



TYNESIDE LOIPERS

The NorthEast's Specialist
Cross Country Ski club

Newsletter

January 2012



Website: www.tynesideloipers.org.uk

Contents

2	From the editor	5	Asnes Amundsen – the Dream Ski
2	Troll Loipe Trip	6	Ski the web
2	Loiper's Scotland weekend	10	What Loipers do when there's no snow
3	Trip to Dalseter, Norway	10	Tour de Mont Blanc
4	Hut to Hut in Dovrefjell	11	Walking around St Auban
4	Ski Touring in Greenland	12	A Visit To Samoa
5	SSE Course, Kvitavatn, Norway	14	Notes
5	ProActivity Ski Tours	16	Club events

Club Events - see pages 2, 3, 4 & 16

26th Jan, 6-8pm	Discount evening at Cotswold Outdoor
26th Jan, 8pm	Loipers Pub Evening, Union Rooms
18 – 25 Feb	Troll Loipe Tour, Rondane, Norway
24–27 Feb or 16–19 Mar	Loipers' Scotland weekend
18 – 25 Mar	Trip to Dalseter, Norway
25 Mar - 1 Apr 2012	Snowsport England Nordic Skills Week, Norway
Easter 2012	Loipers Trip to Norway – Hut to Hut in Dovrefjell
27 April – 11 May	Ski Touring in Greenland

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From the editor

Some Loipers have had a few days' local ski-ing in mid-December, others have enjoyed perfect conditions after massive snowfalls in Switzerland. Let's hope the eight Loipers currently on a telemark trip in the Alps are enjoying similar conditions there.

This month's newsletter invites you to join a range of trips, in Norway, Scotland and Greenland. We have technical advice from the experts and enthusiastic reports of holidays as far away as Samoa. Nearer home, don't forget the Discount Evening, followed by a pub meet in Newcastle on 26th February.

This season's ski trips

Troll Loipe, Rondane, Norway: 18 - 25 February

Graham Harkness and Heather Dickinson plan to ski the Troll Loipe from Rondane - Lillehammer, approx. 170 km, in 8 days. The trip is organised by Norske Bygdeopplevelser, who provide luggage transport, see:-

<http://www.norske-bygdeopplevelser.no/reiser//reiser-3-116.html>

The cost is NOK 8850, excluding flights. We would welcome any Loipers who would like to join the trip.

Heather Dickinson

Loipers' Scotland weekend: 24 – 27th Feb or 16th – 19th March

We are attempting to organise a long weekend in Scotland. As for last year, we will be staying at the Lagganlia Lodges, attached to the outdoor centre at Feshie Bridge. The lodges are well-situated, comfortable and well-equipped, see <http://www.lagganlialodges.com/pages/Lodges.html>.

Depending on snow conditions, this gives access to skiing on the Cairngorm ski area, high touring (the Monadliaths or the western Cairngorms), or lowland ski touring in the Rothiemurchas Forest. The non-skiing options involve walking (plenty of high hills and ancient forest) or hitting the outdoor shops in Aviemore.

I need to know very soon who is interested and will be asking for a £20 deposit to secure your booking.

If you would like to join us, please let me know your preferred date as soon as possible. Assuming sufficient interest, we will book for the 10-person lodge for 16-19 March. (The Feb date has availability only for the smaller 6-person lodge, so the March date is preferred).

Alan Mitcham

Trip to Dalseter, Norway: 18 – 25 March

The skiing

This area is an excellent mountain touring region with several good summits to reach. It also has an extensive network of generally well maintained and undulating loipe, mostly in mountainous terrain with some rattling good descents. There is ski hire at the hotel for both track and I think metal edged skis (best to check availability in advance)

Who's going

This trip is organised by a group of people who have all had links with Waymark Holidays. We'd welcome any members of the Tyneside Loipers who would like to come along. There are currently 5 of us booked. Most of the 5 will be concentrating on the mountain tours (approx. grade 3/4 and 4 old Waymark equivalent) but at least one will be doing some track skiing. Everyone books their own flights and makes reservations with the hotel direct. It is likely that the hotel will have availability even for very late bookings! For more details please contact John Mordue – a) 01629 733249 b) 077480 47780 – c) jmordu@yahoo.com

The Hotel - Dalseter Hoysfjellhotel

Located in Espedalen approx. 90 minutes by train and taxi north from Lillehammer.

