



TYNESIDE LOIPERS

The NorthEast's Specialist
Cross Country Ski club



Newsletter
Jan/Feb 2011

Website: www.tynesideloipers.org.uk

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Club Events

Tues 15 th Feb	Pub meet, The Union Rooms, Newcastle – see p. 3.
Tues 1 st March	Pub meet, The Tap and Spile, Hexham – see p. 3.
11 th to 14 th March	Loipers Scotland weekend – see p. 3.
4 th to 11 th April	SSE Coaching week in Kvitavatn – see p. 16.
12 th to 24 th April	Club trip to Norway – see p. 13.

Keith Walker (Chair)	jkeithwalker@hotmail.com	07969 021680
Heather Dickinson (Vice Chair)	hodasd@f2s.com	0191 281 0495
Charlie Fisher (Secretary)	charlie.fisher@phonecoop.coop	0191 261 7719
Alasdair Wilson (Treasurer/Racing Officer)	awilson.craw@bluevonder.co.uk	0191 266 2327
Alan Mitcham (Membership/Newsletter)	alanmitcham@metronet.co.uk	01661 823960
Paramjeet Bhogal (Child Protection Officer)	paramjeet.bhogal@newcastle.gov.uk	0191 266 5052

Editor's Musings

What a great start to the season – the November/December snow was a real treat. I reckon we had about 20 inches of snow here in Ponteland. I had to clear my front drive after getting back from a weekend away and managed to get the car out of the drive after about 6 hours of hard work – all just to get to the dentist! Thereafter, I managed about six days skiing – it could have been a lot more. Even a 45-minute stint around Ponteland Park whilst Pam did the shopping was very enjoyable. The snow here lasted all through December with plenty left for tobogganing with the grandchildren over Christmas!

Many of us have been out and about on the old waggonways in Tyneside and Durham, up onto the Pennines and one or two of us even onto Cheviot and Hedgehope. Weardale Ski Club and Allenheads had some of the best skiing ever.

Top prize goes to Frank Cauley who skied from his door in Gateshead and did a total of 15 days skiing before Christmas (see Frank's articles on pages 4 and 14) even skiing out with a camera and tripod on the morning of 21st Dec to watch and photograph the lunar eclipse!

The masses of snow brought its own problems – not least getting the car out and deciding where to go without getting stuck on the roads. Graham Harkness solved the problem by parking at the Morrison's car park in Consett and carrying skis for a short distance to the Waskerley Way. Several of us met up again at the Morrison's car park on Sunday 5th Dec and skied about 11 miles on the Waskerley Way.

A couple of days earlier (3rd Dec) Keith and I had met up at Allenheads with the intention of skiing up onto Kilhope Law. We were headed by a strong westerly wind and it was very hard work breaking trail in the deep soft snow. We gave up at about 550m (well off the summit) and skied down for tea and mince pies in the Hemel Cafe.

The plentiful snow has brought lots of new members – welcome to Tyneside Loipers – do please get involved and join in the club meets. Many of you have already done so. Several new members joined us on the Telemark trip to the Alps in January and on one of the club outings in December. Others have taken advantage of coaching opportunities (skiing and roller skiing) with Alasdair.

The weather has gone crazy...! After such a fantastic start to the season, the French Alps have had hardly any snow since Christmas. The snowline has gone up and up and the valleys are bare. Early January saw very high temperatures and lots of sunshine – and then very cold sunny conditions but still no more snow. Anyone going to ski in France right now will be very disappointed.

Norway started the winter with very cold temperatures and little snow. But copious amounts of new snow came in mid January and there is lots of time for more snow to build up before the club trip in April.

It looks like there is still plenty of snow in Scotland – ok for our club trip in March.

Club Trip to Scotland – 11th to 14th March

Several of us are booked to go on the Scotland trip in March. We have reserved a 10-person self-catered lodge near Feshie Bridge, near the Cairngorms, from Friday to Monday 11th to 14th with 3 nights of accommodation and hopefully at least 2 or 3 days of good skiing.

