



TYNESIDE LOIPERS

The NorthEast's Specialist
Cross Country Ski club



**Newsletter
October 2008**

Website: www.tynesideloipers.org.uk

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Club Events

Wed 19 th Nov, 7pm	AGM and Social at Alasdair's house – see page 3
Th 27 th Nov, 6pm	Discount evening at Nevisport – see page 3.
1 st to 5 th Dec	Discount week at Wildtrak – see page 3.
Date tbc (December)	Loiper's Xmas meal – details to follow.
7 th to 11 th January	Telemark Long Weekend – contact Alan (page 5)
7 th to 14 th February	Track skiing in Austria – contact Carolyn (page 5)
10 th to 22 nd March	Norway Hut Touring holiday – see Charlie or Alan (p 6).

Alasdair Wilson (Chairman/Racing Officer)	awilson.craw@blueyonder.co.uk	0191 266 2327
Charlie Fisher (committee member)	charlie.fisher@phonecoop.coop	0191 261 7719
Paul Jameson (Treasurer)	pjameson@globablnet.com	0191 266 1875
Alan Mitcham (Membership/Newsletter)	alanmitcham@metronet.co.uk	01661 823960
Paramjeet Bhogal (Child Protection Officer)	paramjeet.bhogal@newcastle.gov.uk	0191 266 5052
Rob Forster (Committee Member)	robertforster4@aol.com	01434 608321

Editor's Musings

It has been an eventful summer for Tyneside Loipers with roller skiing, evening walks, an excellent barbeque at Keith's place in Allenheads, and the Telemark Festival in Castleford. Lots more about all of that in this newsletter.

The main talking point of the summer seems to have been the weather (ie. the rain)! The September roller ski weekend at Hetton Lyons Park was the wettest ever and on Saturday much of the track was under water and skiing was restricted to just part of the circuit. That same weekend the floods in Morpeth hit the headlines around the world. Charlie Fisher escaped the torrential downpour just before everything went haywire and arrived back in Germany to see pictures of the floods on German TV.*

Pam and I escaped the worst of the weather with three and half weeks in N America, much of it watching whales and grizzly bears in British Columbia (the grizzlies were wonderful!) We also spent a few days in Yellowstone National Park – amazing waterfalls and hot springs and geysers, and lots of wildlife including wolves, bears, bison. Did you know Yellowstone has great potential for winter ski touring?! I am still catching up after the holiday and blaming grizzly bears for this late newsletter!

There has been lots of early snow in Scotland (both the Lecht and Cairngorm have been open for early season skiing - <http://ski.visitscotland.com/>) and there are also good reports of snow in the alps.

If you are still wondering where to go this winter, why not join one of Tyneside Loipers ski holidays – telemarking in the French Alps, track skiing in Austria, or touring in Norway (or a weekend in Scotland perhaps). Lots more in this newsletter....

Member news

Congratulations to Stuart Mavin and his new wife Xu Hui who were married in China at the time of the Beijing Olympics. We hope soon to see Stuart back on roller skis and peak fitness after his extended holiday in China.

Many congratulations also to Paul Gaines and his wife Charlotte on the birth of their second daughter Maria Jane back in July....

...and to Charlie Fisher and Dorothee on the birth of their second child Kieran Mathis in late October.

Keep them coming guys – new recruits for TL are always welcome!

* More bad weather...!

The OMM (previously known as the Karrimor International Mountain Marathon), held in the Lake District at the end of October, was abandoned due to atrocious weather. Charlie Fisher (unable to compete this year due to the birth of his son Kieran) missed out on all the fun. The event got a terrible pounding, not just from the weather, but also from the media most of which slated the organisers who they considered to be very irresponsible. Yet only 14 people were injured (none seriously) out of more than 1400 that started the event. Lately the more responsible media have admitted the risks were overstated and things were not so bad after all!

Tyneside Loipers AGM and Social Evening

The AGM and social evening is scheduled for Wednesday 19th October at Alasdair's house, 14 Victoria Avenue, Forest Hall, 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 and any other booze (all contributions greatly received). For more details or instructions on getting to Victoria Avenue, or to let him know what food or drink contribution you will be bringing, call Alasdair on 0191 266 2327 (or e-mail awilson.craw@blueyonder.co.uk).

The formal business will begin around 7.45 pm and end at 9.30 latest. After that you are welcome to stay for another glass of wine or mug of tea and more socialising and people can get down to serious chat about recent exploits and future trips.

