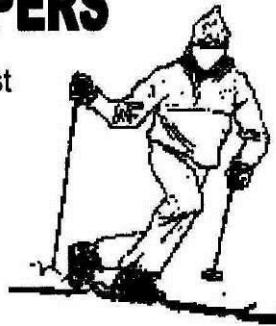




TYNESIDE LOIPERS

The NorthEast's Specialist
Cross Country Ski club



Newsletter

January/February 2014

Welcome to a new look newsletter (this edition produced by Alan Mitcham as temporary editor). Any comments and suggestions will be welcome. The next newsletter is due in May.

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Club Events

7-9 th February	Scotland weekend, Braemar Guide Shieling.
Sat 15 February	Silksworth Ski Festival – see page 2.
2-9 th March	Track skiing holiday in Akaslompolo, Finnish Lapland. Contact Alan.
30 th March to 6 th April	<i>Snowsport England coaching, Kvitavatn, Norway – see page 13.</i>
10-19 th April	Hut-to-hut skiing – Norway/Swedish border.
Fri 25 th April, 7.30pm	<i>Banff Mountain Film Festival, Playhouse Whitley Bay – see page 8.</i>
May (tba)	End of Season Meet, details to follow.
16/17 th August	<i>Snowsport England roller-ski coaching, Hetton Lyons Park, Durham</i>

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Club website www.tynesidelopers.org.uk

And find us on Facebook... sign up for latest postings, snow conditions, club activities, items for sale, etc.

From the Editor

Where is the snow? Keith Walker must be a bit fed up of my asking him about snow conditions in Allenheads. 'Just a thin layer of slushy snow' he says! Surely we are overdue for some snow in the northeast – perhaps late season March or April. I certainly hope so.

Meanwhile Scotland has been having a good season. The Scottish resorts have been digging out the ski tows and chairlifts (many of the lifts are not running because of too much snow) and it looks like the ski season will easily last for another month or two. Just back from the Loipers Scotland weekend (7-9th Feb), many of the snow fences are buried with snow with just the tips of some of the fences showing through the surface.

Lots of snow in the French Alps – the Loipers trip to Morillon in mid January was nicely timed with abundant snow right down to the resort. See Neil Water's account of the trip on page 3.

Thanks to other contributors for this issue, John Mordue, who reports on Dobbiaco, and Mike Hall who writes about his family trip to Akaslompolo over the New Year. Greg Buick gives us an excellent account of last year's trip to Greenland. And Judi Webb writes about her wonderful walking holiday on the Island of Gomera.

Member News

You can't help being envious of some people in this club! Kevin and Kimberley have been skiing in Japan. After our trip to Canada last year, Kevin was invited by our assistant guide Yuji to do some adventure touring in Japan. My e-mail about our January pub was met with the response 'Sorry we cannot make it – Yuji is taking us out to a BBQ – 40cm/day of fresh powder here in last two days!'

Lots of other trips are making me slightly envious. Heather has been back to Goms in Switzerland. Chris Ottley has been skiing in and around Chamonix with the Eagle Ski Club over New Year. Jon Mellor was also in Chamonix in January with the Telemark Ski Company. Greg has been cross country skiing in Engadin for a couple of weeks and is heading out to Mosstrand in Norway. Carolyn Hawkes and family have been enjoying a learn-to-skate week with Eric Woolley in Seefeld. Barbara Gibbons has topped it all, having just returned from two weeks of guided ski touring in the Antarctic! More from her soon I hope.

Meanwhile Alasdair is just back from two weeks in Austria – a week of cross-country skiing in Seefeld as a guide for blind skiers, followed by a week at the World Masters Cross country Ski Championships. Some of these blind skiers are serious athletes and good skiers, so Alasdair would probably have been well challenged keeping up with them (a good preparation/training week for the World Masters which followed).

Silksworth Ski Festival and Championship – Saturday Feb 15th

Tyneside Loipers have been asked to man a stand at the Northeast Ski Championships at the Silksworth Ski Centre in Sunderland on 15th Feb. The main events will be the slalom racing and slope side competitions on the dry ski slope. We will also be there promoting Tyneside Loipers and demonstrating Nordic ski equipment (track skiing, touring, telemarking, etc) and also demonstrating roller ski technique on the tarmac tracks around the centre.

