



# TYNESIDE LOIPERS

The NorthEast's Specialist  
Cross Country Ski club

Newsletter  
October 2010



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

## Contents

2	Editor's musings	8	Pustertaler marathon by C Blackburn
2	Tyneside Loipers AGM	12	The Corfu Trail, by Judi Webb
3	Xmas meal	15	Getting lost in Romania, by A Wilson
3	Local skiing	17	Club Holiday in Finland, by J Brantom
3	Travelling to Europe	19	Subscriptions due!
4	Highlights from last winter	19	XC skiing holidays
5	Tyneside Loipers Club Holidays	19	Where to buy XC skis in the UK
6	SnowSport England Kvitavatn week	20	Club Skis and Boots

### Club Events

Sat 20 <sup>th</sup> Nov at 1730	Loiper's AGM and Social Evening – see p.2
Thurs 6 <sup>th</sup> Jan (tbc)	Xmas meal – see p.3
13 <sup>th</sup> to 17 <sup>th</sup> Jan	Long w/e telemarking in French Alps – see p.5
Jan/Feb (tbc)	Grande Traverse du Jura – see p.5
Jan/Feb (tbc)	Track skiing holiday (Italy or Switzerland) – see p.5
10 <sup>th</sup> to 23 <sup>rd</sup> April	Norway hut touring – see p.6

Alasdair Wilson (Chairman/Racing Officer)	<a href="mailto:awilson.craw@blueyonder.co.uk">awilson.craw@blueyonder.co.uk</a>	0191 266 2327
Keith Walker (Vice Chair)	<a href="mailto:jkeithwalker@hotmail.com">jkeithwalker@hotmail.com</a>	07969 021680
Charlie Fisher (Secretary)	<a href="mailto:charlie.fisher@phonecoop.coop">charlie.fisher@phonecoop.coop</a>	0191 261 7719
Paul Jameson (Treasurer)	<a href="mailto:pjameson@globablnt.com">pjameson@globablnt.com</a>	0191 266 1875
Alan Mitcham (Membership/Newsletter)	<a href="mailto:alanmitcham@metronet.co.uk">alanmitcham@metronet.co.uk</a>	01661 823960
Paramjeet Bhogal (Child Protection Officer)	<a href="mailto:paramjeet.bhogal@newcastle.gov.uk">paramjeet.bhogal@newcastle.gov.uk</a>	0191 266 5052
Rob Forster (Committee Member)	<a href="mailto:robertforster4@aol.com">robertforster4@aol.com</a>	01434 608321
Jane Brantom (Committee Member)	<a href="mailto:jbrantomforster@aol.com">jbrantomforster@aol.com</a>	01434 608321

### Editor's Musings

A great big apology to everyone for having failed to issue the intended newsletter in April/May! It has been a hectic year for me – as well as being away even more than usual, I have taken on extra commitments for Northumbria Ramblers. Rest assured, I will try to keep the newsletter going in the future!

Thank you to those who have contributed to this newsletter. Sadly I have run out of space (20 pages already) and I have had to hold one item over to the January issue. Keep your news and stories coming please – everything gets published eventually!

It is good to have an item from Colin Blackburn about competing in a ski marathon – at last a ski racing article from someone other than Alasdair! (The January newsletter will have an article by Greg Buick on racing the Birkebeiner in Norway.) Alasdair has combined his skiing and orienteering skills (see p. 15) to take on the World Masters Ski-Orienteering Championship in Romania, as well as doing the World Masters Cross Country in Sweden. There are good articles too by both Jane Brantom and Judi Webb.

Snow watchers will have noticed that there have been early snowfalls in parts of Scotland (mid Oct) and the usual early snows have appeared in Norway. Let's hope we are in for a winter as good as last year. Does anyone have an explanation as to why we had such a good snowy winter? Something to do with a southerly shift in the jet-stream I believe. Could it happen this year? I hope so.

### Tyneside Loipers AGM – 20<sup>th</sup> Nov

The AGM will be on 20<sup>th</sup> Nov at Heather's house, 3 Glastonbury Grove in Jesmond (postcode NE2 2HA) which is approx 10 minute walk from West Jesmond metro station. In a departure from our normal routine, the AGM will be on a Saturday, starting at 1730. Hopefully we can do all the boring stuff over a drink or two, then move on to the serious business of eating and discussing loipers ski trips, holidays and plans for local skiing, assuming we get lots of snow (which surely we will).

Heather is providing some bread and soup and also a plum crumble. Any other contributions, savouries, nibbles, cold sweets, etc, will be welcomed (and beer or soft drinks if you wish). The club will provide the wine.

We are also hoping to arrange an afternoon walk (perhaps a walk on Shaftoe Crags) if the weather is reasonable. Do please let Charlie know if you are planning to come along to the AGM and if you would like to join us beforehand for the walk.

### **Roller Skis**

With the help of SnowSport England, we are now in possession of 6 new pairs of Start Combi roller skis complete with Salomon bindings. As the name implies the skis are suitable for both classic and skating. We are also soon to be getting 5 or 6 new pairs of combi boots. The skis and boots are being kept by Alasdair and he is keen to hear from anyone who would like an introduction to roller skiing.

## **Xmas Meal**

This year for a change the Xmas meal will be after Christmas – on Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> January. Hopefully most people will be back from their New Year wanderings and looking forward to lots of skiing – just in time for a last minute decision to join one of our planned trips (or maybe we will talking about skiing in the Pennines the following weekend).

No venue has yet been decided, though we are following up one or two ideas. If you have any places to recommend, do let us know. Hopefully we will agree something in time for the AGM.