Price offer: 18 - 25 March 2012, total of 7 nights:

NOK 5160 for 1 person in a single room facing south, incl. full board.

NOK 8920 for 2 persons in a double room facing south, incl. full board.

Contact details:

Grethe at Dalseter Høyfjellshotell, N - 2658 ESPEDALEN

Tel. +47 61 29 99 10 Fax: +47 61 29 99 41

Email: post@dalseter.no, Web: www.dalseter.no

Trains and buses from Gardemoen to Vinstra

12:05 train from Gardemoen gets to Lillehammer at 13:50.

14:05 train from Gardemoen gets to Lillehammer 15:58

14:45 train from Gardemoen gets to Vinstra at 17:21 (we're aiming for this one) on Sunday 18 March

14:20 coach from Gardemoen gets to Vinstra at 18:20

16:25 coach from Gardemoen gets to Vinstra at 19:38

The hotel provides a pick up taxi service from Vinstra station (costs approx. £25 to 30 per person per trip).

John Mordue

Loipers Trip to Norway – Hut to Hut in Dovrefjell, Easter 2012

A small band of Loipers will be hut-to-hut ski touring as usual in the 10 days leading up to Easter. We are planning to fly out to Oslo on 28th or 29th March, flying to Oslo via Amsterdam, and returning on Easter weekend. We will be skiing typically 15 to 25km per day and there will be opportunities to tackle several skiable summits including Snøheta, the highest peak outside the Jotunheim. The area of Dovrefjell is a National Park. It is very scenic and it is the home of several herds of musk ox. It has some very comfortable unstaffed huts, including Raubergshytta and Amotdalshytta, and one very new staffed hut Snøheim.

We will be travelling by train to Oppdal and then getting bus and taxi in to the trailhead near Gjora to ski in to our first hut. And at the end of the trip we will ski out to the railway at Kongsvold or Hjerkin. If you would like to join us, or just keen to know more, please contact Alan or Keith.

Alan Mitcham

Ski Touring in Greenland: 27 April – 11 May

A small group including John Dark and myself from Tyneside Loipers will be ski touring in Greenland between 27 April and 11 May. The trip is being organised by Tangent Expeditions who have been running trips in Greenland for many years. We will have ten days of ski touring in an area called Liverpool Land, starting at Constable Point (a remote airstrip accessed twice weekly from Iceland) and finishing at the Inuit settlement of Ittoqqortoormiit, a little north of 70 degree latitude.

We will have the benefit of a qualified guide and will be travelling with a dog team. This has the benefit of reducing the weight of equipment (camping gear, etc) that we will each have to carry. Part of the time though, we will be staying in primitive huts. (Unlike Norway, these really will be huts, rather than lodges!)

We are not restricted to doing exactly the same routes as the dogs. Much of the time we will be travelling down the eastern (seaward) side of Liverpool Land, experiencing various aspects of arctic travel, mountains, ice bergs, sea ice and wildlife (bears or bear tracks, arctic fox, arctic hare, birds, seals, musk ox). We will also be skiing some remote peaks in the centre of the region.

If you have the necessary sense of adventure and enough experience of Nordic touring (e.g. Norway) you would be very welcome to join us. Contact me on 01661 823960.

Alan Mitcham

Inghams discount on Lapland holidays

Inghams are giving a 10% discount for Ski Holidays to Lapland for skiers who are members of Ski Clubs. Contact Frank Cauley for further details.

Snowsport England On Snow Nordic Skills Week: 25 March - 1 April, Kvitavatn, Norway

A very popular course for cross-country skiers who wish to improve their skills – whether their interests are in touring, racing or freeheel downhill – and for alpine skiers who wish to convert to telemark skiing. Top class coaching, great countryside for XC skiing, excellent accommodation. Comments from the course last year: "superb instruction, the very best, delightful group of people passionate about their sport, inspirational, welcoming".

Coaching costs: £300. Accommodation costs: from £308 (in 4-person room without bathroom) - £680 (in single room with bathroom)

For further details, contact wendy@royds.org.uk.

ProActivity Ski Tours offers:

- Cross-country skiing holidays in Funäsdalen, Sweden, 11th -18th March or 25th March –1st April. Accommodation in Hotel (£1199/person) or Self-catering (£999/person).
- To facilitate your entry in the Vasaloppet, the biggest and longest cross-country skiing race in the world (90km on 27th February) or an alternative 45km race on 28th February. £650, 25th-28th February 2012.

