



TYNESIDE LOIPERS

The NorthEast's Specialist
Cross Country Ski club

Newsletter
Jan/Feb 2009



Website: www.tynesideloipers.org.uk

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Club Events

7-14 February

10-22 March

28 Mar – 4 April

Thurs 21 May

Club trip – Track Skiing in Kaprun, Austria.

Club trip – Norway Hut Touring – contact Alan or Charlie.

SnowSport England Kvitavtn Week – see separate info.

End of Season Get Together – contact Charlie (see page 3)

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Editor's Musings

A great start to the season...! We have already had lots of snow in the Pennines and Scotland and of course plenty of early season snow in the Europe and Scandinavia. A few of us have been out and about at Allenheads and Yad Moss and Weardale making use of the local snow. Do please let me know if you have been venturing into the Pennines or Scotland so I can give you a mention in the next newsletter.

The TL telemark long weekend in the French Alps was a great start to the season. Five of us stayed for 4 nights at an apartment in Flaine and had four days of excellent skiing and some very useful telemark ski coaching from Paul Gaines (...more on page 6 of this newsletter). I arranged to stay on for another 6 days in the Alps and joined an off-piste telemark week organised by the Telemark Ski Company (more on page 7).

As I write this newsletter, there is another dump of snow promised us in the next few days. I hope it is a big dump – the forecast for Newcastle has been downgraded to 'light showers' but there is still 'heavy snow' forecast for Alston – there should be excellent touring opportunities over Cross Fell! That was in January. Help!.. I had better get on and finish this newsletter.

Member News

Good luck to Alasdair Wilson who is now away competing at the World Masters based in Autrans in France. The UK team has this year swelled to a record 19 participants but Alasdair is the only TL representative. Latest news from Autrans at the start of the 10km race is that it is +5°C and raining!

Good luck to new member Greg Buick for Engadin in March – a first ski marathon.

Heather Dickinson is finding new marathon targets for this year. After beating 4 hours in last year's Engadin, she is having a go at the Einsiedler Marathon in Switzerland and the Kandersteg half marathon.

Skiing in China (nearly)!

Stuart Mavin has been spending some time in China grinding away at the consulate bureaucracy needed to process Xu Hui's visa for the UK. Stuart has sent the photo on page 5 showing skating on the frozen river Hun He, near Fushun in Liaoning province. The river is frozen for 2 to 3 months of the year and sections of the river are cleared of snow for skating.

Stuart says it has been quite cold averaging -25°C until the last few days but now a tropical front has moved in and it has warmed to about minus 10. There is a downhill ski area about 1 hour away but there is a problem getting ski boots to fit – last time we found only one shop with shoes in my size 47 (the biggest available) and they took 4 days to be ordered in.

XC Skiing seems to be a bit unknown here, which is a little strange as there is often snow and it is quite cold. But no, they still ride their bicycles in the freezing conditions, Ice and Snow.

Norway Hut Touring 2009

Tyneside Loipers are going to Norway in mid-March and this year it is a 2-stage hut-touring trip starting in the Rondane and finishing in Dovrefjell. Charlie, Keith and Alan are all flying out on 10th March to join Heather in the Rondane. And then new member Yani is joining us as we head north into Dovrefjell via Oppdal.

For anyone interested in joining us this year, there is the option of joining either the stage or doing the whole trip (both the Rondane and Dovrefjell). In the Rondane we will mainly be following well-marked routes from hut to hut and we will be doing a south to north traverse from Mysuseter to Hjerkind with a maximum daily distance of about 20km. The Rondane is a very scenic mountainous area and was established as the first of Norway's national parks in 1962. There are several peaks over 2000m and also many smaller easily skiable peaks, which we might be able to fit in along the way.

Heather will be leaving us at Hjerkind, but then we are meeting up with Yani (she is arriving 14th March). We are going to on to Dovrefjell area, another of Norway's national parks, which has dramatic peaks, dark corries, sharp ridges and wide, open valleys (and home to herds of musk ox).

Anyone who would like to join us, or keen to know more, please contact Alan or Charlie.

