



TYNESIDE LOIPERS

The NorthEast's Specialist
Cross Country Ski club

Newsletter

May 2012



Website: www.tynesideloipers.org.uk

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Club Events - see page 14

17 th May	End of season meet
27 th May	North West Telemark Festival
19 th June	Bird-watching walk
15 th July	Bike ride, Durham, Consett or Hexhamshire
25 th August	Rollerski race, Hetton Lyons
8 th September	Bike ride round Alston
17 th September	Pub meet

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From the editor

This month's newsletter gives enthusiastic reports of Loipers ski-ing in Norway, Switzerland, the US, Finland, Italy, Austria and Derbyshire. Unfortunately, in contrast to last year, Loipers have not been ski-ing in the north-east this year.

Additionally, we have expert advice on buying touring boots.

Nearer home, don't forget the end-of-season meet in Ponteland on 17th May.

This season's ski trips

Tyneside Loipers Telemark Week – Les Contamines, January 2012

Eight of us signed up with the Telemark Ski Company (John Eames and Bonny Masson) for a week of tuition based in this hidden gem in the French Alps. We stayed at La Chemenaz, a 3-star hotel, from where it was just a 5-minute walk to the main gondola which took us up onto the slopes each morning. The hotel was very comfortable and the food was excellent. We were part of a larger group (18 of us in La Chemenaz, plus four more in a cheaper 2-star hotel in the town) from as far afield as the UK, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, and Finland.

The Telemark Ski Co have been running week-long telemark coaching courses for many years and recently began teaching alpine and telemark skiers in mixed groups. Three of our group (Penny, Helen and Deb) were using alpine equipment whilst the rest of us were telemarking. There were two courses on offer – either ‘off-piste performance’ or ‘all-terrain’.

As the name suggests, the off-piste course concentrated on the technique for skiing un-pisted terrain (anything from deep powder to cruddy old snow). I was in a group of seven (along with Tim Owen and his wife Penny and sister Deb) taught by John Eames. With huge snowfalls over the New Year and continuing cold weather, conditions on piste were excellent. However, with no fresh snow over the previous week and a half, conditions off-piste were quite variable. John's instruction was excellent (as ever) and on most days we started on-piste, concentrating on specific elements of ski technique, and then attempted to practise the same technique off-piste. On two occasions we did a long half-day tour starting with a big traverse away from the uppermost ski lift and ending at the bottom of the ski area. The snow conditions were often quite difficult and were described by John as ‘challenging’. On one day we worked on our technique for skiing bumps (moguls). At the end of the week we had a massive dump of fresh snow (a metre at least). Our group would have benefitted greatly from that fresh snow earlier in the week.

Tim Elliott and Greg Buick were in a small ‘all-terrain’ group taught by Kate (a charming young lady who does occasional teaching weeks for John and Bonny). Much as I enjoyed the tuition from John, I would have been happier still to have been taught by the charming Kate! The ‘all-terrain’ coaching was mainly on-piste but with more focus on basic technique (alpine as well as telemark).

Helen Elliott and Ben Haywood Smith were both given one-to-one tuition by Bonny. Helen had a great week and was delighted with her progress but Ben was a little frustrated. By the end of the week he was still being encouraged to concentrate on alpine technique – “you cannot do telemark turns until you have perfected your parallels”. I really sympathise with Ben and I cannot fathom why Bonny couldn’t have introduced some telemark technique by the end of the week! I had been meaning (and even promised to Ben) that I would do an introductory session of telemark skiing at the end of the week but then we had a massive dump of new snow and the temptation of whooping up the fresh powder was just too great.

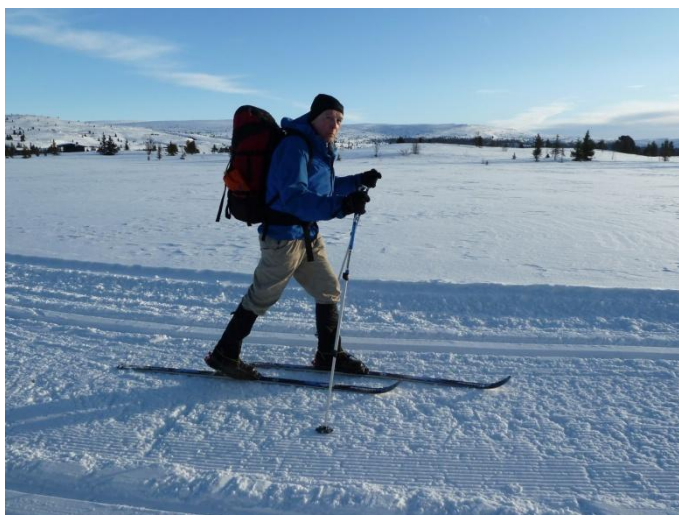
Alan Mitcham (alanmitcham@metronet.co.uk)