For further details, see <http://skiing.proactivity.se>

Technical corner

Asnes Amundsen – the Dream Ski for Norway Touring?

Last year's trip to Norway gave difficult snow conditions – often quite wet and slushy. See Graham's article in the May newsletter 'Tafjordfjella – The Meltdown'!

The difficult conditions ignited the usual debate about the virtues of waxing and non-waxing skis. My choice, normally, would be non-waxing skis (with fishscale base) for the variable snow conditions in the UK and waxing skis for the (usually) colder conditions in Norway and elsewhere. I am certainly convinced that with cold/fresh snow, best performance is to be had from a waxing ski.

But now there is another choice...! In Norway last year we came across several people using 'Amundsen' skis made by the Norwegian company Asnes. These have a Nordic camber and can be waxed just as a conventional ski but they are also designed to be used with special 'shortie' climbing skins. The half skin ('shortie') can be used for moderate climbing, or when the ski wax is no longer achieving any grip on the snow (the skin covers no more than the length of the wax pocket, so it gives a lot more glide than a full length skin).

'Shortie' skins have been around for a few years but until now they have been fitted with a webbing strap which tightens around the front of the ski. This has a weakness

insofar as the webbing is subject to wear and has the potential for extra drag. In contrast, the 'shortie' skins for the Amundsen skis are fitted with a flush metal plate and a catch that fits into a notch in the ski. The design is very neat and was certainly popular with the Norwegians that we met.

Unfortunately none of the usual British outlets stock Asnes skis - one of them told me that Asnes is now out of business! I eventually found more information on the Asnes website <http://www.asnes.com/>

The website is in Norwegian – look for 'fjellski' and you will find the Amundsen skis sold at 3199NOK per pair (about £350). The skis come in various lengths and with a width of 67-57-62 mm. Interestingly there are a number of wider skis which have a similar fitting for the 'shortie' skins. I am tempted by the slightly wider Nansen skis which have a width of 76-56-66 mm at 3599NOK, though I won't be buying just yet as the skis are too expensive. You can get a better deal by going for a ski pack consisting of skis, bindings and boots. The Norwegian company Max Sport has the Amundsen skis, plus Rotterfella BC bindings and top quality leather boots made by Alfa, for a package price of 4499NOK. Go to <http://www.gmax.no> and look for 'vinter' and 'fjellskipakke'.

Alan Mitcham

Ski the web

If you are one of the many people who pack a laptop, netbook or smart phone when you go on a skiing holiday, you've probably already found some web sites that carry ski-related content. To add to your list, here are a few that I have found useful.

Skisporet

Skisporet ("The ski track") is a GPS-based system that shows the state of track-preparation at individual ski resorts within Norway. At present there are about 140 resorts in the system, and in each of them the track-cutting machines are fitted with GPS devices. Every 20 seconds the GPS sends a signal by satellite to a host computer. This tracks the geographical position of each machine and displays the machine's progress on a topographical map. From the map you can see which tracks have been prepared, and when they were last prepared.

Skisporet is presented only in Norwegian and if you are not familiar with that language the best way to start is to go to the homepage at www.skisporet.no. There you will see a map of the whole of Norway, with lots of little squares superimposed upon it. Each square represents a ski "resort" – Sjusjoen or Espedalen, for example.

The individual squares are in different colours, and these show when track-preparation was last carried out in the resort:

- Light-green means 0-3 hours ago ("Timer" is Norwegian for "hours")
- Orange means 3-6 hours ago
- Blue means 12-48 hours ago
- Red means 2-30 days ago ("Dager" is Norwegian for "days")
- Black means 30 or more days ago.

You can use the zoom tool for a closer view of the region that interests you. If you hover on any square, the name of the resort it represents will be displayed.

If you click on one of the squares you will then go to the page for that resort and can see the detailed situation, with all the tracks displayed on a map. The same colour-coding applies, so you can tell when each individual loipe was last cut.

You will also see, on the resort map, black and white circles. These represent the individual loipe-machines, and if you click on them they will give some details about the current position of the machines. I've just been looking at one of them and saw the following details:

- Oppdatert 6 timer siden - means updated 6 hours ago
- Status Stanset – means its status is stationery
- Hastighet 0 km/t - means that its speed is 0 km per hour
- Kompasskurs Ukjent – means that its compass course is unknown
- Hoyde over havet 871 meter - means that it is at 871 metres above sea-level
- Eies / driftes av Sjusjoen – means that it is owned or managed by Sjusjoen

Be aware that at some resorts the loipe machine may also be used for preparing downhill slopes or clearing car parks, so be ready for the occasional odd reading. Also, be aware that some resorts may sometimes use snowscooters to prepare the narrower tracks; the snowscooters might not be fitted with GPS.