Track Skiing in Kaprun, Austria

Carolyn, Pat and Nuala are off to Kaprun on Saturday 7th Feb for another week of sheer self-indulgence – lots of cakes and gluhwein and some healthy exercise skiing the extensive and well-prepared tracks. Flying from Newcastle and hiring skis in the resort, this is really the easy way to get a week of good track skiing.

Anyone interested (if you get this newsletter in time!) should contact Carolyn on 01661 822909. If you cannot join the ladies in Kaprun, you can at least come along to the End-of-Season Meet (see below) and hear all about it. (I hear there are already some plans for a track skiing trip in 2010 – possibly in Finnish Lapland!)

End of Season Get-Together (Advance Notice)

We are planning to have our usual social get-together at Charlie's house on Thursday 21st May – plenty of time for a 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 and a working laptop (one better than last year). We expect to have lots of slides of the club Norway trip too and some video clips from the TL Telemark Weekend in France and the TL track skiing in Kaprun!

Put the date in your diary (21st May) and watch out for more details by e-mail.

Taking your skis on the Train?

Anyone travelling with skis might have noticed a difference between trains here in the UK and those in France, Switzerland, Norway, etc. This was brought home to Heather when she made a casual visit to the station before heading off to Switzerland on a trip by Eurostar (Eurostar itself is not the problem).

The new notice at the station refers to luggage restrictions based on size and weight – they won't take anything longer than 150cm! So skis are officially banned. The nice lady at the information desk said the new restrictions were brought in 3 weeks ago – if you try to take your skis on the train, they might very well be taken off and dumped at the next station.

The nice lady at information seems to have been badly informed. Another TL member has phoned up National Express customer relations and been told that they will indeed take skis but they have to be carried in the guards van and there is a cost of £5 each way. It is worrying to say the least... I guess you have to take along your skis to the guards van and hope that he knows the rules. What if the guards van is full?

No doubt there will be more to report in March when Keith and I are taking our skis on the National Express train to Edinburgh en route to Norway.

And what about skis on planes...?

Those of us who flew to Geneva with EasyJet in January noticed that they have changed the rules with regard to ski carriage! Ski bags have to be weighed (nothing new there) and now have to be less than 12kg. That makes it more difficult to two pairs of skis in one bag (unless you have XC track skis which of course weigh almost nothing).

Jon Mellor and I managed a crafty dodge last year and put two pairs of skis in one bag but I reduced the weight and bulk of my skis by demounting the (releasable) bindings. The bindings were then attached to my boots and went in my main luggage.

The charges for EasyJet are currently
 ski carriage: £16.50 each way (£33 return)
 each addl item of checked baggage: £6 each way (£12 return)

I just checked with EasyJet customer services and payment for skis does not mean you can also take a ski boot bag – you have to pay for that separately (or include ski boots in your main luggage). I was told “put your boots in the ski bag” but that is hardly practical.

The moral is that you need a big enough bag to take your entire luggage including ski boots. Then take off any demountable part of your ski bindings and put two pairs of skis in each bag.

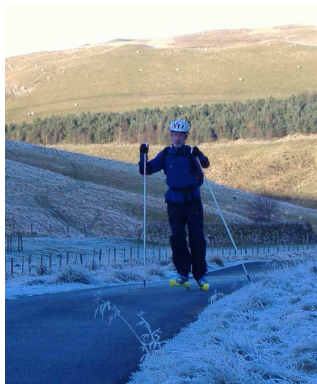


Skating on Hun He river,
China (photo Stuart Mavin)

Kilhope Law Summit, 6th Feb



Roller Skiing in Coquetdale (30th Nov)



.....skating



...and classic!