Footnote: For anyone wanting to learn to telemark, the Telemark Ski Company is not the only option. A good alternative is to go on the Snowsport England week in Kvitavatn, Norway (usually held around Easter). It is a fun week and is reasonably priced. There is a choice of track skiing or telemarking, with formal lessons in the morning and various skiing activities and tours in the afternoon (with the opportunity to switch from telemark to track skiing or vice versa). The telemark instructors, Andy Stewart and Ian Johnson are both very good (Ian also sometimes helps out John and Bonny when they are short of instructors). Look out for the next course around Easter 2013, or ask me for more details. [Ed. You can get coaching from Andy and Ian next month in Manchester - see Club Events below]

Troll Loipe, Rondane, Norway: February 2012

Heather and I had a few time constraints which made February the preferred month for us. As there were only the two of us, we opted for an easier route with baggage transport and comfortable accommodation.

The route was 170km from Hovringen in the north heading south to finish in Lillehammer. We were transported from Oslo to Hovringen by bus. The first day, a 30km run across mixed terrain, was pleasant but I was not so well with some bug that was going round in England. The next day was tougher and all I wanted to do was sleep so we elected to go with the baggage. Heather took a day tour while I slept and fortunately I was much better the following day. Day 3 was fine but the forecast breeze turned out to be a freezing gale. We set off but, after a few hours skiing, we reached a decision point where we would have needed to head off across unmarked country. Even reading the GPS was a major issue, my expensive Gortex cap went flying away, our hands were beginning to freeze and Heather was feeling the effects of the bug. So we turned back and shamefully ended up as baggage for a second day. After that all went well: the weather was cold and the snow was wonderful. Our next stop was



a DNT hut and then two more days of excellent weather and good skiing down to Lillehammer, mainly on prepared tracks.

I would consider a return trip to a slightly more mountainous part, but using DNT huts. On our tour the trail stuck to level ground and the distances were too long (30 - 40 km/day) to allow deviations over hills. A more diverse route could be followed with shorter distances between stops. A check would also need to be made on lake crossings as we encountered a closed trail because of a large melt water lake on top of the main body of ice on the frozen lake. The melt water had itself had frozen over but not sufficiently to safely hold the weight of a skier.

The safety gear we carried was a bit over the top as there is good telephone coverage in Rondane and you are never too far from some sort of shelter even if you were forced to break in. The tour company recommended metal edged track skis and, while our heavier leather boots and touring skis were OK, we could have moved a lot faster with lighter equipment. I learned a lot, improved my technique and, once over the initial setback, had a good few days of skiing. The weather was kind, snow and accommodation excellent.

We now have a few ideas for a trip next year which would include touring DNT huts but not moving every day, also dodging into comfortable hotels for a few nights. So if you have any interest in such a concept for next season, let me know, the sooner the better.

Graham Harkness

[Ed. Venabu Fjellhotell (<http://www.venabu.no>) was an excellent centre, with the opportunity to go up a few mountains nearby. Would be good for a single-centre holiday.]

Derbyshire, Dolomites and Norway – some of my favourite locations

This winter I've skied in Derbyshire, Co Durham, the Dolomites and Norway. This article aims to provide brief information about some great places to ski.

1. **Derbyshire** – I find that Axe Edge Moor near the Cat and Fiddle (Buxton) produces better than average skiing conditions with skiing this season from December through to April! A local isolated shop has a webcam which gives a good idea of what conditions are like. See: <http://www.flashbarstores.co.uk/>

On 5th April this year there was extensive snow and I for one was out skiing on it covering 8 or 9 miles in all. .