Yr.no

www.yr.no is a very good weather-forecasting site. It's in Norwegian but there is a (partial) English version. For regions or specific locations you can see short and long-term forecasts. They are updated two or three times a day. They show temperature, wind-strength and direction and likely amounts of precipitation. (Precipitation is measured in millimetres of water, not snow. So if the forecast is for one millimetre of precipitation, you could get between one and three centimetres of snow.)

Swix wax wizard

Maintained by the Norwegian ski-wax manufacturer, this site helps you choose the appropriate wax-of-the-day for your skis. You can use it to choose grip wax or glide wax. First you need to specify what standard of skier you are: Pro, Sport or Recreational. Then you input details of air-temperature, humidity and snow-type.

For example, if you are a recreational skier and it's minus five Celsius and the snow is quite new, the wizard will tell you to use Blue-Extra grip wax.

Okay, most of us would have got there on our own, but the application becomes more helpful at warmer temperatures. To try this, choose a trickier temperature: plus one degree Celsius, say. If you specify "new snow" the wizard will recommend Red Special. But if you specify "old snow" it will recommend Red Silver. And if you then specify "corn snow" (wet snow that has gone through several freeze-thaw cycles) it will recommend Universal Klister. The wizard is hidden away in the "swixschool" website and the quickest way to get to it is simply to google "swix wax wizard".

Stuart Montgomery, XCuk

Dickinson family trip to Switzerland - Christmas 2011



Judi and Peter's holiday - Walking around St Auban - November 2011



Frank's trip to Samoa - September 2011



What Loipers do when there's no snow

Tour de Mont Blanc - September 2011

We walked the Tour de Mont Blanc the last two weeks in September; a classic walk and absolutely wonderful. We took the established anti-clockwise route from Les Houches, near Chamonix and allowed ourselves 15 days as we allowed for rest days and expected enforced rest days due to bad weather and refuges being closed. Our guides were the French maps, the Cicerone guide by Kev Reynolds and Jim Manthorpe's Tour de Mont Blanc. In planning we also made use of an excellent guide on the web www.walkingthetmb.com.

Weather-wise, we left in winter, walked through the summer and arrived back in the autumn. We were blessed, after the first day, with a gloriously clear window of sunny and settled weather – this brought out all the Mont Blanc baggers!

Technically the Tour is not difficult, no glacier crossings or scrambles; our main concern going that late was weather and closed refuges. The former was not a problem, luck more than judgment, but it was frustrating that some of the refuges were closed and made for a couple of very long days.

It is impossible to describe all that we did and saw in a short article, just that it was probably the best holiday I have ever had! The views of the glaciers at close quarters, the autumn colours on the mountainsides – ranging from straw, through gold, burnt orange to dark crimson with every hue in between, fabulous wooden mushroom sculptures in Switzerland, great places to stay and fabulous food!

We took three rest days, Courmayeur (for a “Gucci” night in a lovely hotel with the best breakfast buffet in the world!), Champex and Tre-le-Champ. We had ten days of actual walking the tour and also did a few of the “variantes” in the guide books. One variant had us walking past a sign that said “Dangerous” in three different languages – it was a while before we found out why!

We met an interesting range of people, including two very wet Belgians in our first refuge; one of whom sported a large white bandage on hand and wrist – I assumed he'd fallen and injured himself, but no – he'd cut his thumb while trying to slice some bread! We saw lots of French alpinists, Swiss cyclists, an Irish couple, Australians on tour, Oriental American ultra runners, Italians in retreat, and the ubiquitous (lost) Dutch, two French Canadians, but only one Brit.

We completed the tour just as it was getting dark on the first of October, it was almost head torch stuff after a very long descent (about 2000m) to Les Houches, but we were in time for dinner! This was a very long day starting from the refuge at Lac Blanc, an eight hour walk according to the book, but that's walking time, so you add the high route variante suggested by madame at the refuge, breaks for photo stops (lots of these), standing gawping at the spectacular views (even more of those), then stops for oranges and water and even a chocolate stop – then guiding the lost Dutch off the mountain – it was an eleven hour day. Worth every second.