## **Local Skiing**

The Weardale Ski Club has already closed its membership this year (probably the first time that has happened before the skis season has begun). I don't yet know whether they will be allowing visitors to use the slope with a day ticket – if so, I guess it would be on weekdays only.

For the latest news at Weardale, Yad Moss and Allenheads you are advised to visit the websites.

[www.yadmoss.co.uk/](http://www.yadmoss.co.uk/)

[www.skiweardale.com/](http://www.skiweardale.com/)

[www.ski-allenheads.co.uk/](http://www.ski-allenheads.co.uk/)

Of course you can have a great day skiing without having to use the ski tows. If the lifts are running at any of the above (check the website), you should also find good conditions for touring nearby. One of the things we need to discuss at the AGM is how we can improve club communication so that we are more aware of snow conditions and the best places to ski – the Cheviots, Kielder, the Waskerley Way or the local golf course – and also able to meet up with other loipers.

## **Travelling to Europe**

Several people have told me about their travel experiences last winter...

Peter Quigley drove to Switzerland by car, using the ferry from N Shields to Ijmuiden. With 4 people in one car, sharing a cabin, the cost is little different from using EasyJet plus car hire (and you can take skis with no extra cost and come home via Epernay with a boot full of champagne!)

Tim Owen went from London City airport to Zurich with Swiss.com (used to be Swissair) at reasonable price about £120 return with free ski carriage. But I doubt the free ski carriage will last!

Vivienne and Harry were trapped in Norway because of the volcanic dust cloud. It took them 3 days to get back, using 15 different forms of transport, including two overnight car ferries and one night spent at a railway station. Their 8-year old daughter thought it was a great adventure!

## Highlights from Last Winter

The great snows meant that we could have skied almost anywhere! Some favourite Loiper outings were mentioned in the last newsletter – sorry, that was January, a long time ago! Blanchland Moor (several times by quite a few of us), along the Roman Wall, Wylam Waggonway, Waskerley Way, Allenheads, Kilhope Law, Cross Fell. I particularly remember one magical afternoon on Kilhope Law with Keith and Graham and Heather – I was just back from an excellent telemark touring trip to Canada and amazed to find such perfect conditions here in the Pennines.

Late in the season, Keith and Pat and I skied up onto Cross Fell from Hartside cafe. The conditions were not so great and we had to link up the snow patches but somehow we still managed to ski most of the way back down to the car park and took our skis off only once. A week earlier the snow would have been perfect but you cannot always be there just at the right time.

Colin Blackburn, Graham Harkness and Helen Dickinson all went on the Snowsport England training week in Kvitavtn, Norway. Graham opted for the telemark course whilst Helen and Colin did the cross-country track skiing option. As usual the feedback from the course was very favourable and the coaches worked their socks off to make sure that all participants got the maximum benefit from the week. Colin is planning to return next year to work more on his racing technique and perhaps this time do a little telemarking as well. There is more on the Kvitavtn week elsewhere in this newsletter and in the accompanying flyer.

The End of Season Meet was here at our house (Alan and Pam). We had a great turn out (16 of us). It was an enjoyable occasion with lots of good nosh (thank you everyone) finishing with a slide show of everyone's pictures from last winter – with some especially good photos of the club trip to Finland.

With the snow all gone, we had several summer outings planned. Sadly the participation from most of the loipers was minimal but those who came along were all quite enthusiastic. We had an excellent walk organised by Keith – only 5 of us – finishing with tea in the afternoon sunshine at the Hemel cafe in Allenheads. And time for a beer as well before heading back on the late afternoon bus to our start point at Allendale.

We also had an orienteering evening, organised by Alasdair at Walltown Crag along the Roman Wall. Again there were only 5 of us. After a showery day, it was a sunny evening. The 3 of us blokes were quite competitive and we chased around the course looking for the fixed controls - the 2 ladies were much more relaxed but took only a little longer to cover the same course. Then in the magical evening sunlight we dallied just a little too long on the top of the crag and we missed the last meal ordering time at Twice Brewed (we sufficed with beer and crisps and a hot pud)!

The round Kielder bike ride attracted only 3 of us though, as ever, it was a good day out. What more can I say – it would have been better with more participation – does anyone have any ideas for next year (preferably with more people involved)?

## **Tyneside Loipers Club Holidays**

### Telemark Long Weekend in the Alps – 13<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> January

Eight of us (so far) are going to Les Carroz in the French Alps for 3 full days of skiing on the ‘Grand Massif’ which includes the resort of Flaine and the whole surrounding area (265km of pisted runs and lots of lift-accessed off-piste skiing too). Several of us skied in this area on the club trip in January 2008 and it was an excellent area for telemark skiing. The resort is known for reliable snowfall and has a relatively short transfer time from Geneva.

We are staying at a 2-star hotel ‘Les Belles Pistes’. The 4 nights half-board accommodation costs 395 Euros each, including a full 3-day lift pass. We are flying with EasyJet, direct from Newcastle to Geneva, and using a minibus transfer to the resort. The flight timings sadly do not allow us to ski on the Thursday arrival day but at least one of us will be skinning up the slope before dinner on Thursday evening to get a first run down and test out the ski legs.

If you would like to join us, contact me (Alan Mitcham).

### Grande Traversee du Jura – January or February

Heather has come up with a plan to ski the length of the Jura mountains – 175km in 6 days. The entire route is on good prepared tracks and Heather would like to do it on skating skis (I think perhaps we could have some of us skating and some doing classic, as I am not sure I am up to doing that distance on skating skis – Ed.) Accommodation would be in refuges and small hotels.