Anyone available to help should please contact Alasdair, who is coordinating the effort on behalf of Tyneside Loipers.

Loipers Telemark trip to France – January 2014

Seven members of Tyneside Loipers (Alan Mitcham, Neil Waters, Mike Hall, Tim Owen, Penny Schofield, Tim and Helen Elliott) enjoyed some great skiing in the Grand Massif area in the French Alps with accommodation in Morillon and nearby Samoëns.

Conditions were excellent as it had snowed a few days before we arrived and then a further dump came after the first night. Alan, Neil and Mike arrived via Geneva and were soon joined by Tim and Penny who travelled by car having already managed a few days skiing in Italy. The apartment at Morillon 1100 was perfectly positioned beside the slopes, just a short ski from the chairlifts, with a small restaurant and ski shop and convenience store within 5 minutes walk. We could ski straight out of the back door.

On our first evening Alan, Mike and Neil decided to use the good weather to ‘skin up’ the slopes above the apartment. After half an hour of climbing in gathering darkness, we stripped off our skins and skied back down to the apartment with head torches, taking care to avoid the piste bashers already out grooming the slopes!

For our first full skiing day, we had planned to buy a lift pass for the Grand Massif area which encompasses a huge ski area with connections across to Flaine but we learnt that the connecting chairlifts were closed due to high winds. Instead we bought the cheaper lift pass and enjoyed good snow mostly using the runs down to Morillon and Les Carroz.

Mike had had very limited telemark experience but he took to it very quickly. Perhaps his recent family cross country ski trip to Finland for his birthday had given him a good start. He was skiing with his new NTN boots and bindings and soon developed a good style.

On our second day the connections to Flaine were up and running and we bought a full area lift pass. We started skiing at around 9.30 am and only just managed to get the last lift at 4.30 pm back over the mountains into the Morillon area. In the evening Tim drove our group over to the village of Samoëns where we enjoyed a Savoyard meal in a local restaurant with Tim and Helen who had arrived that day.



Neil, Mike, Tim, Helen and Alan at Flaine – January 2014

Tim and Helen joined us on the third day and it was great to see telemark skiing being appreciated by others on the slopes – quite a few comments (mostly complimentary) were heard. Sadly Neil then had to hire downhill (alpine) gear having developed a problem with his Rottefella Riva 3 bindings (later found to be a loose insert in the ski which couldn't be fixed locally) but he enjoyed skiing with Penny and Helen who were also skiing Alpine style.

All too soon the final day of skiing came around and good snow conditions were found on the blue and red runs especially on the Plein Soliel route. Another enjoyable day only marred by a tumble by Mike which gave him a sore knee but he continued to ski with admirable determination.

Tim and Penny left on the third afternoon to join their family in Tignes for a week. Tim tells us that the weather was not that great but snow conditions were good and, on one day, four members of the family including Penny were fitted up with telemark skis and joined Tim for a day of free-heel skiing. Hopefully we will have some new recruits for the club telemark trip next year!

The transfer back to Geneva and flight to Newcastle went off without a hitch and we were left, all too soon, with aching quads but warm memories of a great time in the Alps.

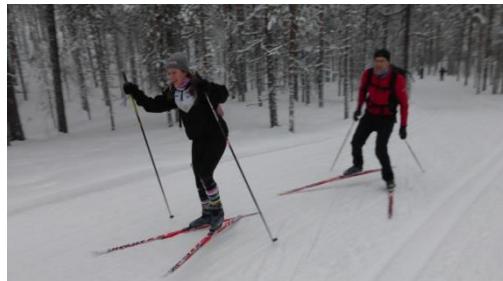
Neil Waters

A New Year Trip to Finland

Having an early January Birthday has always meant an extended season of eating and yet more pressies. This year was going to be a little different as I reached the big Five-O. With a life-long fascination for the night sky, I had always wanted to see the Northern Lights, and where better place to see them than the Finnish Arctic Circle (just the excuse for an early winter holiday and some skiing with the family). Our destination was to be Akaslompolo, coincidentally the destination for the club track-skiing holiday this year.

New Year in Finnish Lapland can have its pros and cons. The days are short and there are cheesy Santa overtones- yes, there is a giant sledge and fairy lights on the watch tower of the local airport!

