coach was Mike Dixon, and he was very good. We spent quite a while watching videos of world cup skiing races for inspiration, which I really enjoyed as not having a TV means I've hardly ever seen world class cross country skiing. We didn't do any circuits in the evenings - I think that may just have been included in the pre course letter to scare us all into doing some fitness training.

I'm now feeling all inspired and determined to spend the summer roller skiing and running so that come next winter I'm fit enough to put all my new speedy techniques in to practice. We'll see how long the inspiration lasts!

Helen Dickinson

SnowSport England coaches Patrick Winterton and Mike Dixon at Kvitavatn are both excellent and I am not surprised to hear you had an inspiring week! Look forward to seeing you out on roller skis. More on the forthcoming Hetton Lyons roller ski courses and the SSE club-based roller ski tours on page 16 (Ed.)

And Kvitavatn again... This is Carolyn Hawkes' account of her trip with Exodus a couple of weeks earlier. (*Yet more drooling enviously over the descriptions of knee deep fresh powder snow...! Ed.*)

My daughter Rachel and I joined an Exodus trip to Kvitavatn Fjellstoge in the Telemark region of Norway, on Easter Saturday and enjoyed knee deep fresh powder snow, on a 2m base, at subzero temperatures all week. We were in 2 groups, with only 6/7 people in each, and had excellent instruction and guiding over a variety of forest, lake and mountain terrain, both track and off-track. Daily pre-ski warm up exercises and post-ski stretching sessions kept our muscles in trim!

Because of the deep snow, an ascent of the mountain Ornenipa was possible on skis right to the top (usually skis have to be taken off well short of the summit).

Evening entertainment for Exodus clients (there were also about 15 independent Exodus skiers) included slideshows, a discussion on waxing, and the documentary and the film "The Heroes of Telemark." The food at the Fjellstoge is excellent although nightlife did not extend beyond 9.30pm, as we were all too tired!

The Kvitavatn area seems to be having a surge in popularity. On our way down from the plateau we passed through an area (under Gausta) where new chalets, chairlifts and alpine runs are being constructed. The World Cup men's downhill was held at Kvitfjell at the beginning of the month.

How lucky we were to have enjoyed the best snow conditions for ten years in such a beautiful setting.

Carolyn Hawkes



Carolyn and Rachel at Kvitavatn, Easter 2008

A hedonistic holiday in Seefeld – Skiing – and a lot more...

We were seeking gentle loipes, lots of hot chocolate, cake and scenic stops. In January, Seefeld delivered just that – a great start to the year!

A quick romp through our holiday... Our first day was a morning of collecting information, orientating ourselves, a ski to Mosern to get our ski legs (and our first taste of the Olympic track) then late lunch at the highly recommended tennis club, our first Bratwurst, Sauerkraut and prosecco. This set the tone for the holiday. The day was rounded off with fanfares from a Tyrolean band on a balcony above the main square.

Day two was a rainy ski exploring the lower Leutasch Valley, with lovely Apfelstrudel and hot chocolate for elevenses in a welcoming warm local hostelry. Soup in Weidach at lunchtime was very welcome after the rain. And a bonus of the early January holiday was having Christmas cake in the rucksack for those important rest stops and also the Christmas decorations in town and gardens to continue the festive feel.

We explored Obern and the upper Leutasch valley day, on day three, in glorious sunshine. Our energetic morning was rewarded with a wonderful lunch of garlic soup in Obern in the sun. It was hard to tear ourselves away but we needed to earn our next treat of cake and gluwain in the konditerei in Seefeld and then (eschewing the temptations of the tea dance) be ready for dinner and the wonderful evening entertainment. Back down to Seefeld for the family music concert in the crypt of the church – a great evening of zither, harp, recorder, psaltery and voice – highly recommended.

The next day we discovered Wildmoos – a short bus ride away and an excellent base for some good loipes. The bar / restaurant is a must – it is the only building at Wildmoos and full of character and bonhomie. Note that it is closed on Mondays.

By day four we were ready for a well-earned rest! We took the train up to Rosshutte for four hours of sunbathing, reading and people watching. The latter included downhill skiers, fearsome free heelers and of course, the ubiquitous sun seekers in their deck chairs. The free heelers were staunchly climbing 1000m up the black run to Seefelder Joch for their ski onto Harmelekopf. Our exercise for the day was a floodlit evening ski as the sun went down.

We made up for our day of indolence with exploring more new territory between Buchen and Wildmoos on our final full day and then had an action packed departure day. We squeezed in a last 6 km morning ski (included a section of the Olympic route) and our grand finale was floating in the outside heated pool, snow gently falling onto our faces, followed by a good Tyrolean lunch and then the easy short transfer back to Innsbruck for our afternoon flight home.

The Krinserhof hotel was fine (good food, good value) and we were well looked after. A more central location would have been preferable but would also have cost more. The 10-euro bus pass was a bargain for the week. We regularly took the 9.28 to the Leutasch Valley and also regularly stopped for gluwain or jagertee near the bus stop whilst waiting for the 6.00 bus home. We could have walked – it wasn't that far!