It sounds a great idea and a few of us are interested. The likely dates are in January or February. Contact Heather if you would like to join us (e-mail [hodasd@f2s.com](mailto:hodasd@f2s.com) or phone 0191 285 0495).

### Track Skiing (Italy or Switzerland)

After an amazingly good club trip to Finland last year, most of us are agreed that we would like to go back again in 2012. But for the coming winter (probably February) Carolyn and her team are talking about going to Italy or Switzerland (or maybe even Norway). No doubt there will be lots of cakes and gluwhein. More details coming soon – or contact Carolyn (e-mail [carolyn.hawkes@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:carolyn.hawkes@tiscali.co.uk) or phone 01661 822909).

### Norway Ski Touring – 10<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> April

Easter is late this year and that is when the main skiing is done in Norway – one of us is now tied to the school Easter holidays so these are our preferred dates. However our chosen area (Tafjordfjella) is relatively little known and we do not expect it to be busy. We will be skiing from hut to hut.

The area of Tafjordfjella, northwest of Jotunheim, has some very fine unstaffed huts connected by recognised marked routes. There are a number of rewarding peaks to be bagged, ranging between 1900 and 2000 metres above sea level and offering fine views from the Jotunheim on one side to the coastal fjords on the other. Currently there are 4 of us going – Charlie, Alan, Greg and Keith. We would be pleased to hear from anyone else who would like to join us. We expect to be flying to Oslo and will be staying one night in each direction at Lillehammer YH.

### Norway Hut Touring – the easier version!

The Tafjordfjella trip is not one for inexperienced skiers! If you are keen to do some Norway hut touring and would like an easier trip please get in touch with Alan. I am thinking of a possible easy hut touring trip in the week before we go to Tafjordfjella, perhaps 3<sup>rd</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> April. The Rondane area would be ideal and has mostly staffed huts. There are good marked routes between the huts (many of them prepared tracks) and there is lots of untracked terrain and easily skiable hills which can be accessed from some of the huts. It is also a National Park (Norway's first) and has some beautiful scenery.

### **SnowSport England Kvitavtn Week – Norway, 3rd to 10<sup>th</sup> April**

Once again the Snowsport England training week is to be held in Kvitavtn, a 3 hour coach journey from Oslo on SE edge of the Hardangervidda. It is much recommended by those of us who have been in previous years (including your own newsletter editor).

Coaching is given in small groups either on the ski hill (for Nordic downhill and telemarking) or on the extensive range of prepared tracks (for XC skills and racing). The coaching is of a very high standard. You will be made to work fairly hard in the formal sessions every morning but there is plenty of time for fun activities (ski orienteering, hill touring, etc) in the afternoons and quiz sessions, films and wax demos in the evenings. For more information see the separate leaflet sent with this newsletter, or contact the organiser [wendy.mcrae@tesco.net](mailto:wendy.mcrae@tesco.net)

### **Norway Maps – Correction!**

I wrongly suggested in the last newsletter that Charlie is looking for people to donate their Norway maps. In fact Charlie is hoping to hear from anyone who has maps of ski touring areas in Norway with the intention that we create a virtual library of maps accessible to members. Please let him know what maps you have (presuming you are prepared to loan them to fellow loipers) and these will go on to a database which he will coordinate.

Back to Finland...! Judi and Peter are going back to Yllas in Finnish Lapland for the umpteenth time, for 2 weeks from 27<sup>th</sup> February. If anyone would like to join them for some of that time, contact Judi (e-mail [judi.w@btopenworld.com](mailto:judi.w@btopenworld.com) or phone 0191 386 3949).



**Colin Blackburn in the  
Pustertaler Marathon**



**Heather, Keith and  
Graham skiing on  
Kilhope Law  
February 2010**

**The Corfu Trail: Rocky Coasts  
and Olive Groves**



## **The Pustertaler Ski Marathon, Toblach, Italy - 9th January 2010**

### **by Colin Blackburn**

In May 2009 I went all the way to Iceland to come last in a cross country ski marathon. Eight months later, I decided to try again – but this time I was determined not to come last. The secret..? Enter a race with more competitors! The Pustertaler ski marathon is in fact two marathons – on Saturday there is a 28km freestyle race while on the Sunday there is a 42km classic race. In a classic race you can only use what is called the classic technique (aka diagonal stride). In the freestyle race you can use whatever technique you like but, in reality, this means a technique called skate. Skating on skis is a bit like skating on ice or roller skates and with sufficient skill you can propel yourself forward quite quickly and even climb steep hills.

#### **TRAINING**

I can't skate for toffee. So, I entered both marathons! The two marathons formed the end of an eight day (training) holiday where I hoped to brush up on my diagonal stride and learn to skate. The holiday was in the pretty Austrian village of Obertilliach and I was with 22 other people, most from a London roller-ski club. The two instructors, Mary Wray and Alan Eason, were experienced SnowSport England instructors and both compete in races, Alan at a very high level. Over the week Alan and Mary switched around between teaching classic and skate, and so did I.

Obertilliach is home to Austrian biathlon (skiing and shooting) and so it has a small XC ski stadium, an ideal basic training ground. The stadium is surrounded by woodland loops with a variety of hills and turns, again ideal training. The stadium also has a cafe, Luigi's, ideal for high-carb meals—the Schlipkrappen, giant ravioli stuffed with potato is probably the acme of this cuisine. All in all a great place to mess around on snow (and they had lots of it, even more than fell in the North Pennines while I was away). Every day began with a 20 minute ski to the stadium, then a few drills to improve balance and technique. The rest of the morning would usually involve a few short ski loops or a short tour re-enforcing the technique. Lunch at Luigi's punctuated the day. The afternoon would again be drills and loops followed by a ski back to the village and my hotel (in fact the hotel had an afternoon cake buffet as part of the half-board deal – a great incentive to get back before 5).