Once settled into our cosy log cabin we had a fantastic base to indulge our winter activities. The track skiing was great with both daughters Chloe and Molly honing their skate skiing in the limited hours of daylight – there were great routes on forest trails. Sally and I explored the local hill on snow shoes and New Year was fun with a fine meal at the local hotel (reindeer steaks) and then down to the frozen lake for midnight where the whole village turns out to set free their Chinese lanterns.



Molly and Mike skating along the trails in Finnish Lapland

One of the highlights of the trip was a husky sledge ride through the Finnish forests. After a short briefing in which the key issue is how to stop the sledge, we paired up, one being the musher and the other being a passenger wrapped up in furs in the body of the sledge. The dogs are bred with one primary attribute in mind and that is 'go'!! The rest is all about speed management – all absolutely great fun. Afterward we retired to a traditional wooden lodge, drank berry tea and listened to fascinating stories of the lead musher training for a 1000km race across Norway. We also learned more about the Finnish poetic appreciation of different light qualities including the moon, stars and of course the Aurora Borealis.

On this trip the atmospheric conditions weren't quite right for our Northern Lights but we extended the festive season on local dishes, including berry soup for breakfast, and had plenty of great winter activities. I still have some unfinished business and can't wait to go back.

Mike Hall

Greenland 2013, by Greg Buick

Less than a year after the 2012 Greenland trip (described in John Dark's excellent article in the Sept 2012 Loipers newsletter), we were heading back to the Greenland east coast. I joined Barbara Gibbons and four others for the 2013 trip, returning to the same coastal area of Liverpool Land but this time using telemark or alpine touring skis, with the emphasis on the interior mountains rather than the coast. Our guide was Paul Platt who had also led the 2012 trip with John, Alan and Barbara.

We each made our own way to Iceland, meeting up at the Airport for the drive up to Akureyri where we were to catch a small plane fly to Constable Point on the east coast of Greenland. The lady at the car hire desk warned us that the weather in Iceland could be very variable. And indeed it was, on our journey we drove through sunshine along the coast and through a blizzard over a pass, where perhaps an inch of snow had fallen, and finally arrived at Akureyri where we were to spend the night. Unfortunately John Dark, who had been with Barbara and Alan in 2012 had a recurrence of flu at this stage and was forced to abandon the trip. Next morning there were six rather than seven for the flight to Greenland.

On arriving at Constable Point, our gear was taken off the plane and almost immediately loaded on some large pulks – we only had a couple of hours before we were to be taken out to our first campsite and we were to travel there on skidoos or in an enclosed buggy pulled by one of the skidoos. The buggy may have looked comfortable but in reality it was very bumpy. After an hour, when we reached the glacier's terminal moraine, we disembarked and the skidoos disappeared and we were left with everything we needed for the next 10 days. The tents were erected, the food was distributed and the polar bear alarm put up around the encampment – we cooked our meals, enjoyed the evening sun and the quiet, and then to a good a night's sleep in our snug sleeping-bags within in our tents.

Next morning there was work to do – cook breakfast, take down the tents, pack the pulks and then pull them up onto the glacier. We arrived at our campsite at about 3 o'clock. But the day had only just begun. There was a storm expected the next day. So for the next couple of hours we prepared ourselves. We pitched our tents, then Paul got out his ice saw and, using the snow blocks Paul had cut, we built two foot walls of snow around the windward side of the tents. Finally it was done and we could have a cup of soup and our evening



meal, after which we retreated to our tents or more accurately our sleeping bags for the next 36 hours. It was no real problem – sleep, eat, read, eat, perhaps a quick visit outside, read, eat, sleep.

On day 4, having sorted ourselves out in late morning we went for our first ski without the pulks. It was a short but enjoyable day just getting used to the skis and having a look at what we could do for the next couple of days.

It was decided that on day 5 we would ski up to a nearby peak. It was a beautiful day, calm and not a cloud in the sky. We made our way through the deep snow across the glacier and made the ascent which was easier than I had expected. We enjoyed great views from the top and then home. We did set off a small avalanche on the way down, but it was on the opposite side of a small gully we were skiing along and presented no danger to us. A great day's skiing!