In short, Seefeld was perfect for our week of track skiing with excellent food, drink and plenty of local culture.

Jane Brantom (with contributions from fellow loipers, Carolyn, Nuala and Pat)

Ylläs, Finnish Lapland – March 2008

There is little more I can add to the description of the skiing at Ylläs in the excellent articles by Judi and Neil in the May and October Newsletters of last year, except to say that I also observed men bathing in a pool in the ice, sausage grilling in the cooking shelters and for the first time – the Northern Lights! So I shall concentrate on adding a bit more detail to the Äkäs Hotel and the Town and access to the various ski tracks.

Travel was with Inghams and I took advantage of their Earlybird offers in May last year, which meant that there was an Internet discount and no single supplement. I had booked on the advice of a friend who had been there several times and is also a member of the London XC Ski Club (Judi mentioned him in her article). He and his wife were there as also were several members of the London club, so this made for good skiing and social activity (imbibing) in the evenings. The range of skiing abilities in the group varied from plodding classic (me), averaging 25k per day, to marathon skaters doing 40k and over. With temperatures varying from -27°C in the early morning to -9°C at midday you had to make sure that you were properly dressed. The cold was offset by bright and even warm sunshine, apart from one afternoon, and this added to the ambience of the area so accurately described in Judi's article.

I stayed in the Äkäs Hotel rooms on a half board basis – the en suite room was warm and comfortable and although it did not have a drying cabinet, it did have ample radiator space. The well equipped waxing room earned glowing praise from the waxing specialists, who also had a great time trying to predict the next day's temperature. Meals were buffet style with plenty to choose from – the main courses being different each evening. The hotel seems to be the centre of nightlife in the town with ballroom dancing in the evenings and a nightclub going on to 4am. Some of the group stayed in the cabins and the apartments adjacent the hotel – all had their own saunas and were spacious with good quality furnishings.

The only medical facilities in the town are available in an annexe to the Hotel.

The large Supermarket is a 10 min walk away and is well stocked for the self-caterers. You can buy beer, cider and low alcohol drinks but not wines and spirits – these can only be purchased – yes you've guessed it – at the Post Office, a further 10 minutes walk away. When you get to the Post Office, which has a very nice café attached, they do not actually stock any alcohol there – you have to choose from a very comprehensive catalogue and fill in a form (if you get your order in by 1330, it will be ready to pick up by 1630 that day but otherwise it will be 1630 the next day – payment is cash only). Just before the Supermarket on the other side of the road is the Äkäsloppolo Sports Shop which has an extensive range of sports gear for both Downhill and XC. You can also hire equipment - 70 euros for Classic XC (skis, boots and poles) and slightly more for skating gear.

Access to the loipe is directly behind the Äkäs Hotel and this links in with all the lower level track, adjacent Äkäsloppolo, and around the hilly areas of Ylläs, Kesänski and Lainio. More adventurous skiing on less well maintained tracks can be

found further east toward the Aakenus area. The number 718 bus (cost 2 euros) departs from the hotel every half hour starting at 0915 for the Downhill slopes and also gives access to the XC tracks. There is also a bus that goes to Äkäsmylly 20k to the north of the Hotel (this only runs on a Wednesday but gives access to several routes back to Äkäslompolo). There are many Autiotupa vildmarkstuga (Wilderness huts) in the area, most of which sell hot drinks and snacks, and these are usually located at track junctions. However some of them will not allow you to eat your own food inside so you need to check before you go in. At the Kesängn Keidas hut, just to the west of the Kesängki lake, if you are really tired you can get a massage – sometimes to the music of a resident accordion player.

Would I go again to Ylläs – yes! I've already booked for March 15th to 22nd next year - along with several others of the group.

Web Sites:

Ylläs Information: www.yllas.fi
 Sports Shop: www.lompolosport.com
 Hotel: www.laplandhotels.com

Frank Cauley

Summer Roller Skiing 2008

We are yet to get into the spirit of summer evening roller skiing, as the weather has so far not been very kind to us and battling along in the wind and the rain has not seemed to be a very attractive option. However the summer must start soon! Alan, Heather, Charlie and Alasdair will be out and about on Town Moor, and along the Tyne and around the circuit at Hetton Lyons Park.

Several other loiper members are keen to have a go and we will be getting together to do an introductory session with Alasdair acting as coach. We will probably start with a half-day session at Hetton Lyons where there is a good tarmac surface and a clubhouse facility with toilets. Please contact Alasdair if you are interested (details on front page of newsletter).

There will be two SSE-organised coaching weekends at Hetton Lyons this year (28/29th June and 6/7th September). These are always well organised with a good standard of coaching – recommended even if you do not have a great deal of roller skiing experience (although a little previous experience certainly will help). More details on the SSE nordic website, or contact Alasdair or Alan.

You may also be interested in the roller ski tours organised by the other SSE affiliated clubs. Some are a little far afield, but a few organised by the Yorkshire Dales club are not so far away and make for a fun and friendly day out - more details on the SSE nordic website www.escnordic.org.uk/