Skiing on Blanchland Moor - photo Jane Brantom

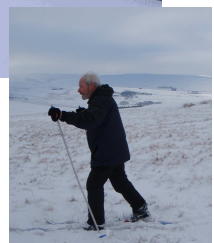


Pat, Carolyn and Jane at
Allenheads

Photo: Nuala Wright



... and Keith
photo by Nuala



Telemark Long Weekend in the Alps – January 2009

It was another excellent loipers telemark trip... this year at Flaine in the French Alps. Flaine is one of the nearest ski resorts to Geneva and boasts 140km of pistes linking with the villages of Samoens and Les Carroz. With only a limited choice of hotels in the resort we plumped for a Pierre et Vacances apartment which was no more than 150m from the piste and convenient also for the resort centre. French apartments are renowned for being small, so we chose a 6/7 person apartment for the 5 of us. We had plenty of space – in fact it was ideal.

We arrived on the Wednesday afternoon (via EasyJet - Newcastle to Geneva) and by 4pm we had settled into the apartment and had the kettle on. It was too late to take advantage of the ski lifts for that day but 3 of us had brought climbing skins and, as the last of the day skiers were leaving the mountain, we set off up the nearest piste. The sky was clear and a big moon was climbing up above the mountaintop as daylight faded. Forty minutes later we had climbed 240 metres and we pulled off our skins for a moonlit descent.

Over our 4 days of skiing we were lucky enough to have unbroken clear blue skies and excellent snow. Flaine is well known for its reliable snow conditions as it is in the snow shadow of Mt Blanc (talking of which... the views from the higher slopes are really stunning – Mt Blanc, Mt Blanc du Tacul, Mt Maudit and the Aiguille du Midi are all quite close and one can clearly see the Mt Blanc ascent route up the Dome de Gouter). One of the most enjoyable and scenic ski runs goes 14km from the top of the Flaine lift system down to the village of Sixt, and from there we could get a bus back to Samoens and ski back to Flaine via a succession of ski lifts.

Paul entertained us by skiing 360-degree turns and backwards telemarking (more often skiing backwards than forwards!). And he earned his lift pass by coaching us in telemark technique and offering some good tips for handling the bumps. That was much appreciated by us all.

For our second day (and subsequent two days) we arranged to meet up with Kevin and Kimberley (not yet TL members but soon will be, I hope!) Kevin is an accomplished telemark skier and he and Paul gave a great demonstration of off-piste mogul skiing. Kevin's helmet-camera recorded some super video footage of Paul telemarking on piste (some of it backwards) – watch out for this on the TL website.

We also met up on Day 3 and 4 with Helen Charlton (founder and honorary member of Tyneside Loipers – she has a small apartment in Les Gets) and on Day 3 we were joined by Terry, an ex-loiper friend of Helen's who knows the Flaine ski area and introduced us to some of the best off-piste. It was great to see Helen skiing very well as usual, albeit on alpine skis (with a ruptured Achilles tendon from a few years ago, she is unlikely to return to freeheel skiing unfortunately).

Many thanks Paul for the telemark coaching and thanks too to Paramjeet for cooking two splendid evening meals! That more than compensated for our limited eating out opportunities and alleviated the horrendous expenses brought by the sinking pound!

An excellent 4 days...! Paul, Paramjeet, Alan, Jon and new member Greg

More Telemark Skiing – Switzerland and Greece

A day before leaving for Flaine and my long-suffering wife asked “How many days are you away skiing this year?” I think she knew the answer but was trying to get me to admit the true extent of my obsession. Flaine and Les Crosets – 10 days, Greece – 7 days, Norway – 12 days. “That is a month!” she said.

I had decided to book two separate weeks with the Telemark Ski Company (John Eames and Bonny Masson). Having missed out on formal instruction for the last 4 years, I was due for an overhaul of my telemark technique.

The week in Les Crosets, Switzerland, followed on from the TL Telemark weekend in Flaine. Les Crosets is part of the Porte du Soleil ski area, which stretches across the France/Switzerland border. It was billed as an ‘off-piste performance week’. John Eames did a great job seeking skiable off-piste snow (with no fresh snow for the previous 10-12 days it was in short supply) though for much of the time we were ‘on piste’ concentrating on telemark technique and discovering how to transfer that technique across to powder snow, wind-slab and ‘crud’.