2. **Obertilliach and Dobbiaco (Austria/Italy)** – I flew to Innsbruck with BA and for about 25 Euro I got to Obertilliach (via Dobbiaco and Silian) by train and bus. Obertilliach has some good hilly loipe which can keep you occupied for a few days. It's a 'proper' village off the beaten track, with quite reasonable prices for accommodation etc. Alan Eason (Snowsport England) is based there during the winter. In just a short session I felt my skating improved by 30% thanks to Alan's input. info@totallynordic.co.uk

After 5 days in Obertilliach I went on to Dobbiaco and stayed for 3 nights at the youth hostel – its actually the old Grand Hotel. At 38 Euros half board for a large single room (the price outside the main Christmas holiday) this was great value. There's lots of good loipe in this area. For example, you can get a bus and taxi up to Platzwiesen (2000 metres) and ski down a sort of landrover track and then on loipe all the way back to Dobbiaco (1200 metres). Fischleintal is another very spectacular destination with a rattling good descent on loipe. Note – loipe passes need to be purchased or the 'loipe police' will almost certainly fine you!

3. **Mosstrond (Norway)** – Mosstrond (930 metres) is on an island on Mosvatn (a lake 40 K long just above Rjukan in Telemark). It's a small comfortable lodge run by Philip and Maiken Yatman philip@mosstrondturisthytte.com. They used to be at Kvitavatn quite some time ago and more recently at Sundet – both former Waymark destinations.

The range of mountain touring in this area is superb. Each day starts with 1.5 km across the lake to the mainland (unless you book transport on the snowscooter and trailer!). Possible day tours include Laksanutane (1353 metres) and Magnusgronutane (1392 metres). The lake is edged with woodland so there is some very nice skiing down through the trees when conditions are right.

4. **Dalseter (Espedalen, Norway)** – Dalseter Hoysfjellhotel is about 4 hours north of Oslo Gardemoen airport. It's a regular destination for XCUK parties www.xcuk.com/ - providing a very good range of both track and mountain touring. The Peer Gynt Loipe starts here and after 20 km you reach Fefor. Fefor Hoysfjellhotel is the hotel where Scott went to test out the tractors in 1911. There are original photos of Scott and Nansen in the hotel.

Dalseter Hoysfjellhotel is very much a hotel which caters for skiers. You won't go hungry there or experience lack of carbohydrates! Some great mountain tours start from the hotel. Peaks include Ruten (1516), Graurdhoa (1383) and many more – more than enough for at least a week.

Please contact jmordu@yahoo.com if you'd like any more information.

John Mordue

Loipers Trip to Dovrefjell (Norway) – it snowed in bucket loads!

A memorable trip – but not quite what we planned! As we headed north on the train (30th March) there was a disconcerting lack of snow but by the time we got to Oppdal and picked up our taxi it was snowing steadily. Once off the main road and heading into Dovrefjell, it had obviously been snowing for several hours. It was 2.15 in the afternoon with 16 km to ski to our first hut, Raubergshytta. And we never made it!

Struggling to make progress in the deep new snow, we quickly realised we couldn't get there before nightfall. So we backtracked and skied 9km along the road to a different hut, Vangshaugen.

There were six of us – Charlie, Keith, Greg, John, Alan and Barbara. Barbara was new to Tyneside Loipers and she proved to be very popular when she unpacked her rucksack and produced a 3 litre box of red wine! Now we knew why her rucksack

(which was actually the smallest) was so heavy – but not for long (the wine was quickly consumed during our 3 nights in Vangshaugen).

Day 2. We still had dreams of getting back on track and making it to Raubergshytta (about 15 km from Vangshaugen over hilly terrain). With the snowfall somewhat abated, we went out to recce the start of the route. We skied around the edge of the lake and up a significant side valley past a thundering waterfall and past some interesting snow formations and cornices. We got up to about 1100m (350m above the hut) and huddled inside the group shelter for our lunch. Moving on to Raubergshytta would certainly have been feasible with some settled weather, but that evening it started snowing heavily.

Day 3 was a proper blizzard. We stayed in the hut all day and played games – contract whist and mountain hut scrabble and a version of trivial pursuits (guess the question, instead of guess the answer) which some of us enjoyed and some didn't! By late afternoon, Charlie produced a packet of mash and pondered 'how can I make this stuff more interesting?' (Potato mash is not proper food, is it?) Spiced up with one or two extra ingredients and made into potato croquets, it kept Charlie happy (and the rest of us too)!

Day 4. It was still snowing but we had an occasional sunny interval and we decided to move on to Gamelsetra – about 10km of skiing along the road (mainly downhill) then 4km on an untracked uphill trail through the forest. That last 4km took us nearly 4 hours with each of us taking our turn at breaking trail in deep, deep new snow (apparently one of the snowmobiles had tried to get through and couldn't manage it).