During the week I managed two days of skating and started to get a feel for it. The rest of the time I concentrated on classic technique. So come Thursday I decided to pull out of the skate race. Come Friday, bizarrely, I changed my mind and decided 28km wasn't that far. On Friday night Alan expertly waxed my skis and I felt committed to doing the freestyle race on skate skis. Saturday dawned with a feeling of mild dread and I got on the coach for the short trip over in to Italy, to the small town of Toblach nestling in the Dolomites. Toblach is where I first learned to XC ski a few years ago and I was on holiday there last January so it was familiar territory.



## 28KM SKATE

I collected my race packs and discovered I had somehow managed to enter both races twice, though I'd only paid once. The packs comprised proper cloth bibs with my name printed on them, commemorative stickers for my skis and a great race hat. A quick change, a warm up and by 9:45 I was on Toblach airfield with a few hundred other skiers. I was in the third start block of three, ie well behind the experts and the fast guys.

In a skate race you are not allowed to skate for the first hundred or two metres. This is because skate naturally involves a side-to-side movement and everyone would crash into one another. So the start involves double-poling in loipe (little railway tracks for the skis) and this just uses the arms. It is very hard work from a standing start and by the time I was allowed to skate I was almost ready to give up, only 200 metres in!

As the skiers zig-zagged around the airfield for the first kilometre I started to skate in my functional but inefficient and inelegant style. Then someone else's pole came across the front of me and I was down for the first time. It turned out to be one of the people I was on holiday with! Picking myself up I settled in to a long, 12km, climb to the high-point of the first half of the race. By the time I was clocked at the check-point I was exhausted – everything ached, my arms especially. What goes up must come down and so began a long gradual descent with a few sharp dips for fun (or torture).

The race route was at many points lined with spectators and so there was a great atmosphere. Shouts of, "Hop, hop, hop, hop, hop!" would chivvy me along when I was feeling at my worst. Over the course there were a few food stations where they served welcome hot lemon tea, muesli bars and bananas. There were also repair stations where you could replace broken skis or poles. Thankfully I didn't need to take advantage of those.

After the first long descent the course levelled out for a few kilometres before the long climb to the finish. Here I was very much on my own and the weather closed in with heavy snow and strong winds. Great! After what seemed like an interminable climb up the Prags valley things finally started to flatten a little. I reached the final road crossing and the 26km marker and felt I was nearly home. At a road crossing police stop the traffic and council workers shovel snow to allow skiers to cross. Once skiers have crossed they remove the snow and let the cars pass. I then skied for what seemed like ages up the valley without any sign that I was on the right route. Worried that I'd gone too far I turned back. Then a few minutes later I bumped into the following skier, she was one of my group, Susan. We assured each other that it must be the right way and so we carried on despite the lack of markings. But finally we saw a km marker. 28km it said. Surely that means we'd finished! Apparently not, the markers signified the start of that kilometre. What a strange system – but now just one kilometre to go and all downhill.

A few seconds later Susan fell on a really short but very steep hill. I hopped out of the skis and jogged to the bottom of the hill. Susan then tried to clip back in to her skis but something was up. We must have spent five minutes trying to sort out the problem and in that time one of the oldest competitors in possibly the most lurid Jackson Pollack-inspired race suit I have ever seen side-stepped down the hill and overtook us! We finally clipped the boot to the ski and set off for the last few hundred metres. The driving snow was in our eyes and we could barely see the finish. In fact we nearly followed the ski-bob ahead of us the wrong way into the finish. A few seconds later we crossed the line together – what a relief! I was then presented with the biggest chunkiest medal I have ever received.

We were both greeted by most of the rest of our group. A quick change, a bowl of pasta, a beer and we were back on the shuttle bus to Toblach and then the coach to Obertilliach. I was utterly exhausted and aching everywhere but relieved I had finished. And I wasn't quite last!

At this stage I should eat and then sleep the rest of the night but, with the classic race to come, skis had to be waxed. In classic it is extremely important to get the grip wax right as that's the bit that pushes you forward and lets you go up hills. Alan is an excellent waxing technician and he prepped the skis with glide wax and ironed in a couple of layers of grip as a base. The rest of the grip wax would have to wait until the morning of the race once we knew what the snow was like. After that I slept well.

#### **42KM CLASSIC**

The Sunday was much brighter and we had phenomenal views of the Dolomites. I got changed into my race suit and checked what was happening with wax. Alan's advice was four or five layers of blue followed by two of violet. It's a dark art that I barely understand but it worked and got me round the whole 42km without slipping. I passed other skiers who were having to re-wax so Alan's expert advice probably bought me a couple of places.

The classic race started in the same place but this time the loipe zig-zagged the whole field so that you could stride instead of skating. In fact skating, other than to change loipe, is against the rules and could get racers disqualified. The gun went off and I slowly double poled forward only to see skiers ahead of me getting out of my lane. Once the guy in front moved out I realised why – there was a huge heap of bodies with skis and poles pointing in all directions. It looked like bangers and mash from the Beano! I managed to avoid the pile-up by skating out and moving to another lane, just in time.