The Hotel Telecabine was excellent (good food and nice rooms) though I was not overly keen on the ski area and for various reasons I found the skiing quite difficult. Unfortunately I missed the first day of tuition because of the trip to Flaine. And unfortunately I was outclassed by the other two skiers in the group (one was on his second week of back to back tuition with John Eames and the other was an outstanding accomplished telemark and alpine skier who probably shouldn’t have been there)!

Skiing in Greece was a different experience altogether. We stayed in Delphi (a world heritage site with many preserved ruins of Ancient Greece) and we were bussed each day up onto Mt Parnassos. The daily ride up to the ski area in our 4-wheel drive bus (invariably hampered by fresh snow) produced much excitement from our driver and frequent gesticulations and muttered references were made to Greek drivers often slewed across the road or stopping to fit snow chains at the least appropriate place.

It was a superb week with a very sociable group (12 of us, plus John Eames and his assistant Graham Hammond) all of us reasonable telemarkers – some better than others (one guy was a Danish ski instructor, living in Sweden and teaching in Norway). In the evenings we had a great time sampling the local restaurants – this is tourist Greece in the off-season – most visitors are there in the summer.

On two days we went touring from the top of the Parnassos ski area. On Tuesday (our second day) we had brilliant blue skies and we skinned up onto a high ridge and along the tops with wonderful views of the Aegean Sea off to one side and the Gulf of Corinth on the other. That was followed by telemarking down a broad gully on easy fresh snow and a short lunch break before tackling the second highest peak in the Parnassos region (2430m) and of course more fresh snow descents back to the main ski area. On Friday we did another tour including the highest peak in the area at 2480m and with the benefit of a lot more new snow.

We had other days of formal instruction (telemark and alpine) in and around the Parnassos ski area. The Greeks don't tend to ski off-piste and much of the off-piste is easily accessible from the lift system. More and more snow fell during the week and I confess I found it hard work skiing in deeper and deeper powder and difficult skiing in poor visibility (low cloud and semi-blizzard). But it was a great fun week and I am keen to go back another year.

Alan Mitcham

Telemark Touring – Mt Parnassos

Photos by Alan Mitcham



Jon, Alan, Paramjeet,
Paul & Greg in Flaine
Jan 2009



Off-piste in Flaine....

and Paul shredding the bumps



Flaine photos by Jon
Mellor and Kevin Moore

Telemark Skiing Instruction – Who does it?

The **Telemark Ski Company** www.telemarkskico.com would rightly claim to be the foremost UK-based telemark skiing organisation. They have various courses running right through to the end of April at Krippenstein and Obergurgl in Austria, Andermatt in Switzerland, and Cervinia and La Thuile in Italy and weekend courses in the Cairngorms, Scotland. Additionally they offer guided hut touring trips in the Alps, including the Haute Route (Chamonix to Zermatt) and the Stubai Alps (Austria) and Gran Paradiso (Italy). They also do a range of guided Nordic hut touring trips across Scandinavia.

The Telemark Ski Company uses IFMGA-qualified mountain guides to lead the telemark hut touring trips and various BASI-qualified instructors are involved with the telemark coaching and nordic hut touring. There are some great photos from the latest 2009 season on their website including some from the Mt Parnassos trip mentioned in my article – go to the home page and click on ‘Latest News’. And there are some superb video clips linked from the same page – deep soft powder (telemark skiing at its best)!

Ski4Real www.ski4real.com is a smaller organisation offering telemark ski instruction based mainly at La Thuile in Italy. It is run by Kim George (he was one half of the now defunct Telemasters). I have heard good reports of Kim’s courses and apparently he is a very good instructor. The website is certainly worth a look.

Other telemark ski instruction is offered by **SnowSport England** as part of the **Kvitavattn week** in Norway (see separate leaflet). Telemark coaching is by Andy Stewart and Ian Johnson. This is special one-off week and a splendid gathering of nordic ski enthusiasts, telemark and track skiing (you don’t have to be committed to a whole week of telemarking). The track skiing sessions are led by Patrick Winterton and Mike Dixon, both of whom are quite inspirational. Alasdair will be attending and is planning to do the training and assessment for Nordic Ski Instructor.