Unfortunately I've run out of superlatives to describe this walk, every day was magical, even day one in the rain, sleet and snow was an adventure. After day 1 we had wall to wall sunshine except for some cloud on the Grand Col Ferret on the Italian/Swiss border.

At the end we had a couple of extra days so we did some of the little "extras" – a trip up the Aiguille de Midi to watch the dozens of climbers going up and coming down the summit of Mont Blanc, and paragliders galore. We also took the little train to see the Mer de Glace. Peter's camera battery died on the penultimate walking day, but one of the ever helpful Dutchmen had his battery charger so all was not lost – even managed photos of Judi hanging on to the ladders for dear life while bemused chamois looked on!

Judi Webb and Peter Sedgwick

Walking around St Auban - November 2011

We decided to take another walking holiday, where do you go in November? High Alps not good with lots of snow a probability, Madeira – good weather but didn't really appeal, we love the Mercantour area of the southern French Alps, so we started looking around there.

We found a place to stay near the Mercantour and close to the Verdun Gorge and there was plenty of walking at around 1500m – so less likely to be snow covered.

What a find! The apartment was an old hayloft and the owners are a Scottish couple who are big in the paragliding world – which is why they settled there. Apartment was just lovely and our hosts were more than perfect – a great welcome, wine and nibbles on our arrival and a great file full of walks we could do in the area.

Again we were blessed with great weather – despite it being the latter part of November, we walked in shirt sleeves – though we did have to remove some ice from the car first thing in the morning. There is a huge variety of walks in this area, you can do the gorges – we didn't as why go into a gorge when there is sun on the mountainsides? There are loads of low level walks direct from the door, and ridge walks galore and the big mountains of the Mercantour are just an hour's drive away.

We walked every day for a week, which delighted our hosts as they could see their work and preparation was being used as we took their ideas and walks from their file and their local knowledge. Our hosts were more than helpful as some of the walks were lineal so they picked us up or dropped us off as the route demanded. They also provided us with fresh bread as the local shop was 3kms away and was not open every day.

We had lovely walks – along ridges, through villages, in woods and forests and open heathland – and no one there! Saw hunters on a couple of days – but apart from that we were on our own. We had such fantastic views of the high mountains in the Mercantour Park as well as being able to see the sea – only an hour and a half from Nice.

This is definitely a place we will go back to – the apartment and our hosts were so lovely and so much more to explore than could be done in a week. The apartment can be found as Les Basses Beaumettes on the web.

Judi Webb and Peter Sedgwick

A Visit To Samoa

Why Samoa? – several years ago while visiting a bookshop in Surrey, I came across First Editions of Volumes 1 & 11 of ‘The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson’. What a life! – in his 45 years he helped build a lighthouse, travelled with his donkey in France, travelled widely in Europe, went across America by train, lived with miners in the Rockies, and then hired a Schooner in San Francisco to cruise the Pacific Islands (and found time to write some books!). He suffered from a form of Bronchitis and was always looking for somewhere to live with clean air, unlike that of most of Europe during the Industrial Revolution. He eventually settled in Upolu, the most populated island of Independent Samoa, where he spent the last four years of his life until he died in December 1894. He was much revered by the Samoans for his involvement in their society so they gave him the name of ‘Tusitala’ which means ‘Teller of Tales’.

Early last year I was invited to visit friends in Sydney later in the year and thought this would be the ideal opportunity to renew my interest in RLS and visit Samoa. So in September I took a flight from Sydney at 2115 which arrived in Apia at 0600 on the same day! Coming back I left Apia at 0700 and arrived in Sydney at 0900 the next day. This situation was remedied at midnight on December 29th when Samoan clocks were put forward 24 hrs to erase December 30th. This meant that Samoa moved its time zone to the western side of the International Date Line so that it is now only 5hrs ahead of Sydney and 3 ahead of Auckland.

Geographically there are 13 tropical islands between 13 & 15 degrees south and 169 & 173 degrees west, which can be classed as the Samoan Islands. All the islands are volcanic in origin and were formed by merging of the Pacific and Indo Australian Plates The two main islands for Samoa are Savi’i and Upolu where the capital, Apia is situated, and as recently as 1991 there was a major eruption on Savi’i.