Business items will include: finance, members and SSE subs, other officers reports, club kit, trips planned, Awards for All application, publicity, and lots more (full agenda on the night). The AGM is also your opportunity to influence what the club will be doing over the next year.

Loipers Christmas Meal

We don't yet have a final date or venue for the Xmas meal – we are probably looking for a Tuesday or Wednesday evening in mid December. We intend to make a decision at the AGM night. I have a fancy we might be going to the Highlander PH (just a few miles out from the airport). They have a private room with an open fire and are offering a good Xmas menu (in my experience the food is good and they are well able to cope with a large group – unlike last year at Kisii where we had very slow service).

If you have any other suggestions please bring them to the AGM. Watch out for final details by e-mail.

Club Discount Weeks (and Evenings)

1st to 5th December is club discount week at Wildtrak (St Andrews Street, Newcastle). The 20% discount applies to all items except perhaps books and maps and GPS and is off the original marked price.

27th November is a special club discount evening at Nevisport. They too are giving 20% discount on production of your TL membership card. The evening starts at 6pm and they expect to stay open until around 9pm as long as there are enough customers to make it worthwhile.

Remember that Wildtrak and Nevisport 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.

Other Dates....

Kendal Film Festival runs from Thursday 20th to Sunday 23rd November and has a great programme of films and lectures as always. There are many well-known contributors (Doug Scott and Rheinhold Messner to name but two) and there is a ski and board evening (Friday 21st) with lots of adrenalin action. There are also films and lectures about wild-water canoeing and adventure biking. See www.mountainfilm.co.uk

Yet more adrenalin snow-sport action can be seen at the Empire Theatre at the Gate in Newcastle on Tuesday 25th November. The new Warren Miller film 'Children of Winter – never grow old' starts at 7.30pm. Tickets are available from Nevisport at £7.95 or book on-line at <http://www.store.warrenmiller.co.uk/> Everyone attending gets a Columbia Sportswear goody bag and a chance to win various prizes!

Tyneside Loipers Club Holidays

There is something for everybody – no less than three TL holidays to choose from! So it would be really great to see lots of loipers joining in on these trips.

Telemark Skiing in the Alps – 7th to 11th January

We are going to Flaine in the French Alps for a long weekend of telemark skiing. Flights are from Newcastle to Geneva with EasyJet, leaving Newcastle at 10.15 on Wed 7th and returning from Geneva at 21.20 on Sunday 11th. So we will have four full days of skiing from Thurs to Sunday (unfortunately we wont arrive in time to do very much on the Wednesday).

Four of us are already booked (Paul Gaines, Paramjeet, Alan and Jon) – you would be welcome to join us. Paul is a qualified BASI Telemark Instructor and is keen to do some coaching sessions, so hopefully we will all come back as better skiers!

The cost of flights including ski carriage is about £120. Return transfers to Flaine are about £60 each (the resort is only about one and half hours from Geneva) and we are expecting to get an all-inclusive deal at a reasonably priced hotel. Contact Alan for more details!

Track Skiing at Kaprun, Austria – 7th to 14th February

Carolyn, Nuala and Pat have booked a one-week holiday at Kaprun on 7th Feb, flying from Newcastle to Salzburg with Crystal Holidays, and would be delighted if other loipers would care to join them. Kaprun and nearby Zell am See have 300km XC trails as part of the Europa ski region (Free ski bus). There is even a short trail on the Kitzsteinhorn glacier itself!

(Editor's note – Kaprun also has excellent downhill terrain, ideal for telemarking!)

Half board accommodation in a shared room at the Hotel Sport costs £456 with balcony, or £435 without balcony (both with private facilities). There are also chalets and other hotels there.

Contact Carolyn Hawkes on 01661 822909 (e-mail carolyn.hawkes@tiscali.co.uk).

Norway Ski Touring, 10th to 22nd March

Now a regular event in TL calendar, we are doing our usual hut-to-hut touring trip in mid March (before the Norwegians invade the huts for Easter!) It looks like there will be at least 4 of us – Charlie, Keith, Alan and Heather. We are keen to hear from anyone else who would like to join us.

We expect to be flying from Newcastle to Oslo via Amsterdam (KLM) or possibly from Edinburgh to Oslo (Norwegian Air) and then we will take the train north. We will be skiing either in the Rondane or Dovrefjell (the final choice depends on who else might be joining us). Last year's trip to Dovrefjell convinced us that there is still much to do in that area – wonderful scenery and some grand peaks. On the other hand, the Rondane is probably easier skiing and with a greater choice of huts – that would be a new area for us.