At the time of writing we have a couple of spare places in the lodge. See www.lagganlialodges.com/ and look for the Anderson Lodge. There are a few good eating places nearby, so there is the option of eating out or staying in. If you haven't already booked a place, contact me (Alan Mitcham) as soon as possible.

There is currently plenty of snow on the Cairngorm ski area and there is lots of snow for ski touring above about 800m. There should be good skiing opportunities on the ski hill or on the Monadhliaths or on the Cairngorm summits or on the hills above Glen Feshie. We might even be lucky and get more snow for low level skiing in the forest or around Glenmore Lodge.

Currently there is a mix of skiing abilities – 4 of us are fit and experienced and will be hoping to go off on at least one day to do some high touring – others are less experienced but will be able to do shorter day tours or make use of the ski hill. There will also be walking options. Do get in touch if you want to join us.

Loipers Pub Evenings

We have fixed a series of dates for a regular fortnightly get together in Newcastle or Hexham. The idea is to meet up for an informal chat over a beer or two. Come and meet other club members and talk about skiing (club trips, local snow, roller skiing, etc) and anything of interest going on in the NE. It would be great to see any or all of you on these dates. Meet from 7.45 onwards.

The next meets are Tuesday 15th Feb at the Union Rooms in Newcastle and Tuesday 1st March at the Tap and Spile in Hexham. Other dates in March are to be confirmed.

The Union Rooms is a Wetherspoon pub near to the Central Station (48 Westgate Road, NE1 1TT) and convenient for the metro. Ignore the scaffolding around the outside – the pub is open for business and we will usually be in the small room adjacent to the upstairs bar.

The Tap and Spile is in Battle Hill, the main street through Hexham (the old A69 about 30 years ago) at NE46 1BA. We will be in the side room – turn left as you go in the door from the main street.

Any problems finding us... Try phoning my mobile 07791 161382, or phone Keith Walker on 07969 021680.

The Hebburn Haute Route?

Well, not quite.....! The skiing area I am writing about is just inside the Gateshead/South Tyneside border. The geographically correct name is the 'East Gateshead Wardley Landfill Site' – a bit of a mouthful for a future ski resort! But this is an excellent ski area as I discovered during the recent heavy snows of late November and December. Initially I was able to get to the area by driving East from Heworth roundabout, along the A185 and through Pelaw toward Hebburn. I parked adjacent to a gate at NZ303626 and skied to the Landfill Site via the Bowes Railway Path. A few days later I discovered I could ski to the area virtually from my front door by carrying my skis to the Pelaw Waggonway, where it crosses the old Sunderland Road, then skiing about a mile and a quarter past Pelaw Metro Station and then a short distance south to the Landfill Site. You can see all of this on Google Earth – just type in Pelaw Metro Station and use the Satellite picture to follow what I have described.

The highest part of the site is all of 50m above sea level, but the slope to the south provides an excellent area for improving downhill skills. I was able to make tracks around the whole site which gave over a mile of skiing. It was also possible to get onto the Bowes Railway Path and ski north to a park with a good selection of ups and downs. In total I had about 15 days skiing in this area and for the majority of the time the snow was of good quality and on some of the really cold days it was even powder. The view from the top of the landfill site was quite amazing – Penshaw Monument to the south, Cleadon Water Tower to the east and the Tyne Valley to the west. All that was needed was an Alpine view to the north, but the reality was an unobstructed view of the Wallsend Gasometer.

Sightings of cross country skiers are obviously rare in East Gateshead. Several times the locals expressed their amazement – most only having ever heard of downhill skiing. On three occasions I was asked if I could be photographed and some dogs were eyeing my ski poles as possible urinals – they were actively discouraged! All in all a wonderful start to the season – I still find it difficult to believe that I have had all this skiing in East Gateshead and before Christmas too!

Frank Cauley

Xmas Meal

Thanks to Alasdair for organising the post Xmas Meal on 6th January at SIX Restaurant at the top of the Baltic, enjoyed by 14 of us (10 loiper members). The food was excellent and we had good service. The special deal was very good value indeed – two courses (starter and main) plus a bottle of house wine between 2 people for just £15 per head. It was a good venue and enjoyable evening. I received an e-mail the following day from new member Jim Taylor with special thanks for making him and his wife so welcome.