The average year round temperature in Samoa is 28°C during the day and 23°C at night with quite high humidity. Also noticeable on the shuttle bus to the hotel, were white arrows painted on either side of the road. Later I was told that these were to make sure that drivers knew which side of the road to drive on after the changeover from driving on the right to the left which took place in September 2009. The right side driving was a legacy of the Germans who ran the then Western Samoa from 1899 to 1914 when New Zealand took over the Islands.

After breakfast and the forecast for being a fine dry day, I visited the RLS house at Valima – on my way there, I did wonder why someone from Edinburgh with a chest problem would want to live in such a humid place. This question was soon answered with the position of the house which was 600ft above sea level – at this height the humidity was noticeably much lower. The house was designed by RLS and his wife, Fanny, and built to the highest standards, with most of the furnishings being brought

from the Stevenson house at Heriot Row in Edinburgh. The property is maintained by the RLS foundation which is based in Arizona.

After my visit to the house, I climbed the 700ft to the grave of RLS near the top of Mt Ve'a – at 1360ft it has expansive views over Apia and the harbour. The grave itself is a concrete structure about 4 ft high and it is said that RLS requested to be buried with his boots on and pointing toward Edinburgh – a quick check indicated that the direction appeared to be correct!

A day tour and a half day tour around the eastern end of Upolu soon revealed that much of the forests on the lower slopes have been destroyed by logging and agriculture, but huge Banyan trees are still common standing like sentinels draped in their aerial roots. However views of the hills indicated the lush covering of forests all the way to the tops. There are also the spectacular waterfalls at Tiāvi and Fālef and iconic beaches such as the ones at Tafatafa and Lotofaga within the coral reef which surrounds most of Upolu. Other impressive natural features due to the volcanic nature of the island are the Piula Cave Pool and the Sua Trench. I had not done any snorkelling for many years but the conditions in Samoa are just about as good as they can get – I did much more snorkelling than swimming.

Samoan Society is very much based on fa'a Samoa, 'The Samoan Way', which very much involves the family and the extended family. An instance of this is that when a child is born the after birth, the fanua, is buried near the place of birth in order to link the child with the place and the community. At the other end of life, the tradition is that a person will be buried at the place of their birth. This was very evident on my Island tours where you could see the graves adjacent the family Fale. A Fale is a traditional Samoan 'house' which consists of an oblong building with rounded ends and peripheral posts supporting the roof made of thatched palm fronds. There are no rooms and the open sides enable cool breezes to pass through, but woven coconut leaf blinds can be unfurled to keep the rain out. There is very little furniture and the occupants sleep on mats which can be rolled up to make more room during the day. There are separate small Fales for cooking and bathing.

Early settlers in Samoa are thought to have arrived from New Caledonia some 3000 years ago but they had no knowledge of the world beyond the Pacific, it was their belief that the universe was a dome which ended at the horizon. Contacts with Europeans began with the Dutchman Roggeveen (1722) then the Frenchmen de Bouganville (1768) and La Perouse (1787). Also in 1791 the British ship the Pandora called in while searching for the mutineers from the Bounty. The first Europeans to settle in Samoa were escaped convicts from Australia and sailors who had jumped ship from whaling vessels which had called in for supplies. Several took Samoan wives and some common Samoan surnames of today such as Coffin, Jennings, Slade and Stowers derive directly from these marriages. In 1830 two representatives of the London Missionary Society, John Williams and Charles Barff landed in Savi'i and thus began the conversion of the Samoans to Christianity. By the 1880's it became the strongest social and cultural force in Samoa – this was because it supported the already deep rooted culture of the family.

Today it is still very obvious the hold Christianity has on the community – I have never seen so many churches and so many different branches of the religion. From the Assembly of God to the Wesleyans I counted at least another 15 all within a 10 mile radius of Apia. The whole place closes down on a Sunday with most people attending a church service. The staff at my hotel told me that I must go to a service and listen to the singing. This I did and was amazed to find that there was no separate choir, the congregation was the choir. They sang some quite complicated songs all in perfect tune and I found it all quite uplifting. Songs play an important part in Samoan storytelling and this is brought out in the ‘FiaFia’ night most of the hotels have once a week. The FiaFia replicates the inter-village celebrations of traditional Samoan song and dance and is carried out by men and women in elaborate costumes. I was told that the hotel staff themselves along with local singing groups, are the main performers – they do not have to learn anything as all the words, melodies and dances are learned as they grow up. The evening concluded with a fire dance where dancers toss, catch and twirl flaming batons tracing fiery patterns in the darkness to the beat of a slit drum, providing a fitting end to a far too short holiday. I hope to go there again some day and allow myself much more time to enjoy what Samoa has to offer.