Contact Charlie or Alan if you are interested in joining us. Or come along to the AGM to find out more. There are photos to whet your appetite on page 10.

And yet more...! The London Region Nordic Ski Club have organised a club holiday to Yllas in Finland from 15th to 22nd March (oh dear! that clashes with our club trip to Norway). They are keen for other SSE-affiliated club members to join them and Frank Cauley from Tyneside Loipers has already signed up.

Yllas is in Finnish Lapland and is well recommended. It has great snow and an extensive range of good tracks for skating and classic (see previous newsletter articles by Judi Webb, Frank Cauley and Neil Aitchison). Flights and accommodation are available through Inghams or Crystal Ski. Contact the LRNSC organiser damonya5@gmh.myzen.co.uk or speak to Frank Cauley.

Bits and Pieces

Thanks to Charlie for spotting this news item...

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/7178561.stm>

This particularly crass article on the BBC news website refers to a boom in short skiing holidays abroad, leading to a rapid increase in knee injuries, particularly to women. This would not have been so bad if it were not for the accompanying picture, which has obviously been taken from a big ski marathon (probably the Engadin)!

Fear not fellow loipers – the knee injuries are due to falling and twisting in modern alpine-style ski boots. Be safe and ski nordic!

Performance-enhancing drugs... try Viagra! The World Anti-doping Agency (WADA) has confirmed it is funding a research project on the use of performance-enhancing effects at various altitudes of Viagra, after which they will consider including it in its list of banned substances. As well as boosting the blood supply to muscles – helpful in sprinting – the drug may also enhance endurance especially at altitude. See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/olympics/7469509.stm>

Summer Events 2008

Many thanks to Keith Walker and his wife Paula for hosting an excellent day in the wilds of Hexhamshire, culminating in a BBQ evening at his house overlooking the Allenheads valley. This was certainly the highlight of the loipers summer calendar and one of the rare days this year on which the weather actually felt like summer.

We started (ten of us) at the Hemmel café in Allenheads village and Keith then took us on an 8-mile walk over superb countryside including the summit of Killhope Law (third highest peak in Northumberland at 673 metres above sea level) and ending back at the Allenheads Inn. The BBQ was already lit by the time most of appeared at Keith's house. And there, plenty of good food and drink was consumed, basking in the evening sunlight and gazing at the superb views including the summit of Killhope Law! Thank you Keith for an excellent day. See picture on page 10.

We also had two very splendid evening pub walks. The first was a circular walk from Once Brewed (Or is it Twice Brewed? One is the pub and the other the place, I believe) – many thanks Nuala. Rescheduled from mid-summer's eve because of dreadful weather, the second attempt promised to be almost as bad, but it brightened up as we drove west and we started with a dramatic rainbow sky. Seven loipers (well, 5 of them were loipers!) enjoyed a 6-mile walk. And yes, we did get fairly wet towards the end, but we dried out very quickly at the pub and it was a pleasant evening. (In the rain along Hadrian's Wall – photo on page 10!)

In mid-July the weather was rather kinder and our walk took us from Allen Banks to Cart's Bog. Once again there 7 of us (6 loipers!) and we walked about 5 miles arriving at the pub in ample time for a pub meal. Cart's Bog PH is much recommended and the food was very good.

Castleford Telemark Festival (27th Sept)

This was a one-day SnowSport England event at the indoor snowdome. The all-day ticket cost just £65 (that was good value if you skied for the full 8 hours). Five keen telemarkers turned up from Tyneside Loipers (Alan, Paul, Peter, Paramjeet, Tim) and also, two of Tim's youngsters, Matt and Leah. Already keen alpine skiers and snowboarders, they came along for an introductory beginner telemarkers session – both showed much promise and continued telemarking through to the early evening.

SSE telemark development officer Matt Higginson did a great job, as did SSE club instructors Ralph White and Sylvia Mercer who worked with some of the beginners. There was one other coach who I did not think much of (and for some inexplicable reason I was allocated to his group!). Later on I did an evening session with Paul Gaines and I felt I had learnt a lot in the last couple of hours. It is difficult to be enthusiastic about telemarking on such a small indoor slope but generally I thought it was a good occasion and I am hopeful it will become a regular autumn event. Thanks to Paul for entertaining us with jumps backwards telemarking and bump skiing on his twin-tip skis!