Notes from Alasdair....

During the last snow in Nov/Dec, I gave lessons in both classic and skating to a total of 13 people from a range of backgrounds including orienteering, running and paragliding. A couple of these have joined us and 3 were already members. I am planning to give roller ski lessons as weather permits. I can be flexible and evening sessions are not precluded since some of the tracks I use are street-lit. Good tarmacked cycle tracks are ideal.

I am continuing to roller ski regularly for training and welcome companions. I'm training specifically for the World Masters Cup (effectively the world championships) in early March being held near Vernon, British Columbia. See www.mwc2011.com for details and live results in due course. Races for men are 30k, 10k and 45k, either classic or freestyle, with one day rest between. The women and older men (60+) do a bit less – 20k, 5k and 30k.

Colin Blackburn, one of our members, is doing the World Masters Ski-Orienteering Championship this year in Susjoen near Lillehammer - I'm tempted to go too and see if I've learnt from my escapades in Romania last year. There is a bit of a revival of ski-O in the UK and there is hope that a British team could go to the World Championships in Sweden this year. Get in touch if interested for the future.

I am wondering whether we could compile a map of roller ski and snow ski routes in the region for recreational skiing taking into account the cycle tracks, waggonways and golf courses which can be reached by bus/metro or from your back door. A good starting point might be the cycle route map set up by the Tyne Wear councils. I would be pleased to hear from anyone wanting to coordinate this.

Alasdair Wilson

Paramjeet's Motorbike Trip to India - Fund Raising for UNICEF (Sat 12th Feb)

I am planning to do a motorbike ride from the UK to India going through much of Europe, including Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania, then into Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and finally India. I am starting on the 5th April and hope to arrive in India by about the 20th April. As part of this I have organised a social event at Newcastle Cricket Club on Saturday 12 Feb 2011 (from 7.30 till 11.30) for sports people, friends and family. The evening will have an Indian buffet meal, a disco, and a bar and there will also be 2 main speakers.. Jim Alder (1966 Commonwealth Gold Marathon winner) and Ultra Runner, Sharon Gayter, will each will be giving a talk. There will be chances to win various prizes in raffles too. The cost is only £15 per ticket and all the money will go to UNICEF. Tickets can be reserved from me, Paramjeet on 07792522865, or email me on psbhogal@yahoo.co.uk

Paramjeet Bhogal

Tyneside Loipers Telemarking in the Alps – Jan 2011

A long weekend clearly isn't long enough. On Thurs 13th Jan, ten of us travelled via Geneva en route to Les Carroz and the Grand Massif area of the French Alps. We were seven enthusiastic free-heelers accompanied by three enthusiastic fixed heel skiers (wives of some of the above).

Our spirits were slightly dampened as we approached Les Carroz and two of us confessed to having read a damning report on Trip Advisor about our hotel 'Les Belles Pistes'. We learnt from our driver that the hotel was being closed down in March. But it turned out just fine. It was owned by an English couple who were about to retire to a new development on the other side of Les Carroz – the food was good, the staff were friendly and it was in a perfect location, a short walk to the town but close to a convenient access lift into the Grand Massif.

We had 3 full days of skiing and each day we took the long gondola and a sequence of chairlifts over to the higher runs above Flaine where we found the best snow and good runs for telemarking. Sadly the snow was not nearly as good as 2 years ago. The heavy snowfalls from before Christmas had been followed by unusually warm weather. Most of the snow had disappeared from the valleys; and some of the lower slopes (those still open) were icy and treacherous. During our stay, the sun shone relentlessly each day and typical air temperatures were up to about 7°C.

The higher pistes were very good and included a devilish run called Diamont Noir. We did some worthwhile off-piste runs too and had some notable crashes on the jumps, some of them captured on camera (thank you Jon and Kevin!). Sadly Helen (Tim Elliott's wife) missed most of the fun as she had injured a calf muscle on our first day following a slow speed fall when her ski bindings failed to release.

It was good to see Helen Charlton who drove over from her apartment in Les Gets to ski with us on our last day. Helen is skiing as well as ever – she started up Tyneside Loipers in 1983 and is now on alpine skis (we would perhaps have persuaded her to get back on telemark skis but for her busted Achilles tendon from a few years ago).