But another storm was due the next day. It came and we had another 36 hours in the tent – people were beginning to finish their books! It was difficult to know how much snow fell but there was a lot blown about. This ended the possibility of another peak, because of the avalanche risk. We decided to move to our next campsite a day earlier than planned. This meant a U-shaped trip round to a glacier a little to the south but parallel to the one we were on. Once again it was a beautiful day and we travelled through great scenery with views down the glaciers to the sea. Pulling pulks it was a long day and I have to admit that I was glad when we had our tents up and the walls built.



Day 8 was another beautiful day but somewhat restricted by the avalanche risk. The next day was misty and although we went out for a ski it was only a half day. There was another storm coming in! This time the storm came through during the night and I slept through most of it. In fact we obviously missed the worst of it – it was the storm in which two Britons who were just off the Greenland ice-cap much further to the west lost their lives.

The storm did not completely blow itself out till mid-morning so we only had a short day's skiing on day 10.

On Day 11 it was again calm with barely a cloud in the sky. We had a full day's skiing without the pulks, although the



avalanche risk was still high. We skied up a side glacier/valley. At the end we put on our crampons and climbed up to look over the next glacier to the south. We were camped on Hans (or Hansel) glacier and we were looking at Grete (or Gretel) glacier.

Day 12 was our last day skiing. We packed up the tents and made our way down the glacier. At an early lunch stop we abandoned the pulks and climbed off the glacier. Once off the glacier we climbed on skis, keeping close to the rocks and keeping 10 yards apart if we had to cross open snow. On one open slope Paul and Barbara crossed and I was third. When I was about three-quarters of the way across there was a sudden whoosh. I have to admit that my heart rate soared for a moment, but it was only the snow settling. But it did settle quite a bit and Paul decided that that was as far as we would go. We had a short but enjoyable ski down in nice snow. We hitched on our pulks again and skied on down the glacier. Getting off the glacier was not as steep as I expected but I have to admit I did fall – not a good idea with a pulk. Once off the glacier we had just a few kilometres to ski to where we were to be picked up by the skidoos.



As we approached our meeting point we had a bonus, with three musk ox in view. Unexpectedly they started coming towards us. They had heard the skidoos coming up the valley. They passed by us about 100 meters away and then climbed up out of the valley.

Reading this, you may think that the trip did not go well. But anyone undertaking such a trip understands such trips are an adventure. Before going on the trip I was a little apprehensive because I had not done such a trip for 15 years and then not with alpine touring skis. Despite the unusual weather conditions (Paul had never experienced high avalanche condition there previously) I thoroughly enjoyed the trip and would love to do it again. I would certainly recommend such a trip, although at £4,000 it was the most expensive holiday I have had, but it was worth it.



Greg Buick

Tyneside Loipers in Canada – March 2013

Great memories of last year's trip to Canada... Kevin Moore has produced an excellent video of our week at Sentry Lodge in the Selkirk Mountains. The video starts with our helicopter trip into the remote lodge and then switches to our Canadian guide Russ Lyberger entertaining us in the lodge (singing and playing the guitar) and follows with an excellent compilation of our 7 days of ski touring in a metre of fresh snow. There is even a sequence with Kevin landing in a tree – all recorded on his helmet camera!

Here is the link on YouTube...

www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7ELEjEjKNQ&list=UUgsDeQ4XHJlbe59Z1XPDIIA&feature=c4-overview

Starring Tyneside Loipers, Tim and Penny Owen, Kevin and Kimberley Moore, Steve Campbell and Alan Mitcham, plus friends Andrew and Andy, guides Russ and Yuji, and hut guardians Hanna and Ewan. It is well worth watching!

The Sochi Olympics – Feb 2014

Hoping for some good coverage of the Sochi Olympics on BBC television... here is the programme of events for the cross-country and biathlon disciplines. I don't suppose they will all be covered by the BBC, though there are several hours of coverage each day, so there is a good chance of seeing the highlights at least. Personally I will also be watching out for some of the snowboard events and the Skier-Cross, which must be about the most enjoyable spectator-sport there is.