Heather's Engadin Marathon PB!

I took the train from Newcastle to Basel, leaving home about 8am and arriving in Basel at 9.15pm. The next day, with daughter Sheila, I took the train to Chur and then changed to a little red Thomas-the-Tank-Engine train that twisted and turned and dived in and out of figure-of-eight tunnels up the mountains to St Moritz. The snow looked dismal: a landscape I had seen so often as a winter wonderland had only old, patchy snow and last year's brown grass. Lakes that used to be covered in ice rippled with open water.

At St Moritz, the connecting bus took us to Maloja, the village at the top of the valley, just before the road falls downwards towards Italy. We had rented rooms above a restaurant that regaled us with hearty meals of local specialities and the woes of being an innkeeper in this modern era of smoking bans and the iniquities of paying taxes to those inbred, Italian-speaking half-wits on the other side of the pass.

For the next few days, we rediscovered our ski legs and revisited all our old haunts. By mid-day the snow was usually so warm that skiing wasn't much fun. But Maloja had the best snow and, even after six years of skiing there, I discovered new loipe that roller-coasted over the wooded hills. Saturday was rest day for visiting museums and eating spaghetti and on Sunday we headed down the valley again to Samedan for the start of the Frauenlauf (women's race).

It was raining as we parked our skis at the back of the field of 900 skiers. Having had a knee injury, which had prevented training for six weeks, my only ambition was to finish. The start was slow and it was a long time before I could ski freely - I was wishing I had started further forwards. The snow was slushy and the wind was against us. Eventually, the field settled down into skiing in two lines and it was difficult to pass (you had to espy a gap ahead and have enough oomph to overtake several skiers at once before slotting yourself back into line). We all had an



A happy Heather cruising to a PB in the Engadin Marathon...
and a happy Helen doing much the same thing!

enormous sense of achievement when we finally crossed the finishing line - with our worst times to date for the race - and were rewarded by our free pasta and chocolate bars. Skiing the Frauenlauf usually feels like being transported on a flying carpet, but even the Engadiners couldn't make much of the warm snow this year.

The marathon was the following Sunday. If I hadn't paid for my entrance fee, a deposit on accommodation and non-refundable train tickets, I would have packed my bags and headed home. But we were committed to Engadin for another week. The temperatures rose as high as 13°C, the snow melted on the frozen lakes - what wax should you use to ski through 6 inches of water? Each village on the marathon route is responsible for preparing the marathon piste in their neighbourhood, and two "Streckenchef" have overall responsibility for the upper and low ends of the valley. We watched uncomprehendingly as the Streckenchef were interviewed at length in Rumantsch on Swiss television, while bulldozers behind them delivered snow to cover the bare patches. Finally, the temperatures dropped, the water on the lakes froze, our skis became unmanageable and the wind was always against us. We gave up skiing and went for gentle walks in the spring sunshine.

And so race-day arrived, overcast, temperatures just below zero and flurries of snow. Helen hotfooted off at 7am to park her skis at the front of her block before coming home to her porridge; I had no such ambitions. At 8.30am, off we went: bibs on, baggage onto the lorries, into the pens, warm-up led by Emil Tann, president of the organising committee, then the traditional song of Mars from Holst's Planet Suite, the starting gun - and we were off. Swish of 2,000 skis. Men and women were separated for the first kilometre. I had made a decision not to check my watch, but I couldn't resist having a peek at the 5km mark. 20 minutes - I could hardly believe it! If I keep this up, I could achieve my ambition of doing it in under 4 hours! I pushed myself as hard as I could over the lakes to St Moritz. From somewhere - whether by natural blessing or by trucks that dump snow in the night - a light covering of snow had appeared on the lakes and the piste was excellent. After St Moritz, there is a well-known bottleneck as you head uphill through the woods. On the notorious downhill to Pontresina I fell for the first time ever, as I tried to steer clear of some particularly heavy, unpisted snow. Pontresina is the half-way point and I had a time of just under 2 hours - still in with a chance of beating the magic 4 hour barrier. So over Samedan airfield and then the final stretch over the "Golan Heights" - undulating hills that sap your energy as you approach the finish. Checking my watch every 5km, I realized I was catching up time. The snow on the final stretch up to the line was foul. As I struggled over the line, the clock read 4.00.55. Disappointment - but only until a younger, more intelligent Dickinson explained to me that there were four clocks at the finish line and you had to read the one that is the same colour as your bib.