On our last afternoon, 3 of us (Kevin, Keith and myself) took the chairlift to the top of the resort below the Tetes des Lindars and ducked under the ropes to ski 450 vertical metres into a remote valley which we had eyed longingly on the previous day. The snow was very good and it was enjoyable off-piste skiing. We stopped at a CAF hut part way down the valley and put on our climbing skins as the only way back out of the valley was a long slog back up into the resort (very hot in the afternoon sun). We needed to get back in time for the last connecting chairlift to Les Carroz but Keith and I failed to make it (it was an expensive taxi ride)!

The guys all insisted that I publish Kevin's photo of me taken on our last afternoon off-piste! Apologies – Kevin's caption 'Our leader giving it all!'

Alan Mitcham

More photos... see www.flickr.com/photos/k2moore/sets/72157625881651244/



Consett to Durham on the old railway 8th Dec – Alan, Malcolm and Nuala



Making curves off piste

Untouched snow on the last afternoon - Keith

Serious telemarking - Greg

The January Telemark Trip to Les Carroz



Crashing out on the bumps!



Crikey - who is this..? Clue on page 6

Skiing the Birkebeiner – March 2010

The Birkebeiner is a classic 54 km ski marathon held annually in Norway. It's skied in March and for my 65th birthday I decided to do it. I suppose I needed to prove to myself that I am not too old! A year earlier I had skated the Engadin Marathon though I confess I have little track skiing experience (I prefer wilderness backcountry skiing).

My nephew lives in Oslo and is married to a Norwegian. When I suggested doing the Birkebeiner he was appalled but, as I had expected, he soon came round to the idea, even persuading his wife to do it.

Being 65 meant I had to start at 7 o'clock in the morning, so we had overnight accommodation at the start. We got there the previous afternoon and it was raining. I reported at the information desk and explained where we were to stay – the lady then asked me 'Are you sure?' When I confirmed the place, a short exchange took place in Norwegian with my nephew's wife. It turned out we had been allocated a place in the local Norwegian Army camp, but foreigners are not allowed to spend a night in a Norwegian Army camp. Not even Swedes, she assured us (but they are not in Nato!). So we were reallocated to a kindergarten.

This worked out well as there were some very experienced skiers staying there, including one man doing it for the 41st time. So we got good advice on waxing our skis. It was going to be warm the following day – klister! The technique is to put on a thin layer of blue klister, well rubbed in, and on top of this put on universal klister. The blue klister, which is for cold conditions and harder than universal, would help to bind the universal to the ski and preserve the klister for the duration of the race. Well that's the theory – if you can do it properly.

I had to be up about 5.30 to get ready, have breakfast, then a half hour walk to the start, time to get myself sorted, see if the wax was working, take on some liquid, then line up for the 7 o'clock start. A slight bottleneck just after the start but after that there was plenty of room and it was a nice clear day with not too much wind. Within a few hundred meters there were skiers on the edge of the track redoing their waxing but my klister was working ok. In fact I only had to herring-bone for three or four paces on the whole 500 meter climb.

It was not only the 'old' who had started early but also the handicapped and I have to admit it is a little disconcerting to be 'racing' along behind someone who is blind. But there was a long way to go and I was intent on finishing rather than racing.

The Elite group set off an hour after us and so they started coming past before I had reached the top of the first hill, but any worries I had about getting in people's way were soon allayed as they were well spread out and later when skiers were constantly passing there was always plenty of room. The climb to the top of the first hill at 15km had not been as bad as I had feared. After that a couple of km downhill then a second climb before an 8 km run in to the half way point where I was pleased to see I was well up on my six hour schedule.

I took half a banana, already peeled, and took my time to eat it before proceeding with the second half – another climb of about 250 meters. It soon became apparent that I was not an expert waxer as this time I was having to herring-bone. I probably persisted too long, and certainly had the impression I was losing a lot of time. Eventually I decided I would have to put some more wax on my skis. There is a waxing station at the half way point and someone who used that said it was well worthwhile if needed. My bit of waxing improved things but I was relieved when I got to the top of the hill since from there on it was ‘flat’, or even downhill. However the diagonal stride was not the best technique in the conditions and I noticed the Norwegians were all double poling, taking quick sharp pushes (not the long strong pushes I had been taught). Anyone thinking of doing a ‘race’ like this should concentrate on double poling.