And there is also **Telemark-skiing.co.uk** run by Matt Higginson who is in charge of Telemark Development on the Nordic Key Committee of SnowSport England. Matt runs courses at various indoor snow slopes in the UK (principally at Tamworth). He is also advertising an early season telemark coaching week at Hafjell in Norway in December 2009 – see website www.telemark-skiing.co.uk for details.

Finally, on telemark skiing...

Don’t forget the **International Telemark Festival** at Livigno, Italy from 28th March to 5th April. **La Skieda** is now going for its 15th year as strongly as ever and has been enthusiastically taken over by the Livigno centre of commerce. There are races, day tours, mountaintop dinners, parties galore, instructional classes and clinics, film shows and many other events. More details on www.skieda.com (the website is a bit quirky but stick with it!).

I had a great time at La Skieda in 2001 and would love to go back some day [Ed.]

A Grand Day Out! **Or... Rolling in Upper Coquetdale**

It was Alasdair's idea – we ought to do a roller ski tour in the Upper Coquet Valley above Alwinton. A little sceptical (thinking of the hills between Alwinton and Shilmoor) I decided to go along with it. So the two of us drove up on a bright frosty Sunday in late November. The trees were everywhere covered with a thick coat of hoar frost and looked very beautiful against the blue sky. Not many trees in Upper Coquetdale though. And in some places the sun barely penetrated to the valley floor.

We decided to start at Shilmoor as, from thereon, the road up the valley is not too hilly. Our initial skirmish was to ski up from Shilmoor to the Wedder's Leap car park and then back for lunch, which was a very good warm up. Then we drove to Wedder's Leap and skied all the way up to Blindburn and back (and indeed up the side road to the farm at Trows).

A total distance of 14 miles on skis, the valley road is for most part quite well surfaced and at this time of year there was little traffic. One motorist stopped to wind down his window and made the bizarre comment 'I thought you were skiing for a moment!' Obviously roller skis are not yet recognised in these parts.

I confess there were stretches of road where the tarmac was not so good and there were stretches covered with sheet ice (taken with great care!) where there had obviously been water running across the road during the night. But all in all it was a grand day out and we felt very pleased with ourselves. I think the photos prove the point!

SportScotland Avalanche Information Service (SAIS)

Three climbers were killed in an avalanche on one day in late January, whilst tackling the usual walker's route (Coire ne Tulaich) up Buchaille Etive Mor. Avalanches are not that uncommon in Scotland (as recently as 1994/95, 12 people were killed by avalanches in one winter) so the risks have to be taken seriously. The incident on Buchaille Etive was something of a freak incident in that it occurred on a popular route when a number of people were in close proximity (two groups of walkers/climbers were involved).

At this time in January, the SAIS had rated the avalanche risk as Category 3 (Considerable) and noted: *'New accumulations of soft slab have continued to form in sheltered locations and field tests showed several weakly bonded layers within the snowpack. The greatest accumulation of unstable snow is above 850 metres on North-West through North to East aspects'* (Coire ne Tulaich faces NNE and its slope angle is probably greater than 30 degrees which is a critical angle for avalanche risk!) Up to date Scottish avalanche risks are given on www.sais.gov.uk

Avalanche risks are graded from 1 to 5. In relation to backcountry skiing, the SAIS advise for Category 3 conditions *'Off-piste and back-country skiing and travel should only be carried out by experienced persons able to evaluate avalanche hazard. Steep slopes of the indicated aspect and altitude should be avoided.'*

GB Nordic Team Member beat the Norwegians!

This was the joyful news from Team GB after their Christmas and New Year training camp at Sjusjoen in Norway. At the Gasburennnet XC races in January, Andrew Young won the M17 race beating the best of the Norwegians (a full 50 seconds ahead of the 2nd placed competitor) and Andrew Musgrave was second in the M19-20 category close behind the winning Norwegian skier. The GB development squad spend much of the year training on roller skis and their hard work seems to be paying off.

This was the report on one Norwegian website...

“We are impressed!