As we chugged back down the mountainside in the little red train, the entire carriage checked their mobiles in unison as their times were texted through. Helen and I had personal bests (3h19 and 3h44) and both the men's and women's winners set course records (1h24 and 1h33).

Heather Dickinson

Training tips for roller skiing by Alasdair Wilson

This autumn, on Thursday evenings, several club members have been enjoying the recently resurfaced paths across Newcastle's famous Town Moor and honing their skills in making quick changes of direction to avoid the cowpats. (Have you ever noticed the strong bond they make to the tarmac as they dry out and the tremendous force that a contracting pat exerts on said tarmac layer?)

With the weather so variable it has been a bit difficult to keep up regular sessions but the lighting is actually quite good, and with a head torch and reflective vest to alert cyclists to our presence, Alasdair is happy to arrange further sessions where he will pass on some technique pointers or even start you roller skiing from scratch*. If you'd rather ski in daylight then that may be possible around a mutually convenient lunchtime. Note that the paths in Leazes Park are well surfaced too and we have permission to use them outside the busiest times.

As the snow season approaches, roller skiing is an excellent way of getting those underused muscles and neural pathways back into shape. But getting out on rollers isn't the only way to kick-start the ski season. One key skill to work on is balance on one leg – pretty obvious really but well worth the effort to improve. There are various balance aids available, e.g. balance cushions and platforms, available through physiotherapy web sites. One useful DIY balance aid is a foot long (shoe length) log about 10cm diameter. Saw off a slice along the length to make a flat surface to stand on (the curved surface goes on the ground). Aim to stand on one leg (on the log) for periods of up to a minute. Give yourself space to jump off if you get too wobbly and having it on a carpet makes it a bit more stable. Once you gain confidence try it with your eyes closed, or mimicking either diagonal stride with arm movements or skating. Try feeling through your foot and explore the feelings when you are well balanced compared to out-of-balance. Try moving your body-weight to your forefoot and then back towards your heel and back to centred. Also think about getting your foot, knee and chin all in line. This all aids your proprioception, ie your unconscious knowledge of where the different parts of your body are at any one time, and as this improves the adjustments you need to make to maintain balance will become smaller and hence you will ski more effortlessly and have more fun. A side effect will be that your support muscles, tendons and ligaments will get stronger – you'll know what I mean when you try balancing with your eyes shut.

When you get back on your rollers or your skis remember that feeling of stability and firmness through your feet and you'll soon be driving off and gliding like the best of them.

- Alasdair is a qualified roller ski instructor. See newsletter front page for contact details.

Ski Upper Coquetdale on Rollers...! It has been pointed out to me that the road to the northwest of Alwinton (one of the longest dead ends in the UK) is well surfaced and could be an excellent roller ski route. We intend to have an expedition to try this out before too long. The outline plan is to take roller skis and/or bicycles up to Alwinton one weekend soon, park in the village, maybe pop into the pub, start our exploration up the road and return in due course to celebrate the inauguration of the route at the Rose and Thistle. Please contact Alasdair if you'd like to join in.

Alasdair



The May BBQ at Keith's house in Allenheads...
...and a wet 'midsummer' along the Roman Wall



Easter 2008 Tyneside Loipers Trip to Dovrefjell

Top left - lovely Amottdalshytta. Bottom right - Snowhetta summit ridge (2280m)
In between – wonderful snowy scenery (but the sun didn't always shine like this!)

A Visit to Iceland, July 2008

If you are intending to go to Iceland to get your money out of your frozen Icelandic bank account, I would strongly recommend you stay for a few days and visit some of the wonders of this incredible island. There is so much to see, from the Phallogical Museum at Husavik (yes- it's true! 150 specimens of animal penises, with a rather large example 'standing' outside) to the Vatnajökull Ice Cap, which at 3088 sq miles, is the largest in Europe. In between there are more smaller icecaps, glaciers, huge waterfalls, many areas of intense geothermal activity, quiet and active volcanoes, fjords, miles of volcanic black sand beaches, ancient moss covered lava flows and moon-like landscapes. Driving around the island can be summed up in that well known Monty Python phrase 'and now for something completely different' and there is - around every bend in the road, with the lack of trees and roadside vegetation making for expansive views in all directions. The main road around the major part of Iceland is Route 1 – this is a tarmac road but all the roads to the interior have varying types of gravel surface so a good standard of 4 x 4 vehicle is essential for these roads which frequently include river crossings.