Keith had stayed in Gamelsetra in 2009 (and Barbara in 2005). It consists of a collection of wooden buildings (an old farmstead) in a traditional style. The main building was completely covered by a snowdrift with just the chimney showing. We started digging away the snow where Keith had remembered the door to be – 20 minutes later we had found the door and after a further 10 minutes we had moved enough snow to get in. Keith lit the stove – he is the fire lighting expert! And then someone else investigating the adjacent building suggested we move there. All that effort wasted!

It was comfy enough and we stayed there for two nights but the hut had a distinct disadvantage – it was made for dwarfs! We kept banging our heads on the low lintel between the sleeping and living sections of the hut. Ouch!

Day 5. We were convinced that the snow would start to consolidate and the skiing would become easier. We aimed to do a major recce up to a lake at about 1300m, beyond which was a very small hut Loennechenbua (not big enough for us to stay, but



had the huts to ourselves).

Day 7 was rather dull and there was a cold wind. We went for a short day tour and we had a wonderful downhill run back to the hut from our high point of about 1700m (the hut was at 1300m).

Day 8 brought wonderful blue skies and we followed the marked route over to Reinheim. The route had been changed since our last visit to Dovrefjell and it took us up to about 1720m on the shoulder of Snohetta, which is the highest mountain in Norway outside of the Jotunheim. We could clearly see the summit mast and we gazed at the glacier which we skied down in 2008 – a fairly serious descent!

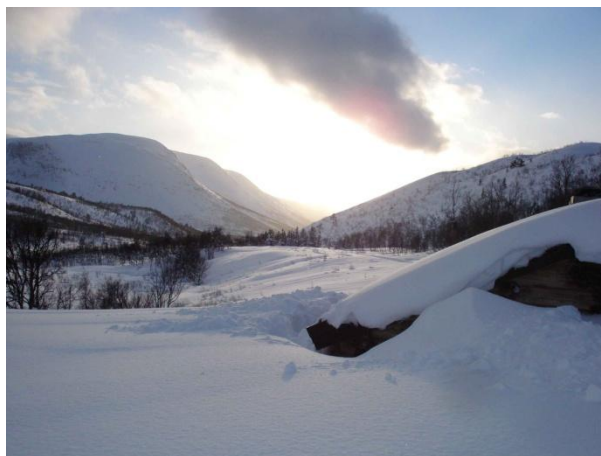
We arrived at Reinheim in time for lunch after a great descent from the col in perfect snow.



After lunch, we went out for an afternoon tour and bagged three summits between 1800 and 1900m – an excellent afternoon with superb skiing, especially on the descent which was a wide open bowl leading back down to the valley. Some of us managed linked telemark turns and all of us had wide grins on our faces!

an interesting port of call en route to Amotdalshytta). It was a successful recce and we got to the lake and back to Gamelsetra by early evening.

Day 6. We finally made it to Amotdalshytta where we were back on track on our originally planned route! Amotdalshytta is a very fine hut and we shared it with a group of Dutch people and a Norwegian couple, plus two young guys from Italy (up until then we had



had the huts to ourselves).

Day 9. In the morning we revisited the wide open bowl and tried to repeat the great descent but the snow conditions were not as good (it was colder and the

Alan Mitcham

Ski with the bison in Yellowstone

Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming, founded in 1872, is credited with being the first National Park in the world. It is on a large plateau above 7,000 ft and is full of geothermal features, geysers, mud pools, hot springs etc. The park which is 50 miles by 60 miles does have roads running through it but these roads are not cleared in the winter, except for a corridor in the North of the Park. However there is winter accommodation at its most famous attraction - Old Faithful Geyser which erupts every 90 minutes or so.

In the last week of February seven of us visited the park. We flew via Dallas to Jackson Hole and then the next day took a bus up to the park entrance. There we transferred to a "Bombardier Snow Cat", an oversnow vehicle that some who have been to Norway may be familiar with.



These vehicles travel along the uncleared roads. We were given earplugs and set off for the three hour trip along the road to Old Faithful Snow Lodge.

We did not stay in the lodge but in two person cabins which were about 100 yards from the main lodge. The cabins were cheaper and more spacious than the main lodge and had hot showers. We ate in the main lodge: breakfast was a buffet with just about anything you might want from scrambled eggs to muesli and blueberry muffins.