	Cross-country	Biathlon
Sat 8 th	Ladies skiathlon 7.5km classic/7.5km skate	Mens 10km sprint
Sun 9 th	Mens skiathlon 15km classic/15km skate	Womens 7.5km sprint
Mon 10 th		Mens 12.5k pursuit
Tues 11 th	Men's and women's sprints	Womens 10k pursuit
Thur 13 th	Women's 10km classic	Mens 20k individual
Fri 14 th	Mens 15k classic	Womens 15k individual
Sat 15 th	Womens 4 x 5k relay	
Sun 16 th	Mens 4 x 10k relay	Mens 15k mass start
Mon 17 th		Womens 12.5k mass start
Wed 19 th	Mens and womens team sprints (classic)	Mixed relay
Fri 21 st		Womens 4 x 6k relay
Sat 22 nd	Womens 30k mass start (skate)	Womens 4 x 6k relay
Sun 23 rd	Mens 50k mass start (skate)	Mens 4 x 7.5k relay

The great hope for British cross-country skiing is 23 year-old Andrew Musgrave who is competing in the sprint events. Andrew now lives in Trondheim and recently won the Norwegian National Championships, beating the entire Norwegian field at their own game. An Olympic medal will nicely top off his 2014 season.

For an excellent video interview with Andrew Musgrave, see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/0/winter-olympics/25845565> (the link also gives some good background on his development at the Huntly Nordic Ski Club in Aberdeenshire).

Winter Mountaineering and Ice Axe Skills

I came across this useful section of the BMC website. There is loads of information on winter mountain skills with a link to a very good video on ice-axe techniques, covering methods of ice-axe arrest from various body positions, if you are unfortunate enough to find yourself sliding uncontrollably down an icy slope.

See www.thebmc.co.uk/winter-climbing-and-walking-skills

The Banff Mountain Film Festival comes to Whitley Bay – 25th April.

For one night only, it is the Banff Mountain Film Festival World Tour. A series of adrenaline-packed short films on climbing, skiing, mountain biking and kayaking, it looks very good indeed. The following web page has a link to online bookings and also a link to a video/trailer which is quite stunning. Tickets are £13 (£11 for concessions).

www.playhousewhitleybay.co.uk/events/5117/banff-mountain-film-festival-world-tour

Dobbiaco revisited

A year ago I wrote a short article for the Loipers newsletter on Dobbiaco and Obertilliach. It is an excellent area for cross country track skiing. Here is some useful additional information, particularly relating to loipe, cafes and restaurants!

Tourist Information – winter tel. +39 0474 913 156 (e-mail info@altapusteria.info)

This is the place for go for a loipe plan, loipe passes and bus and train time-table. Loipe passes must be shown at check points, for example joining the loipe at the Dolomitenhof. You can also get info on weather, loipe conditions, bus/train times etc. The office is on the main street as you walk gradually uphill from the train station - about 600 yards and on the right.

You may also want to get details about Gustav Mahler's connections with Dobbiaco!

www.toblach-dobbiaco.com/holidays/useful-information.aspx

The 7 day Dolomiti Nordicski pass with Mobi Card cost 31 Euros in 2013 and gives free transport on buses and trains across a large area. Ask about this at the Tourist Office. It also provides free travel to Silian (most of the way to Obertilliach). Remember to 'validate' all bus and rail tickets and the mobi card for each journey using the machines provided!!

Good places for coffee, lunch, apfel strudel!

Skiing down the loipe from Fischleintal past Sexten and on to San Candido/Innichen

1. **Green Lantern** – about 200 yards to the right of the loipe near Sexten in a clump of trees.
2. **Hotel Paradiso, followed by the Lindenhof** – Hotel Paradiso is about half a mile before San Candido (Innichen) as you ski down from Fischleintal (just after you cross the bridge onto the right side of the stream). The Lindenhof is a little further along on a side road on the right.

Cafes along the route up to Prags Wildersee

3. **Edelweiss Hotel** – The bus from Dobbiaco to Sage passes this gasthof just before you reach Sage.
4. **St Viet (on the way to Prags Wildersee)** – pleasant Gasthof just off the loipe. Look for the sign inviting you to visit the gasthof as you approach St Viet from Sage (worth a visit, though off the beaten track).