When I reached the last feed station at Susjoen (co-incidentally at 42 km) I felt almost as if I had finished. Only 12 km more and downhill or flat and I had skied it the week before. In fact this was the section on which I lost time as the final flat 6km at lower altitude was very mushy. Those who started later said the whole track was like that for them. I also have to admit I fell. It was on a long straight downhill – except that about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way down was a road. In the preceding week it had been necessary to stop for the road but for the race it was covered with snow and flying down the hill I was wondering whether I could go for it. I decided not! So starting to snowplough, I was soon flying through the air. After I landed and was trying to untangle myself I heard a shout from behind so I quickly moved out of the way. No damage was done and my excuse is that I am not used to such narrow skis.

I finished at 12.40 (5 hours 40 min) and could relax for the rest of the day. I probably could have pushed myself harder but I had enjoyed the skiing, and occasionally watching the spectators watching me.

Any advice...? Well you could wait till you’re 65 and then you get to start before the crowds – the track conditions are at their best and you are finished by lunch. If the weather is fine, it’s a great day’s skiing

Greg Buick

Greg seems to be packing in the skiing this year..! In January, he joined the Loiper’s telemark weekend in Les Carroz. In February, he is joining a group organised by Martin Read to Santa Maria in Austria and in March he is going on a 2-week telemark touring trip to Canada, staying for a week at the Selkirk Lodge in the western Rockies and then doing the Wapta Traverse, a 4-day high route across the Wapta Glacier.

By the time he joins the Loiper’s trip to Norway in April, the rest of us will be struggling to keep up!

(Alan Mitcham – Ed.)



The Lunar Eclipse on Skis 21st Dec, Frank skiing in Gateshead and the 21 Dec sunrise



The loipers near Consett on 5th Dec – Ben, Neil, Keith and Jon



Pat, Carolyn and Nuala – energetic poses on their trip to Italy

Equipment Talk – Which skis and boots for local touring?

Lots of people (new loiper members) have asked for advice about buying skis and boots, so here is a guide for anyone planning to ski in the UK, or go touring in Norway. First, do think carefully about what type of skiing you will be doing. Will it be cross country track skiing, or Nordic touring, or telemark skiing? Unfortunately the equipment choice is fairly complicated and you will not be able to buy one pair of skis to do everything!

The likelihood is that you will buy your first pair of ‘cross country’ skis to use on the few occasions when we have local skiing in the Pennines or the Durham Dales or Kielder Forest. In this case you would be better off thinking about Nordic touring skis (not cross country).

Nordic touring skis are wider and more shaped than cross country track skis. They also have metal edges so that you have more control for skiing downhill or skiing across icy slopes (something that we come across more often than we like to admit). The boots for Nordic touring are generally heavier and stiffer and the bindings are more rugged (again to give you more control and enable you to use the edges of the skis).

In contrast, cross country track skis are straight and narrow and do not have metal edges. And cross country boots and bindings are generally lighter and less stiff than those for Nordic touring. Nevertheless they are fine for lowland touring and old railway tracks.

Braemar Mountain Sports are a good source of information (have a look at their website www.braemarmountainsports.com). They offer good advice and will be happy to talk to you on the phone or in person about cross country, Nordic touring or telemark equipment. Their web pages for Nordic touring are particularly helpful. They also offer an equipment hire service, so there is a good chance you can try out some similar equipment before buying. Other specialist suppliers are mentioned at the end of this article but Braemar would be my first port of call.

A typical Nordic touring ski is the Fischer E99. These are available in lengths between 185 and 205cm and of course they have metal edges. The width of the ski in millimetres is 69/55/62 (the 3 measurements at the tip, middle and tail give an indication of the sidecut and hence the ease with which the skis will turn). These will be ideal skis for most types of terrain and most snow conditions. If you expect to be skiing on steeper terrain you might consider a wider ski such as the Fischer E109 (width 78/60/70mm) but bear in mind that the extra width makes the skis slower and more tiring when skiing longer distances on the flat.