Frank Cauley

Notes

For Sale

Several items are for sale in return for a small donation to club funds.

Greg Buick has donated:

- a pair of Black Diamond telemark skis, with bindings, 175cm, with good edges and a reasonable sidecut (ideal for anyone starting out telemark skiing).
- a pair of Asnes MT2 skis (mountain touring) complete with bindings. These are 200 cm long metal-edged skis with a waxing base.

Peter Quigley has donated some Rotterfella Riva-3 bindings. The bindings need to be fitted by the purchaser (or done at minimal cost at LD Mountain Centre).

Contact Alan Mitcham – 01661 823960

Age discrimination in Snowsport England Insurance Scheme

In our last newsletter, we announced that Snowsport England had launched their own insurance scheme. Unfortunately, this scheme does not accept anyone over 65.

Heather Dickinson

Snow in the UK – not much yet!

Two years ago a group of us were skiing at a remote lodge in the Selkirk Mountains and the Canadian ski guide was grumbling about the lack of snow (actually it was pretty good but just not as good as they are normally used to). We were enjoying a good winter in the UK and it prompted that comment that we had got all their snow. He went on to postulate his theory that there was only a finite amount of snowfall in the world – either they get it in N America or we get it in Europe!

As far as I know, there is no shortage of snow this winter in N America or in the Alps. Those of us going on the Loipers trip to Les Contamines next week can't wait to plant skis on all that new snow that has come since late December.

The theory about there being a finite amount of snow in the world is probably a bit far-fetched. But there are always winners and losers. If you want to enjoy the snow in the northeast, you have to be quick. That promising start before Christmas came to a quick end. This year's best snowfall seems to have been at Weardale Ski Club – Swinhope Moor (they had an amazing 7 days of operation).

So far this year, Norway has not had very much snowfall either (not in the Oslo area at least). But it shouldn't be a problem further north where the Loipers will be skiing later in the season. There is plenty of time yet!

Alan Mitcham

Winter Tyres

After the experience of last year, I was determined not to be caught out by road conditions that made many of our country lanes inaccessible due to heavy snows. More to the point, I was determined to maximise my chances of getting access into the Cheviots and Pennines as soon as it snowed. I clearly needed a set of winter tyres.

I was told that the best time to buy was in August or September. So I bought a set of winter tyres for £55 each (including fitting) and they were duly fitted in November when we had our first bout of really cold weather. Sadly I haven't yet had the opportunity of putting them to the test!

Winter tyres are made from a much softer grade of rubber that improves tyre performance at low temperatures and gives better grip in ice and snow. However they do not perform well in summer conditions so you need to keep two sets of tyres and swap over in the spring and autumn (my tyre fitter charges just £10 to do a complete swap of the tyres at each changeover). Arguably it is better to get hold of an extra set of wheels to save that twice yearly visit to the tyre fitter – try getting some from a scrap yard.

In many European countries it is compulsory to keep two sets of tyres, one for winter and one for summer. Here in the UK, the need is less obvious (maybe this year I could have done without). Nonetheless I will be ready for the next snow!

Alan Mitcham

Club equipment for hire

The club has a stock of gear (skis, boots and poles of various sizes) which can be hired by members at a charge of £10 per weekend.

Contact Pat Lynch on 01661 853475 or e-mail: trishwylam@yahoo.co.uk

Club events

Discount evening at Cotswold Outdoor, Thursday 26th January, 6-8pm

Tyneside Loipers are invited to a special 20% discount evening at Cotswold Outdoor (Northumberland Street, Newcastle) from 6 to 8pm on Thursday 26th Jan. The discount is available to Tyneside Loipers members only and applies to everything in the shop (walking, climbing, camping and all outdoor gear). Remember to take your membership card as the offer is taking place during normal shopping hours.

Loipers Pub Evening, Union Rooms , Thursday 26th January, 8pm

The discount evening will be followed by a Loipers Pub Evening. Meet as usual in the upstairs bar of the Union Rooms from 8pm onwards (Westgate Road, opposite the Central Station). Contact Keith Walker - 07969 021680 if you are having trouble finding us.