All the others had brought their own skis, metal edged cross-country skis as would be used in Norway. Having seen that touring skis could be hired at the lodge I had decided to rent skis, as it was only \$100 for a complete package for six days.

However the equipment was not really what might be called touring equipment. The boots were no different from those used for track skiing and I was advised not to take metal edged skis but to take the lighter skis. This was what I did and I have to admit that it was more than adequate – the light weight was worthwhile.

It had been snowing on the way in; in fact it snowed every day we were there.

Usually there was sunshine and generally little wind. The weather did not affect us going out each day – the main impact was that we continually had to break trail, but there were seven of us so that was not really a problem. With one exception the days were not long days. Most days we skied little more than 10 miles with very little elevation gain. There are longer trails but as we were always having to break trail we did not attempt them.

The first day was an easy 9 mile loop to see the Lone Star Geyser and get ourselves acclimatised after all the travelling.

The next day we went up to Mallard Lake with the intention of extending our trip to the longer and more difficult Mallard Creek trail. However we had to break trail all the way and lost the trail on one occasion and wasted half an hour. The terrain was generally straightforward with an altitude gain of only 760 ft. We had lunch at the lake then continued on the next part. However we had difficulty following the trail and after a while decided that, with all the trail breaking and trail finding, we did not

have enough time, so we turned back. As we did so, an American couple turned up. He had done the trail a few times before and they decided to carry on. However we met them later and found that they had subsequently turned back and written a letter to the park authorities pointing out that the trail was inadequately marked.

Two of the trails involve taking a short “bombardier” trip, doing a short tour and then skiing back to the lodge. So the next day we had a short trip in a “bombardier” to the



end of the road where there was a bridge for us to ski across before proceeding on our ski trip. When we got there the bridge was blocked by a herd of bison. We had to move them on, which we did with the help of the driver. We were told that banging our ski poles together was the best method. After a short while we managed to get across the

bridge and proceeded with our tour up to the frozen Fairy Falls.

On the way back the bison were again by the bridge and we again had to carefully clear ourselves a pathway. Later we came across more bison making their way onto and along the trail for a short while. This time we had to concede precedence to them. The bison like this particular area and the trails as it makes life easier for them. They don't need to walk through deep snow and all the thermal activity means that in many places the ground is almost clear of snow and therefore grazing is a lot easier.

Next day we skied to Majestic Falls. Then we had another short “bombardier” ride almost up to the Continental Divide. We skied up to the divide at 8,590ft, then had a very nice ski down beside the Spring Creek (because of the thermal activity the rivers do not freeze over in the winter). On this part we passed a lady of 82 who was enjoying her ski along the riverside.



On the final day we decided to try the Mallard Creek route that we had not managed to complete on the second day. It was no problem to get to where we had been before and we proceeded to the highest point on the trail for an early lunch. After lunch things became more difficult. The trail was difficult to follow and we had to navigate by map and GPS. Eventually we picked up the trail again, only to lose it once again by going down the wrong gully. We wasted an hour getting ourselves out of it – including having to take our skis off and walk along a stream bed for a short while. However we were lucky, as when we managed to climb out of it we

immediately hit the trail. But progress during the day had been slow both because of difficulty finding the trail and the deep snow. It was now getting late and we still had about 5 miles of skiing still to do. Although the trail was now gently downhill, the deep snow meant that progress was still slow. Eventually we came out onto the trail that we already knew. Progress now became quicker, although the wind was filling in the trail so we still had to work. The trail ran parallel to the road but not generally in sight of it. At one point however it did come within 50 yards of the road. Again our luck was in, as at this point a passing “bombardier” offered us a lift back to the lodge. So we all piled in with our skis and fifteen minutes later we were back at the lodge, just before it got dark. Still it would have been nice to have finished the ski even if it had been in the dark.



If this last paragraph makes it sound difficult – then that’s wrong. Not many people do that particular route. Most of the skiing is relatively easy. I was not using stiff boots or metal edged skis and I did not feel that I needed them. Most of the trails are no more difficult than loipe in Norway. And if your spouse does not ski then there are snowshoes.

It is a trip thoroughly to be recommended, although a long way to go for just one week. We spent two weeks in Wyoming. The second week we spent 4 nights in a Yurt in the Grand Tetons Mountains and had really beautiful weather and skiing on telemark skis. Two very contrasting trips but both turned out to be wonderful.