Nordic touring boots were traditionally made of leather but nowadays leather boots are hard to find (at least in the UK). Modern touring boots are made either with a combination plastic/fabric design (like a beefed up version of cross country boot) or a hard shell plastic with a comfortable inner liner giving excellent stiffness and good control. There are several to choose from on the Braemar website – for example

look at the Alpina BC1650 or BC2150 for a lightweight combination design, or the Garmont Excursion which is hard shell. If you are buying a medium width ski such as the Fischer E99 you should probably have a lighter combination boot but if you decide to get a wider ski such as the Fischer E109 you will need a stiffer hard shell boot.

An added complication is that there are at least three different kinds of touring binding currently on the market and the bindings need to be compatible with your boots. Alpina boots are designed to fit a back country (BC) binding whereas the Garmont boots are meant for a 75mm 3-pin binding. (Salomon BC bindings are different again and designed for use with a Salomon BC boot.)

Just for the record my own touring setup (which I use for hut touring in Norway and for local skiing in the northeast) is the Fischer E109 ski and the Garmont Excursion boot, used with a 75mm cable binding. However I sometimes hanker after my old Asnes skis which were narrower (faster and less effort for distances on the flat). My E109 skis are the (waxless) version with a fishscale base which also make them a little slow going downhill. Waxing skis are usually quicker and more efficient in the good snow conditions typically found in Norway but a waxless ski is certainly convenient for the variable snow conditions found in the UK.

It is also important to choose a ski of the right length – too short and you will sink into the snow and get little glide – too long and you will have trouble turning and difficulty getting enough grip to propel yourself along.

If this is all a bit too complicated maybe the answer is to hire some of the club skis and boots (details elsewhere in this newsletter) and get to know more about the options that are best for you. Don't forget that you may also need climbing skins for those long ascents (it can be awfully tiring struggling uphill on a slope which is too steep for your wax or fishscale base). The club has some of these too.

The main UK suppliers are

[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

I learnt from LD Mountain Centre (Dean Street, Newcastle) that they are now doing a cross country ski package (skis, poles, boots, and bindings). The package comes from Atomic and costs about £320 all in, ordered to customer's requirements. But think carefully! Do you really want cross country track skis? For metal-edged touring skis, I advise going to one of the above.

[Alan Mitcham](#).

Club Trip to Norway – 12 to 24th April

It is not too late to join us on the club trip in Norway. Six of us are already booked – Alan, Greg, Keith, Charlie, Graham and Heather. We are going to be skiing in Tafjordfjella which is a less well-known area NW of the Jotunheim.

We will be starting in the north, going by train to Bjorli and then a few miles by taxi to an access point from where we can ski to the DNT hut at Pittbua. For the next 10 days we will be skiing between huts and frequently staying 2 or 3 nights in one hut to explore the area and bag a few peaks. At the end of the trip we will be skiing out to the road at Grotli in the south and catching the service bus back to Lillehammer for a final night before flying home (Oslo-Newcastle via Amsterdam). Heather and Graham will be leaving a couple of days early and flying home on 22nd April.

The Tafjordfjella area has many peaks between 1700 and 1999 metres which appear very skiable and there is a great deal of easily accessible terrain besides. The mountain huts in the area are all unstaffed but apparently they are some of the nicest and best-stocked huts in the Norway.

We will be using lightweight Nordic touring gear (metal edged skis and touring boots with 75mm 3-pin bindings). Rucksack weight will be kept to a minimum and essential safety gear will be shared as far as possible. Contact Alan, Keith or Heather if you would like more information or want to join us. Note that Tafjordfjella is a fairly remote area and not suitable for those new to hut touring.

There was not a lot of enthusiasm for the **Easy Norway Hut Tour** which I proposed in the last newsletter. Only one person responded – sorry Philip! I would nevertheless be pleased to organise an easy hut touring trip for next year, Easter 2012 – or if a sufficient number of people contact me soon enough, it might still be possible to do something for this year. There are several areas of Norway which might be suitable for a beginner's trip – it would be good to start discussing this if anyone is interested.