The race then followed the same route as the day before for the first 18km but today it returned through Toblach Stadium and went over the new artificial hill, the height of a three-storey building. In fact it was a three-storey building with snow on top! The up was then followed by the steepest down I had ever seen. After the stadium the classic route went along and up the Sexten valley. The climb to Bad Moos was even steeper and longer than the climb the day before – it just didn't let up. Again,

up usually means down and in this case it was a glorious 5km descent on nearly straight tracks, fantastic fun and very fast. I finally got to the finish and found the guy behind me was trying to sprint past to take the glory of 481st place. I wasn't having that, so I double-poled like crazy but stuck a couple of kicks in for good measure as it was slightly uphill. I beat the guy by 0.4 of a second to hang on to my place. We shook hands.

I was so pleased to finish this one in a good time, for me, and nearly 40 places off the bottom. I beat the old guy with the Pollack suit too. A second huge medal was followed by food, drink and the bus journey back to a relaxing shower. That evening I had a great meal with the rest of the group and afterwards slept like a log. The only disappointing thing was that I had to leave the XC ski trails behind and head home...if only I could persuade Durham CC to put in a few tracks for skiing. With three ski marathons under my belt I am now well and truly hooked and looking forward to doing more races. I'm already thinking about how I can manage to do 10 World Loppet races on two continents to get my World Loppet Masters gold medal. Up until now the summers have been about running and dreaming about skiing. I am also now roller skiing to improve my technique and do faster ski marathons.

### *Results*

#### **FREESTYLE**

<b>POS</b>	<b>NAME</b>	<b>CLUB</b>	<b>CAT</b>	<b>TIME</b>
1	Pezzo Mirco	Selva di Val Gardena (BZ)	M	1:17.18,7
403	Blackburn Colin	GB-Consett	MV40	3:46.28,9

406 finishers.

#### **CLASSIC**

<b>POS</b>	<b>NAME</b>	<b>CLUB</b>	<b>CAT</b>	<b>TIME</b>
1	Kreczmer Maciej	PL-Krakow	M	1:54.39,5
481	Blackburn Colin	GB-Consett	MV40	4:10.10,6

## **THE CORFU TRAIL**

### **A Late-Summer Walking Treat**

The Corfu Trail is a 220km path which zig-zags from the south of the island to the top northern corner taking you through unexplored areas of the island and mainly missing the over-exploited beach areas. It's been in existence for less than 10 years and is not an especially challenging walk - but it's got a lot to recommend it. You see the best parts of the island, villages, olive groves, forests and stretches of beach unencumbered by sun-beds.

We went independently in the last two weeks of September, using The Companion Guide to The Corfu Trail – an essential for independent walkers as the Trail is not always clearly waymarked. It also helps to have the Freytag & Berndt 1:50,000 map. You can also go with various tour operators and have your bags transported to pre-booked overnight accommodation (they also supply route directions). We carried fairly light 45 litre packs – no tents or sleeping bags – with mostly warm weather clothing and just enough food and water to keep us going during the day.

The complete Trail is a 10 day walk, though you can shorten it, or take the odd day here and there for a rest, swimming and snorkelling, or include some local walks. We gave ourselves 15 days, with a late evening arrival into Corfu Town (using EasyJet) and a less than 2 hour bus ride to the start the following morning. The extra days allowed us to stop over a couple of nights when we found somewhere we liked or fancied a rest day. We also needed an extra day as we postponed the final leg due to torrential rain – but we did complete the whole trail and some great “extras” too.

It starts at Kavos – a grim, tacky enclave full of fast food joints, bars and hotels for the 18-30s wanting sun, night-life and booze. But almost immediately after leaving the “strip” you are into virgin territory, woodland walks, an old monastery and then onto an immense strand of sand on the west coast with few people and clear blue sea for perfect swimming to cool you after the first day's walk. You walk along the beach and then head up and inland back over to the east coast, through lush vegetation, olive groves and farmland to Lefkimmi – which is a collection of working villages which form the second largest “town” after Corfu Town.

From Lefkimmi the path meanders back to the west coast, through non touristy villages and landscapes and then down to long sandy beaches with hardly a soul in sight. This part of the island is mostly unspoilt and has not fully succumbed to Corfu's mania for laying tarmac on the old tracks. The one or two unsightly beaches are not sufficient to distract you from the beauty of the villages, tiny bays, olive groves and old monasteries and chapels – as well the beautiful and quite wild sand dune area around the Venetian-made Lake Korission.

After the tiny bay at Paramonos, a pleasant place for a stop-over, the Trail heads inland and uphill, through farmland, heath land, olive groves and small settlements ending at a string of villages with views opening up to the “mountains” at the north of the island. You then head back towards the west coast, via the second highest peak with its beautiful monastery and gardens full of walnut, fig and chestnut trees.

This stretch of the west coast is more rocky and has “the loveliest beach in the world” – according to Lawrence Durrell.

This is the last chance to swim for a couple of days as the route turns east through some of the greenest and least spoilt terrain towards the northern “mountains” and plateau – including the summit of Pantokrator, the highest point at 911m. It’s not exactly an alpine peak and the monastery at the top competes for space with dozens of antennae and masts, as well as Albanian snack sellers – but it’s still impressive for such a small island. The views are stunning on a clear day – over to the Albanian mountains and the Greek mainland, as well as a great panorama over most of Corfu.