For ski trails in the Old Faithful area see

<http://www.yellowstonenationalparklodges.com/old-faithful-area-ski-trails-1692.html>

Greg Buick

Another Visit to Finland

Yes – for the fifth consecutive year and I have already booked to go to Yllas next year. As usual the conditions were just about perfect with temperatures down to -20°C



at night and around -7°C during the day. Also any snowfall was during the night so the track machines had the loipe well prepared by the time we went out in the morning. The bonus this year was the availability of the Northern Lights – on two consecutive evenings there were really very good displays – not quite the full monty but good enough to light up the sky.

Frank Cauley

Another Engadin ski marathon

After a break of four years, I went back to the Engadin Ski Marathon (42 km), largely due to an invitation to share a flat in Maloja, the starting-point, during the week leading up to the marathon. The Frauenlauf (ladies' race, 17 km) is a week before the marathon, so I did that too.

It was a warm week, which did not augur well for the marathon but, as usual, the men and boys of Engadin did superb work overnight, transforming a piste that was hard and icy on the lakes and bare and balding in the woods into a great track.

One big difference between the 2012 race and previous Engadin marathons was that there were many more Brits in the 2012 race e.g. 131 this year (36 women of whom I was 25th, 95 men) compared to 69 (15 women and 54 men) in 2008. However, there were only five British women in the Frauenlauf (of whom I was second).



Heather Dickinson

Technical corner

Marmalade on your fish and chips

I was recently in Norway for XCuk, skiing off-track in Hovringen with a British group. One of our recurring topics of conversation was the difficulty of buying good off-track boots in the UK. Several of us owned leather boots in the 75mm Nordic Norm style, all needing replaced, and we were finding it impossible to get such boots from UK shops. The message from the shops was: plastic yes; leather no. One of our group members had even been told, in a shop in Scotland, that leather ski boots are now almost impossible to get hold of because BSE (Mad Cow Disease) has caused such major disruption to the leather industry.

Perhaps that rather fanciful tale had influenced the group from Edinburgh that we met at Peer Gynt Hut, setting off in plastic boots for a tour in Rondane. I ski a lot in Norway and (almost) the only people I ever see using plastic boots are from the UK. Mad Cows notwithstanding, the Norwegians seem to manage to get hold of leather.

So after the Hovringen trip, I checked out three shops: a G-Sport (pronounced Gay Sport) branch in Ringebu and the G-Sport and Sport-1 branches in the Strandtorget shopping centre in Lillehammer (G-Sport downstairs and Sport 1 upstairs). All the other ski shops in Lillehammer are branches of G-Sport or Sport-1, so I didn't visit them. In all of the shops I visited, I was offered a choice of leather touring boots.

G-Sport (Ringebu) showed me three different weights of leather boot. They could be bought separately or packaged together with skis and bindings. They were pushing a package with Madshus Voss skis (3/4 metal edges and a profile of 60-50-55), Rottefella Auto NNN BC bindings, and Alfa Synnfjell BC leather boots - all for NOK 1999. You would have paid twice that amount if you had bought the three items individually: boots NOK 1399; skis NOK 1899; bindings NOK 749.

You could upgrade the boots to heavier Alfa boots, either Kikut or Skarvet. For a lot more money, you could substitute Fischer E109 skis for the Madshus Voss ones.

However, all these boots have NNN Back Country (BC) bindings, rather than the 75mm ones that my group wanted. The shop stocked only one type of 75mm boot in leather. Manufactured by Varg and called (I think) the Skavl, it sold for NOK 3299. The sales assistant said he thought it was too stiff for touring and was better as a telemark boot – even though it was cut quite low, just above the ankle.

Before leaving I asked him if he had any plastic boots for touring and his look suggested it was a silly question – like the look you'd get if you asked to have marmalade on your fish and chips. We keep plastic boots for skiing on the piste, he said. For touring we use only leather. Leather gets better with age; it gets more comfortable.

G-Sport (Lillehammer) had the same Madshus Voss package as their Ringebu branch, with options to upgrade to the heavier Alfa Kikut or Skarvet boots (they quoted package prices of NOK 2499 or NOK 2999 respectively). The prices for these boots, if bought separately, were NOK 1999 and NOK 2499 respectively. They had no 75mm boots in stock.