Here in Norway we like to think that we are born with skies on our feet’s and are nearly unbeatable in Nordic skiing. And especially when we compete against skiers from Great Britain, a country more likely connected to sports as football, horse riding and rugby. But today the national ski team got attention with their 7 participants – a gang of serious competitors who are the best of the best in their country. The time they spent for preparing themselves is incredible, especially when we know that all sessions on snow has to be done in another country than their own. When we asked one of the managers Alastair Dargie why people from a place in Europe known for little (nearly nothing!) snow chooses Nordic ski as their sport the answer is simple: “We are crazy and special”. And after a small chat with Alastair I have to admit that these are serious athletes. Not only do they go to Norway some weeks to get snow under their skies, they spend a lot of time on roller skis and spend much of the time together during the winter season in other countries.”

There has been more good news from Team GB as they continue their successful season. There is a great blog on www.britnordicteam.co.uk and lots of good video clips showing the team in training and racing elsewhere in Europe.

Local Skiing

All our local ski areas have already had at least 25 days of skiing this winter (and more to come hopefully). Website addresses and information-answer phone numbers are given below.

Allenheads (see www.ski-allenheads.co.uk) 01661 860689

Yad Moss – Carlisle Ski Club (www.yadmoss.co.uk/snowreport.php) 01228 561634

Weardale Ski Club (www.skiweardale.co.uk) 01388 527527

Yad Moss and Allenheads are easily reached from Tyneside. Weardale is less easily accessible (you will need a 4-wheel drive car or snow chains as there is a hilly 4km of minor road up to negotiate up from Weardale). All the above offer casual day skiing for £15 per day, or you can pay a joining fee and get unlimited skiing for the season.

There is plenty more skiing (of the XC touring variety) to be had up in the Pennines. Let me know if you have snow near you and I will try and pass on the news.

Jane's Tea Room Loipes in Northumberland!

Four days of great loiping in Northumberland – all ending with yummy teas – who could ask for more? I teamed up with other friends and Tyneside Loipers to make the most of the recent snow. Day one was from the front door in Hexham to Warden with Nuala Wright and then an early evening ski with Pat Lynch around the floodlit bandstand in Sele Park. Day two was up to Allenheads ski slope and then striking out over the moor with Pat, Nuala, Carolyn Hawkes (and Keith Walker for part of the way). The Hemmel tearoom hot chocolate and cake just hit the spot after that. Day three was in glorious sun over sparkling snow from Sleafy Forest to Blanchland with a friend and Phil Latham, ending with hot chocolate and rum at the Lord Crewe. The final excursion was with a friend and Rob from Brocolitia to Simonburn and the tearooms there. If only we could have more of this!

Jane Brantom

Club Equipment

Don't forget we have several pairs of metal-edged touring skis and leather boots, which are available for a small charge to club members. Custodianship of the club skis is now being taken over by Paramjeet. Contact him on 0191 266 5052 or e-mail paramjeet.bhogal@newcastle.gov.uk

Buying or Hiring in the UK?... (Track Skis, Telemark or Touring Skis)

Braemar Mountain Sports. Tel. 013397 41242 or www.braemarmountainsports.com
Cairngorm Mountain Sports, Aviemore. Tel. 01479 810 903 (same website)
Mountain Spirit, Aviemore. Tel. 01479 811788 or www.mountainspirit.co.uk
Backcountry UK, Ilkley, Yorks. Tel. 01943 816011 or www.backcountryuk.com

Braemar Mountain Sports and Mountain Spirit both have good stocks of hire equipment.

The bargain buy at the moment (if you get there quickly enough) is at Killin Outdoor Centre. Touring skis, poles and boots and climbing skins (ex hire and some of them even brand new) cost just £199. And brand new telemark skis (Atomic TM22) and bindings also cost just £199. See www.killinoutdoor.co.uk/skicourses.htm

Skiing in Scotland?

Does anybody fancy Scotland (touring or piste skiing) for late March or early April? I would be happy to coordinate a Scottish ski weekend (or midweek even) if anyone cares to contact me – always assuming we still have enough snow!

Alan Mitcham

Next newsletter – articles to me by end of April please. Maybe we should have a bit less telemarking and more track skiing / touring – it's your newsletter – over to you!