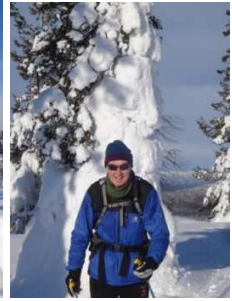
From there, it’s a long slog down to the sea on the east coast where there are attractive small bays like Kalami (Durrell’s White House) and Kouloura, which are popular but not yet overwhelmed by big hotels and the rash of Kensington-by-the-sea villas. From there, it’s the final day’s trek, back up to the limestone plateau and down to the north coast and the Trail’s end at Agios Spiridon. The last stretch includes the uninhabited hill village of Old Perithia with its 4 tavernas and the world’s best walnut cake!

**Highlights?** Well, the walk itself, the lovely and stunning scenery, beautiful woodlands, flowers (especially cyclamen in the autumn and the tobacco plants with their fabulous evening scent). It is strikingly varied for an island that’s less than 80km from tip to toe. This is probably the most fertile Greek island too, with a diversity of flora and fauna to keep even the real enthusiasts interested. You’re also surprisingly detached from the crowds and the beach-side developments. Hikers are something of a curiosity – we only met two others. In some of the finest spots there are wonderful chapels and monasteries. We also met some intriguing and mostly very friendly characters, including some helpful ex-pats. Add to that the food (simple but very tasty), the weather (mostly hot and clear), the beaches (many and varied, and often quiet) and the swimming (great!), and even the ubiquitous Corfu cats – all in all, a fantastic holiday!

**Lowlights?** Not really anything worth getting upset about. The way-marking was frustrating at times, as were the notes. The Corfiots (the islanders) also have a habit of dumping rubbish in some of the most beautiful places. And there was a lack of well located, good, simple B&B accommodation which meant we sometimes had to rely on “all-inclusive” hotels which did at least have good breakfasts and buffets. One final caution – the horseflies were hungry (take plenty of insect repellent).

**Verdict?** We recommend it and are planning to go again – next time in May to get the benefit of the full range of spring flowers which, according to locals, ex-pats and a lot of enthusiastic writers over the years, transform the island and are truly exceptional! We’ll let you know...

**Judi Webb and Peter Sedgwick**



**Amazing skiing in Finland (Akaslompolo)  
Tyneside Loipers Club Holiday – February 2010**

## Getting lost in Romania

### The World Masters Ski Orienteering Championship

I came across the World Masters Ski-O Championship (this year in Romania) while idly surfing the web. Back in '95 and '96, I had been part of the GB team (more from availability than skill) but the constraints of full time work prevented me from participating further (until now). Readers of Tyneside Loipers newsletter will know that I also regularly take part in the Masters World Cup in cross-country skiing. This year was to be in Falun, Sweden, a week or so after the ski-O event in Romania, so I organised myself to do both – with some difficulty – with a week in hand.

A key to orienteering is to know where you are meant to be going. This wasn't the case with my accommodation for the Ski-O but I'll tell you that little story another time. At least I knew the place was Miercurea Ciuc at the south end of the Carpathian Mountains, the coldest town in Romania and home to the best beer.

The Masters competition was over two days interspersed by the World Junior champs, European Senior World cup and a relay championship – a busy programme (challenging to the organisers let alone the competitors) with heavy snowfalls and variable temperatures. The map gives a flavour of the hilly terrain and complex track network the courses were set on. The fresh snow made the going rather tough since the tracks weren't well prepared. Looking at the map, the solid green lines are meant to be groomed trails, dashed lines are skidoo tracks and dotted lines are skied but ungroomed. Skating skis are de rigueur and, whilst the difficulties of skating in fresh snow are the same for everyone, the fast people do it much better – or take their skis off and run up. The descents were also a challenge, as you might guess from the contours. Descending a steep single track in deep snow meant a lot of bum-braking, both intentional and accidental (but at least the snow was soft).

Ski-O has different challenges compared to conventional orienteering. The map is designed slide under a plastic cover which allows you to swivel the map to keep it orientated. This took me a bit of getting used to, particularly as I had no wrist mounted compass to help me. In conventional orienteering, I usually keep a thumb close to where I am on the map so it is easy to see where to look next. This is a touch hard in ski-O when both hands are involved in poling, so perhaps it is not surprising that I got confused early on Day 1 and went to control 9 instead of control 4 (and only realised my mistake when I got to control 8). Never mind – it was a steep learning curve but I wasn't last.

I enjoyed Romania and the Ski-O despite the difficulties. The people were friendly, helpful and enthusiastic, the food was fine and plenty of it, the scenery spectacular in places and the snow was plentiful. Don't expect wonderful, slick organisation but transport seems to work, albeit slowly, and you'll have a holiday with a difference. Miercurea Ciuc has its own biathlon range near the Ski-O venue, although the country seems only recently to be promoting sport after many years when the state ignored it.

My stay in Romania ended with the closing banquet in a rather posh restaurant and a free for all buffet with ample beer. I invited myself on to a table with some Slovaks and Bulgarians who luckily spoke some English. Eventually, back at the hostel after cadging a lift with some Czechs, it was really too late to go to bed so I watched the Winter Olympics until 3.30 for the bus transfer to Bucharest to get my plane to Stockholm – but that’s another story....