Tyneside Loipers AGM – Nov 2010

Twelve people turned up at the AGM and Social on 20th November at Heather's house. The front page listing of officers reflects some of the changes on the committee. Alasdair Wilson and Paul Jamieson have stood down as Chairman and treasurer respectively – thank you both for the time in your respective posts. Keith Walker has taken over as Chairman and Heather Dickinson has taken on the post of Vice Chair. Alasdair has taken up the reins as Treasurer. Jane Brantom and Rob Forster have reluctantly both resigned from the committee. We would welcome another female member of the committee if anyone would like to come forward.

There was lots of good discussion about club equipment and trips, all reported in the minutes (contact Charlie if you need a copy). Conversation was interspersed with lots of good food and wine. Thanks again to Heather for hosting the evening.

Watching the Lunar Eclipse on Skis - 21st Dec 2010

Listening to the radio on December 20th I happened to hear that early the following morning would be a total eclipse where the earth's shadow would block out sunlight to the moon between approximately 0640 and 0740. Having recently purchased a new camera this would be the ideal opportunity to test it out. Also with there still being plenty of snow around I would be able to ski to the viewing site virtually from my front door. The last time a lunar eclipse occurred at the Winter Solstice was in 1638, so this was a rare event indeed.

Awakening at 0530 on the 21st, a quick look out of the window was rewarded with a clear sky and a very bright moon – great! So at 0615 with a flask of coffee, a tripod and camera in the rucksack, I walked the 30yds to the Pelaw Main Waggonway, put on my skis and I was off. Although there had been a slight thaw the previous day, overnight frost had firmed up the snow to a skiable condition. Ten minutes later I was at the Wardley Landfill Site (a raised section at NZ306622) and an area I was getting to know quite well, as I had skied here frequently as a result of the heavy snow in late November and December.

The light was quite eerie. There was a still full moon in a cloudless sky reflecting off the snow as I set up the tripod and camera. Sure enough, at the predicted time of 0640, the western edge of the Moon crept into shadow, and by 0740 the shadow had progressed to the eastern edge to give the Moon a reddish glow. And then as the moon sank further to the northwest, the lightening sky to the southeast indicated the onset of the rising sun. What should have happened was that the shadowed moon would have disappeared over the horizon just as the sun rose, but unfortunately it became obscured by cloud. However I stayed on for the sunrise which occurred at 0831 and was rewarded with a spectacular show over the snow covered landscape. In between taking the pictures I spent the time skiing – mainly to keep warm. But 2hrs skiing and photographing a Lunar Eclipse at the Winter Solstice... who could have predicted that happening in East Gateshead at the Wardley Landfill Site?

Frank Cauley

Skiing in Lapland - 2012

Several people have mentioned that they are keen to return to Lapland as a TL club trip for next winter (2012). The club trip last year was excellent. The area has wonderful skiing with superbly prepared tracks and beautiful scenery.

Judi and Peter are going again to Yllas for a fortnight in early March 2011 with Helen Charlton and Neil Aitchison joining them for one week. Frank Cauley is also going to Yllas (his 3rd or 4th time I think) with the London Region Nordic Ski Club. It must be good! ...Hope to be there in 2012. There is also a good chance of seeing the Northern Lights, as Pam and Paula did last year. The next 2 years will see a peak in solar activity, so maximum chance of seeing the aurora.

Tyneside Loipers in Dobbiaco, Italy

Four keen loipers went to Italy for a week of track skiing at the end of January. Just back in time to catch this newsletter, Carolyn sums up the trip by saying...

We had glorious sunshine and excellent cold snow! Exodus booked us onto the Newcastle flight to Innsbruck for a mere £25 extra, saving us the Gatwick journey. The 15 euro Sud Tirol travel pass was great - Pat even used it on the train to Bolzano to see Otzi one day. We all used the train to go east into Austria (Sillian) to ski back and west to Welsberg to ski the length of the Gseisertal. We also used the buses more locally, to Cortina, the Kreuzbergpass area, Fischleintal and Prager Wildsee, from which we skied back (downhill!) all the way.