Our ten-day holiday started from Akureyri in the middle of the north coast. Akureyri is the second largest town in Iceland and is less than 1 degree south of the Arctic Circle. It also boasts the world's most northerly 18-hole golf course, which holds the Arctic Open golf tournament during the hours of the midnight sun in June. To the east of Akureyri on R1 are the mighty horseshoe falls of Godafoss whose spray can be seen several miles away and beyond, near Lake Myvatn, is the very active geothermal area of Námafjall where the heat has turned the ground to varying shades of brown with bubbling mud pools and rising steam visible in all directions. Further to the north is Europe's most powerful waterfall, Dettifoss. At 45m high and 100m wide it is not a pretty sight as the water is glacial, so pretty filthy, but you can feel as well as hear the power as you approach it – the flow rate has been measured at 193m³ per second – an awful lot of water. Route 1 continues in a south-easterly direction toward the moon-like landscape of the Möðrudalsfjallgarðar hills and if you look to the southwest there is wonderful view of the perfect cone-shaped extinct volcano Heröubreið (1682m) some 70km to the south. It is believed to have erupted through the then ice cap and was left in its present state when the ice melted.

The east coast has a Norwegian feel about it – many deep fjords with steep sides with Route 1 hugging the shoreline. As the road rounds the massive cliffs at Eystrahorn you catch glimpses in the distance of the Vatnajökull Ice Cap with the 20km long sandbar at Lonsvik bay to seaward. Later on, the majesty of the Ice Cap and its many glacial fingers covered the whole of the northern and western horizons. Beyond Hofn is a small inland lake with a narrow exit to the sea where mini icebergs calve from the Breiðamerkur Glacier and float in a jumbled mass with seals and arctic terns playing amongst them. At the Svinafelljökull glacier you can walk quite close to it and hear the creaking and groaning as it moves.

The south of Iceland provided equally amazing features as the rest of the country. A 30km drive across the moss covered moon-like flats of Mýrdalssandur with views of the Mýrdalsjökull ice cap brought us to the 120m high Dyrhólaey Promontory, from where there were expansive views from here to the west and east of black sandy beaches with isolated pinnacles of rock up to 56m tall sticking out of the sand. To the north – the ice

cap – to the south the sea and the Westman Islands which include the volcanic island of Surtsey which emerged from the sea between 1963 and 1966. Dyrhólaey is a good place for bird watching, particularly puffins. Driving further west on Route 1 is the dramatic 60m-high Skógafoss waterfall which suddenly appears around a high cliff. And further on is the Seljalandsfoss waterfall, not quite as high as Skógafoss but of great tourist interest as you can walk behind it.

As we had hired a Toyota Land Cruiser we decided to take a trip inland on the gravel roads to Landmannalauger. What a drive! – quite the most varied scenery you would ever wish to see – mountains, rivers, fords, snowfields, not to mention the hairpin bends on the sometimes single track roads. Landmannalauger has an extensive geothermal landscape highlighted by multi-coloured rhyolite mountains and warm bathing pools – very popular with tourists but well worth a visit. From there we continued north on R208 to its junction with the paved road R26 – this was another very scenic drive, especially the section between the lakes of Frostastaðavatn and Hrauneyjalón and past the hydroelectric power stations at Hrauneyjarfoss and Hjólparfoss. From near here you can see Hekla, Iceland's most infamous and active volcano. It erupts about every 10 years, the last being March 2000, but recent rumblings may herald a new period of activity.

The original Geysir does not blow off any more due to blockage, but another geyser known as Strokkur blows off about every 10mins and is fascinating to watch as the water in the circular pool is sucked in and out by the pressure of the hot geothermal and cold river water down below. When the pool is almost full, the water suddenly bubbles up in a blue bulge causing a plume of steam to erupt with a great hiss – not to be missed! A little further north is Gullfoss (which means Golden Waterfall) – probably the most striking in Iceland. It is in fact two waterfalls one immediately above the other and at right angles to it, the total fall being 230ft.

When I wrote my diary up for the Iceland Tour it filled 5 sides of A4 so what I have described above is just a small selection of what I experienced – and that in itself is only a small fraction of what there is to see. You really need several visits to Iceland do the island justice. It is helpful to have some knowledge of off-road driving in a 4x4 as conditions on the gravel roads can be very variable indeed.