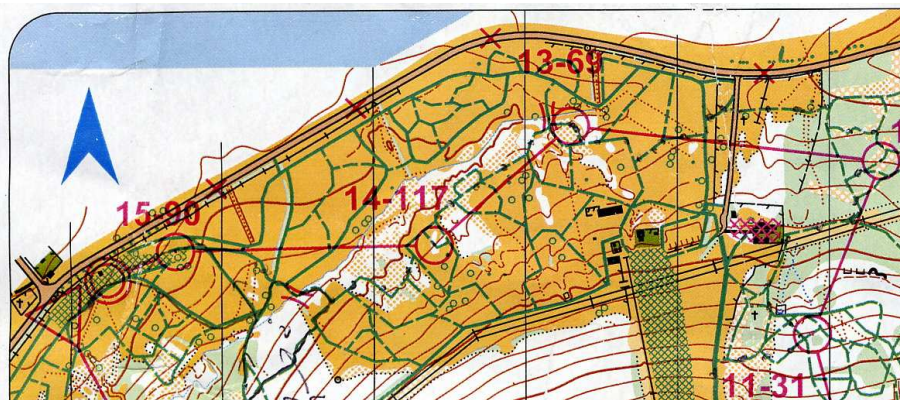
### Alasdair Wilson

Another story... this is what Alasdair says of the World Masters in Sweden.

“Falun is a centre for nordic skiing so the facilities were excellent. There were eight of us Brits, with 5 of us staying together in a residential school. Conditions were very cold and windy on most days and with lot of fresh snow there were many waxing and clothing challenges to overcome. Our results were quite good. Norman Clark was again very competitive in his class (M80+) and won a Gold, Silver and a Bronze. I had my best competition in terms of time behind the winner and achieved a PB in the 10km Freestyle and was pleased to complete all three races (30km Free, 10km Free and 45km Classic).

It was good to watch the last fixture of the FIS World Cup a month later and see the top skiers ski over some of the same route. But they also skied up Murder Hill which, when I was there, I thought was the bottom of a downhill run.

Falun would be good for a skiing holiday as there is an extensive network of tracks and good public transport which allows visits to other areas. Falun is a big town so plenty of other opportunities plus it is a centre for ice skating on Lake Rinn which is specially cleared of snow – sadly I didn’t get a chance to try that out.”



Part of the Ski-O map showing the steep contours and the first 5 controls



## **The Club Ski Holiday in Finland (Akaslompolo)**

by Jane Brantom

The early start from Manchester airport was unappealing but by Sunday afternoon we'd crossed the Arctic Circle and were installed in our lovely log cabin, and we were kitted up and skiing across the massive lake. The holiday had started!

The snow was perfect and the well-maintained tracks meant some magnificent skiing through forests, up and down hills and across lakes. I loved the sense of space, the light and the silence. The heavy snow on the trees was amazing. I also loved the stops! Coming upon a hut or shelter was great, especially as they all had open fires which were often outside. A dive onto the rucksack for your sausages and soon you had your own 'home cooked' lunch.

The best day's skiing for me was the day we caught the bus across to Totovaaran and skied the 25km back to Akaslompolo, especially the moment the prepared tracks disappeared and we were advised to go another way. There was a set of tracks to follow however, so we did. We discovered their creator some three km later – our very own Keith Walker, trail blazing ahead of us and also lighting the fire in the hut.

The accommodation and food were good too. We returned to our spacious log cabin every afternoon for tea and homemade cakes (the six of us were very well organised on that score) followed by sauna and pre-dinner drinks. Then a walk (or sledge) across to the Akas hotel, sometimes followed by trying to spot the Northern Lights. What a pity we only dug the old sledge out on the last evening – thanks to Wenda for doing that otherwise we may never have discovered the joy of sledging to and from dinner in the dark. Musical entertainment was from our futile efforts to remember the 'yoike', da da da-da-da ( x3), da da-da, as we skied along. Pat and I finally managed it on our last day.

The only real disappointment was the free cross country ski equipment hire that came with the Ingram holiday. These were adequate but not ideal and some of us exchanged them for slightly better versions during the week. However, they weren't the best introduction to cross country skiing for the uninitiated. We were also caught out by 'early closing' of nearly everything but the supermarket on Saturday afternoon.

We always said that a sighting of the northern lights would be a bonus. The experience of putting on at least five layers after dinner and picking our way out onto the lake was one to remember though and we did see some unusual colours and patterns in the sky. A pity we missed the wonderful sightings by Pam and Paula – another good reason to return.

There are many reasons to recommend Yllas. Staying in the Yllas log cabins with half board at the Akas hotel suited us very well. The skiing was excellent and having another 14 members of the Loipers around was great too.

**Jane Brantom (with others sharing the log cabin Carolyn Hawkes, Pat Lynch, Nuala Wright, Champa Sadler and Wenda Fabian)**

### The Club Holiday in Finland again...

Our week in Finnish Lapland (28 Feb to 7 March) was wonderful. The scenery was beautiful, the tracks were very extensive and superbly maintained and the snow was perfect. On top of all this, we had amazingly good weather.

The nearby ski hill goes up to 700m above sea level (remember this is beyond the Arctic Circle) and is served by a number of drag lifts and two chair lifts. Pam and I took ourselves to the ski hill on our second day – the only day when the weather was rather questionable – many of the lifts were closed because of high winds (90km/h on the top) and conditions in some places were more Scottish than Scotland!

In several places the prepared loipes go up to almost 500m (in one case coming close to the ski hill) and it is noticeable that the higher slopes are gradually less tree-covered – those that survive on the exposed slopes are covered with thick coats of snow, in some cases so thickly covered that the tree itself is completely hidden. Several of the loipe are graded as black (difficult). One such was the track over Kukas (474m) which some of us did on a windless sunny day at the end of the week. The route down called for some strong nerve, or a lot of snow-ploughing (note to downhillers and telemarkers: remember that this is on cross-country skis). Once we were in the trees again we came across a lone reindeer – it was a fairly tame one and we met it again at the wilderness cafe at Kotomaja.