Off-track exploration was limited, but Nuala and I did follow an Alpine touring route up a gorge near the Drei Zinnen one day.

Pat and I had both been to Dobbiaco (separately) about 15 years ago but the spectacular scenery and the variety of trails more than met our expectations/memories.

The ski stadium had a new large building with a curved roof over which we skied on our first evening. The week was enlivened by the Alpine squadrons of the Italian army having races, including biathlon. Also the Cortina - Dobbiaco World Cup races took place at the end of our week.

We went to a talk (in Italian) by a Hot Air ballooning racer. Great slides, but it was hard to keep awake! Then on another night we went to a torch lit race in the stadium, for which we could have registered. When we arrived nobody else had registered and we were given torches anyway!

Nuala says... We were too late back from our cross border trip to Sillian in Austria to join in the army's biathlon competition on the military range outside Dobbiaco, but they let us ski across the range so that Carolyn could practice her shooting skills (taking aim with her ski poles). We were entertained by them in the bar that evening, playing Dire Straits amongst other more local tunes. So the following day we set off earlier and followed the army again to Monte Croce for the marathon. They made such a mess of the loipe so it was a slow journey back down to Moos! However the evening brightened up with our torch light demonstration down at the Nordic arena, beautifully prepared for us, but without much of an audience.

One legged skiing down a black run, going off piste up the valley towards Monte Cristallo and Pat finding her man in Bolzano were other delights! We unfortunately did not get a place in the Grand Fondo, Cortina to Dobbiaco (a 30 km international classic race) on our final day. It was 80 euro to enter. We had our own challenge - getting back to Dobbiaco from Lago di Braies before the coach left for the airport!

Sounds like a good trip. And not a mention of gluwhein?! (Ed.)

Tyneside Loipers on Facebook

Charlie has set up a group page on Facebook and so far there are 16 of us signed up as members of the group (less than a third of our club membership). We really need more of us to sign up and make this work – ideally we should have 90% or more of loiper members onboard. The Loipers Facebook page is a good opportunity to keep up with things that are going on in the club and anyone can post comments (let us know where you are skiing, where there is good snow, or when you are offering items of ski equipment for sale) and you can also post photos of your ski trips.

The Facebook group is not to everyone's taste and we have found it has some limitations, particularly with handling photos (unless you have mastered the difficult trick of posting multiple photos, it is best to post only one photo per event). Some have complained about the number of notification e-mails they are receiving (and yes you will definitely get more e-mails). You can probably set your Facebook page to minimise the number of e-mails but it is easy enough to delete each e-mail and take on board that there might be something worth checking on the loipers page.

You will first have to join Facebook (go to www.facebook.com and find the sign up page). You will need to enter a minimum of information about yourself (most of it can be ignored) and you will be invited to identify 'friends', people you know who are already on Facebook (you can ignore that too – or leave it to a later date). Once signed in with your own Facebook page, look for the search box at the top of the page, type in Tyneside Loipers and you will be invited to join the loipers group.

Another initiative from Charlie... We now have a (dwindling) number of calling cards which have been especially printed (both sides) in colour with some attractive photos and information on how to make contact with the club. These are useful if you are out skiing or come across someone who is interested in cross-country or roller skiing and you would like to tell them about Tyneside Loipers. Let me know if you would like some of these to keep in your pocket when you are next out on skis.

Club Skis

There is now a list of club equipment (skis, boots and poles) available on the club website www.tynesideloipers.org.uk/ We have a healthy stock of gear (most sizes) for hire at a small charge – the kit is looked after by Pat Lynch in Wylam. Contact Pat on 01661 853475 (or e-mail trishwylam@yahoo.co.uk)

Contact Pat also if you have equipment which can be donated or loaned to the club.

Late Stop Press... SnowSport England Kvitavtn Week – 4th to 11th April

Anyone interested in the coaching week at Kvitavtn in Norway, contact the organiser Wendy McRae (wendy.mcrae@tesco.net). This is an excellent week of coaching (cross country and telemark) from highly qualified and motivated instructors. Total cost for accommodation and coaching is about £600. Highly recommended by anyone who has been in previous years – speak to Alan or Alasdair if you want more info.