The 10-day holiday was booked with 'Discover the World' and this included the flight from Heathrow and internal flight to Akureyri, 9 nights in good standard hotels and the hire of a 4x4 Toyota Land Cruiser. We generally ate in the hotels but found 3 cafes that provided excellent food.

Food costs are generally quite expensive and if you like fish there is a huge variety ranging from haddock to carefully rotted shark. If you are determined to try the unusual, some places serve puffin, guillemot and even fulmar. If you are really adventurous, you can try singed sheep head!

Frank Cauley

'Essential Iceland' is a handy sized guide book (AA publication)

Tour company: www.discover-the-world.co.uk/iceland.asp

Tourist Office: www.icetourist.is/

Downhill Skiing: www.onthesnow.com/iceland/skiereport.html

Ski Touring: www.outdoors.is/ski-touring

SnowSport England -Nordic Skills & Multi-Activity Week Kvitåvatn, Norway - 28 March to 4 April 2009

This will be the ninth year of this highly successful 'On-Snow' coaching week at Kvitåvatn. It comes much recommended by Alan Mitcham and Alasdair Wilson (both of whom attended the course in 2007) and by Helen Dickinson who was there in 2008. Accommodation is at the welcoming Fjellstoge and coaching is provided by a top team led by Mike Dixon 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. If there is sufficient demand, there will be an additional group for those wishing to be trained and assessed under the SnowSport England Coaching Scheme.

The mornings will be devoted to skills training in small groups, whilst the afternoons will be used for a range of mountain activities, fun-races and games. Snow related activities in the past have included ski orienteering, and mountain skills such as snow holing and crevasses rescue. There is also an opportunity for some off-track touring and there are talks, slide shows and quizzes in the evenings.

The hospitable Kvitåvatn Fjellstoge www.kvitaavatn.dk/en/ is 1000m above the town of Rjukan. The south-facing site overlooks a frozen lake and is dominated by Gausta, which at 1883m is the highest mountain in southern Norway. The well-maintained loipe offer excellent skiing over rolling terrain. The freeheel downhill groups will use the nearby downhill pistes and the area provides splendid mountain touring.

Accommodation is in 2-bed or three-plus bed bunk rooms. Self-service meal arrangements include Norwegian style breakfast buffet (where you make your own packed lunch) and full evening meal. Tea and coffee are available all day at no extra charge.

For more detail and to book your place, contact Wendy McRae (tel 01274 670071 email wendy.mcrae@tesco.net). Or contact Alan Mitcham.

Coaching costs are £295 for six days coaching, less £15 discount for members of SSE-affiliated clubs (that includes Tyneside Loipers) and £35 for early booking before 31st December. (Don't know if you can claim both discounts - Ed.)

Accommodation and meals for the week will be NK 3304 (approx. £337) for a 2-person room or NK 2800 (approx. £286) in a 3-plus bunkroom. Coach transfer is also available from Oslo Gardemoen airport for an additional £80.

More details of SSE events including a breakdown of the racing calendar and a wealth of other information are given on the SSE Nordic website www.escnordic.org.uk/

A History of Cross-Country at the Winter Olympics

I spotted this in the LRNSC newsletter (Ed.). Though the next winter Olympics are not until 2010, I hope will you agree that it is worth printing in our TL newsletter.

The history of Olympic cross-country skiing is as much about Norwegian patriotism as internationalism. When the sport first appeared as an international competition, Norwegians worried their beloved national sport would be tainted. In 1920 Norwegian expatriates, who had spread cross-country skiing world wide, called for the creation of an International Ski Congress to rule skiing competitions. The congress officially recognised only cross-country, or Nordic, events and sponsored international ski meets every four to five winters in Sweden. Until 1924 there was always a Norwegian leading the Congress; thus Norwegian rules prevailed, including the tenet that competitors had not only to be physically fit, but also possess upright moral character!

The First Winter Olympic Games: Interest in winter sports grew internationally and some events were added to the Olympic Games held in the summer. Then in 1924, the International Ski Congress became the Federation Internationale de Ski or FIS and the International Olympic Committee endorsed an eleven-day “International Winter Sports Week” in Chamonix, France. Along with speed and figure skating, ice hockey, curling, military patrol and bobsledding the festival featured two Nordic skiing events: the men’s 18km and 50km races.