G-Sport maintains a website, at (www.gmax.no) which sometimes undercuts shop prices. But the website is in Norwegian only and I understand it accepts orders only from mainland Norway.

Sport-1 (Lillehammer). When I asked if they had 75mm leather boots in stock I was told no, but they could get them for me from another branch within 4 days. They said that leather NNN BC boots have become the off-track norm and few people now ask for 75mm boots. How about plastic? I asked. The reply was: No. We only use plastic on pistes.

So, the lesson seems to be: you can still get leather 75mm boots in Norway, but you might need to ask a shop to order them in for you, which would take a few days and – unless they were willing to respond to an emailed request – would mean you would need to visit the shop at least twice. That would be okay if you were staying, as I did, in the youth hostel in the centre of Lillehammer. Or you could make a couple of visits to the shop in Ringebu if you were skiing at nearby Kvitfjell or Venabu.

Stuart Montgomery for XCuk Limited

[Ed. NNN bindings have a bar in the toe of the boot to hook into a catch in the binding; the Back Country (BC) variant is more rugged. The older 75mm Nordic Norm bindings have three pins on the binding which slot into three holes at the front of the boot.]

Next season's events

The World Masters Ski-Orienteering Championships are being held in Madona, Latvia next year from 11th -17th February. There is a growing interest in ski-O in the UK with a team being sent to the World Champs 2012 by British Orienteering and two of our own members taking part in successive masters events in Romania and Norway. The advantage of the masters events is that you can enter whatever your standard yet mix with the best in the world. Alasdair is keen to gather a group together who would be interested in going. The area is fairly accessible being about three hours from Riga International Airport and there will be accomodation to suit all budgets. See: <http://www.esoc2013.lv>. So if you are interested in a challenging week in an unfrequented skiing area get in touch.

Alasdair Wilson (awilson.craw@blueyonder.co.uk)

Cross-country Masters World Cup

Another event for the mildly to enthusiastically competitive is the Masters World cup in X-C skiing, which is being held in Asiago, northeastern Italy, from 14 -22 February 2013. This is an excellent ski area with over 500km of trails, not too far from Venice. Dates fit a little snugly with the Ski-O but you could still do a 10 km and 45 km race after completing the Ski-O on 17th. See: www.mwc2013.com/en/ . Talk to Alasdair for more info or have a look back in our past newsletters for reports of past events.

Alasdair Wilson (awilson.craw@blueyonder.co.uk)

Club events

Thurs 17th May 6.30 onwards: End of Season Meet at Alan and Pam Mitcham's - 5 The Rise, Darras Hall, NE20 9LJ (ph. 01661 823960). Please join us for an end of season social get-together and bring along any photos of your ski trips (on memory stick or CD) for a slide show at the end of the evening. Be prepared for some slides of the club Norway trip(s) and some slides of Greenland I hope! Please let Alan know if you are planning to come along. Food and drink contributions would be welcome (wine will be provided).

Sun 27th May 2012, 10am to 6pm: North West Telemark Festival. Manchester Cross Country Ski Club present the second UK Telemark ski festival at the Manchester Chill Factor. Coaches: Andy Stewart, Ian Johnston and Chris Stewart (2010 & 2011 British Telemark Champion). See: <http://www.mccsc.org.uk/>

Tues 19th June at 6.00: Bird-watching walk led by Alan. Bring binoculars and meet at Thornley Woods Visitor Centre (grid ref. NZ 177 603) off the A694 between Derwenthaugh and Rowland Gill. This will be a gentle walk (no more than 3 miles) and we will be looking for woodland birds (tits, nuthatches, etc), red kites (from the viaduct), warblers (in and around the meadows) and water birds (from the pond hide at Far Pastures). We will finish up with a pub meal, probably in Rowlands Gill.

Sunday 15th July: Bike ride - contact Stuart Mavin or Keith Walker. More details to follow. Easy off-road riding around the old railway lines of Durham and Consett or on some of the trails around Hexhamshire. Bring packed lunch.

Sat 25th August: 4pm. Hetton Lyons, Co. Durham. British Rollerski Series race.

Sat 8th Sept: Bike Ride - contact Keith. The packhorse trails around Alston and beyond. This is an undulating 18 mile route with about 30% off-road and one steep stony descent and one ford crossing. Be prepared with a packed lunch, though we might stop at the pub in Garrigill.

Mon 17th Sept (provisional) - evening pub meet - details to follow.