The log cabins were charming and very comfortable (ours was shared with Keith and Paula) and it was lovely to entertain those from other cabins on different evenings. Each cabin has its own sauna and the lounge area has a log burning stove (there was a free supply of logs kept in the shed adjacent to the ski store). But the downside of lighting the stove was that those sleeping in the loft area were way too hot to get to sleep at night, so the stove was usually allowed to go out in the early evening.

Thanks to Neil for the coaching session on diagonal stride at the end of Day 1. The skiing was very enjoyable but my technique would improve greatly if I made the effort to go track skiing every year – I have to admit that I got by more on my general fitness than on my skill as a skier. I was much impressed by the standard of skiing generally – most of the people that we came across had clearly been skiing for much of their lives and skied very well indeed (often elegant and invariably efficient) – and the skating technique of some of the younger skiers was quite beautiful to watch.

As Jane mentions in her article, one of the really great things about the week was having a good-sized group to ski with (15 of us in total). Mostly we skied in smaller groups with different abilities and aspirations but usually we managed to meet up at different points of the day (it was a good sociable crowd). We are looking forward to going again in 2012 when hopefully we will have another good get together of loipers.

Alan Mitcham

### **Subscriptions**

Unless you have already paid by standing order, membership subs are now overdue! Please make your cheque payable to Tyneside Loipers.

Full adult membership	£14
Joint members	£22
Country members (newsletter only)	£5

Send payment to Alan Mitcham, 5 The Rise, Ponteland, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE20 9LJ. Alternatively, contact Alan to find out how you can pay by regular standing order – definitely the best way to pay and dead easy to set up!

### **Cross Country and Telemark Ski Holidays**

Exodus has revamped its website this year. As usual lots of winter holidays are on offer (not just skiing). Cross country skiing holidays are available all over Central Europe and Scandinavia and once again they are offering Learn to Skate weeks led by Eric Woolley (in Seefeld, Austria and Versciaco in Italy). Eric's skating weeks come much recommended by everyone who has been on them.

Useful websites are...

[www.exodus.co.uk/activities-experiences/winter-activities/cross-country-skiing](http://www.exodus.co.uk/activities-experiences/winter-activities/cross-country-skiing)  
[www.xcuk.com](http://www.xcuk.com)  
[www.ramblersholidays.co.uk/cross-country\\_skiing\\_holidays.aspx](http://www.ramblersholidays.co.uk/cross-country_skiing_holidays.aspx)  
[www.hfholidays.co.uk/crosscountryskiing/index.asp](http://www.hfholidays.co.uk/crosscountryskiing/index.asp)

(The XCUK website also has links to a much recommended Hints and Tips section with useful articles on a number of cross country ski topics – news, books, racing, training, equipment, etc)

The Telemark Ski Company [www.telemarkskico.com](http://www.telemarkskico.com) are the specialists for Nordic downhill and telemarking skills and they also do various Nordic hut touring trips. Their downhill weeks now cater for alpine skiers as well as telemarkers, usually in mixed groups. Tim Owen and his wife Penny did a week with them last winter in Lenzerheide and Tim says this worked very well indeed.

### **XC and Telemark Skis – Where to Buy in the UK**

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

All of these places will give good advice (usually!) if you call in at their shop or speak to them on the phone. Braemar Mountain Sports and Mountain Spirit will also hire out equipment (skis and boots) – check this on their websites.

## **Club Skis and Boots**

Pat Lynch has done an excellent job with our club equipment. Our stock of equipment has mysteriously increased as we have been donated several good pairs of skis and boots from one source or another. Special thanks go to Rob Forster who has built a very neat storage rack which makes Pat's the tidiest garage in Wylam.

As well as the skis owned by the club and stored in Wylam, we now have access (through Keith Walker) to a variety of skis and boots stored in the old outdoor centre at Allenheads. If you wish to hire club equipment, you should first contact Pat (e-mail [trishwylam@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:trishwylam@yahoo.co.uk) or phone 01661 853475 or 07708 012795). She will then put you on to Keith if you need access to the skis at Allenheads.

Pat's address is 5 Algernon Terrace, Wylam, NE41 8AX. There is a small hire charge of £10 per weekend for club equipment (negotiable for longer hire) for club members. Please note that we may charge a little more for non-members.

Most of our skis are metal-edged touring skis with 3-pin bindings and most of the boots are stiff leather boots. These are ideal for ski touring in Norway and in the UK. We also have a few pairs of climbing skins.

A high proportion of the club skis have waxing bases (not fish scales). Pat has a small supply of waxes and you will indeed need to apply wax or klister to the bases before skiing. Understandably, waxing skis have rather gone out of favour for skiing in the UK – snow conditions are seldom reliable and it is difficult to wax for the varying temperature and condition of the snow (and particularly difficult for anyone new to cross country skiing). But hopefully Pat will be able to fit you up with skis and boots that are suitable for you.

Do please let us know if you have any skis or boots or poles that you are willing to donate to the club (especially poles – we are quite short of them). Do please get in touch with Alan or Pat. Alternatively let us know if you have any surplus equipment that you would like to keep but are happy to lend to club members. Contact Pat and we will put them on the list of available kit.

### **For Sale**

Peter Quigley has some equipment that he would like to sell – any offers to Peter on 01207 542723 (e-mail [peter.quigley@virgin.net](mailto:peter.quigley@virgin.net))

1 pair Rottefella 75 mm toe bindings, with screws & heel plates.

1 pair Rottefella Riva-3 cable bindings including heel plates.

1 Pair new unused Linken telemark bindings.

1 pair Garmont leather boots, size 44 (9½)

1 pair Gore-Tex (bright red) gaiters to fit Garmont boots