Norway’s dominance over cross-country skiing was not tempered by the Olympic Committee’s inclusion of fifteen other nations. The Norwegian led FIS organisation continued to rule over skiing and Norwegian athlete Thorleif Haug won three gold medals for the 18km and 50km cross-country races, and the 18km/jump Nordic combined. Jacob Thams won the other Nordic gold medal in the 90m ski jump. Not surprisingly, Norway claimed 17 medals overall, followed by Finland with 11 of the 43 medals available. An American, Anders Haugen, won the bronze in the ski jump, but was not awarded the medal until a scoring error was corrected fifty years later, when he was 83!

Modernization of Events: Over the years with FIS approval, Nordic events have changed and multiplied. In 1936, a 4x10km mixed relay was added to the cross-country events. The 18km race was reduced to 15km in 1952 and has been held as a classic style race ever since (except for the 1992-1998 Games where it was replaced by the 15km combined pursuit). Appropriately the first women’s Nordic event, a 10km classical race, took place at the 1952 Winter Olympic Games in Oslo, Norway. Not until the 1988 Calgary Games, was another major change made: the Olympic Committee began designating classical and freestyle techniques for specific events. Following that decision, the combined pursuit included a 10km classical race and a 15km freestyle race contested on separate days until 2002, when it was shortened to two 5km races held the same day. The 30km freestyle event joined the line-up in 1956, being held as a classical event for the 1998 Games, switching with the 50km event, which was held as a freestyle event that year. The 2002 Winter Olympic Games introduced the 1.5km Sprint.

Nowadays the men and women each compete in six events. The women's events are the sprint, team sprint, 10km individual start, 15km pursuit, 30km mass start and the 4x5km relay. Men compete in the sprint, team sprint, 15km individual start, 30km pursuit, 50km mass start and the 4x10km relay.

Cross-country skiing's twelve events are the most of any Winter Olympic sport. Still holding to the high ideals of its originators and Scandinavian born governing body, the internationally popular Olympic sport validates Norway's pride in their historical national sport. More info on the following website...

http://www.olympic.org/uk/sports/programme/disciplines_uk.asp?DiscCode=CC

The next winter Olympics is at Whistler in western Canada in 2010.

Skiing in the Tunnel (Finland)

You might have thought whilst reading the last article that the Norway's near neighbours in Finland are no slouches when it comes to top medals in XC skiing. No wonder with the superb training facilities at Vuokatti, a few hundred km north of Helsinki.

The Vuokatti ski tunnel has been celebrating 10 years of successful year-round skiing. It is a 1.2km underground track, which is refrigerated to between minus 9 and minus 5°C. It has rolling hills and curves just like any other ski trail and is used by XC skiers from all over the world. Built in 1997, it is the crazy idea that became an international success.

From October onwards, the tunnel connects with outside tracks prepared with man-made snow.

Lots more on <http://www.vuokatti.fi/> and www.vuokattisport.fi/

I couldn't help noticing whilst looking at the Vuokatti website that they also have a full-size indoor snowboarding half-pipe! Good for summer training and competitions. Midday outdoor temperature at Vuokatti at the time of writing is minus 4°C.

Club Skis and Boots

We have about 5 pairs of metal-edged skis and 9 pairs of leather boots available for use by club members. These are ideal for ski touring for Norway or for when we get some snow in the UK! Clare Woodall has kindly looked after the club skis for the past few years but has had to hand over the task.

Currently they are in the hands of Alan Mitcham but I must stress that I really would like someone else to take over, mainly because I am so often away (skiing) at the time they are needed! Do please contact me if you have a spare room or some loft space or a dry shed and you feel you can take over the job.

Alan Mitcham – 01661 823960 (alanmitcham@metronet.co.uk)

Membership Subs

If you have not already paid by standing order, do please send a cheque as soon as possible to the membership sec - Alan Mitcham, 5 The Rise, Ponteland, Northumberland, NE20 9LJ. Cheques payable to Tyneside Loipers please.

Full members	£14
Joint members	£22
Country member (ex Tyne/Wear, Durham, Northumberland)	£5

Membership cards are being sent out with this newsletter to all those who already paid.

Thanks to those who have contributed to this newsletter and apologies to all for being so late! Keep those articles and news items rolling in.

The next newsletter should be out in January (hopefully on time!)

Alan Mitcham (Newsletter and Membership Sec)