Just off the main loipe from Dobbiaco to Cortina

5. **Hotel Fiames** – Several km down from the high point between Dobbiaco and Cortina, there is a sharp right turn to a stadium. Walk past the stadium to the Hotel Fiames (you're now heading back along a road in the Dobbiaco direction). There is a bus stop by the hotel where you can get a bus back up Cimabanche and then ski downhill back to Dobbiaco.

There are lots of other places as well as the ones recommended above!

Recommended routes

1. **Fischleintal** - Train to San Candido/Innichen. Transfer to bus outside train station to Dolomitenhof. Ski up and around Fischleintal. Down to Sexten and on to San Candido. Maybe continue back to Dobbiaco or return by bus.
2. **Cortina** – Bus to Cimabanche. Ski down to Hotel Fiames. Bus up to Cimabanche then ski back to Dobbiaco.
3. **Prags Wildersee** – Bus to Sage. Ski up to Prags Wildersee. Return on loipe to Sage and continue to Villabassa/Niederdorf. Maybe continue to Dobbiaco.
4. **Brukele** – (downhill sections may be hard if icy conditions) Bus to Sage. Ski up to Brukele. Return on loipe to Sage and continue to Villabassa-Niederdorf. Maybe continue to Dobbiaco.

There's often an impetus to do new routes every day but I find the routes in Dobbiaco are so pleasant it is no problem repeating them!

Other routes – and a few warnings!

1. **Sage to Dobbiaco and San Candido (Innichen) to Dobbiaco** – this loipe can be very nice skiing if there is a good quantity of snow at a low temperature. In warm conditions it may be covered in debris and is icy and unpleasant. Check with the tourist office.
2. **Platzwiese** – A high level loipe in spectacular location – approx. 2000 metres. Bus to Bruckele then 4 Euro taxi up to Platzwiese. A taxi back to Bruckele may be advisable. The ski route back to Bruckele is described as 'very challenging'! The military road descent from Platzwiese to Schluderbach can only be done if the avalanche and other conditions are right. You need to be able to snowplough in earnest for about 40 minutes!
3. **Panorama Loipe above Sexten** – It is important to check with the tourist office that this loipe is OK. They may also be able to check with Sexten Tourist Office and book a taxi for you (4 euros each) to get up the hill to the start. You could instead go to Kreuzbergpass and ski up a steep, unpleasant and often icy slope – but there can be a lot of merit in the taxi!
4. **Downhill from Kreutzbergpass to Moos** – This used to be a charming woodland track for cross-country skiers. It is now pisted and used by downhill skiers for descent and by walkers as well. The decision is yours!
5. **Bruckele to Sage** – This can be quite a difficult/exciting descent - particularly when snow cover is thin or icy.
6. **Rotwand lift and descent on connecting piste to Kreuzbergpass** – The lift company no longer sells tickets to langlauf skiers to do this route because of the number of accidents which have occurred in the past!

Ski hire

There is a small ski hire shop on Via Statzione, just by the level crossing near the rail station. It is a one person business. They are very helpful doing repairs to bindings and poles at a very reasonable price. (it is also a good opportunity to try good quality skating skis).

I hope this is of some use to those going to Dobbiaco this year.

John Mordue



LA GOMERA

Or How to take the No out of November

We'd never even heard of La Gomera before autumn 2013 but looking at Paddy Dillon's newly revised Cicerone Guides gave us the idea to go there for a 10 day warm winter walking break. La Gomera is a small island in the Canaries just a 40 minute ferry ride from Tenerife. It's round and like a lemon squeezer – one high point with dozens of volcanic ridges (*barrancos*) running down to the sea, so all walking does require a fair amount of up and down. The high regions are covered with *laurisilva* – cloud forests which absorb the water from the mists coming in from the Atlantic. Lower down it is semi-desert but all fertile with lots of fruit and vegetables – including avocados, mangos, dates and huge banana plantations. The climate (and vegetation) varies a lot from north to south, south being warmer and drier – Chipude (in the centre) is the coldest place in winter and the hottest in the summer and the butt of many island jokes. In 2012 there was a huge forest fire devastating almost a fifth of the *laurisilva* forest in the national park, however, the regeneration of the forest is astonishing as new growth is apparent everywhere.

Our itinerary was to stay in 3 centres, walking between them and staying for 2, 3 or 4 nights in each to explore the local area.

Our 1st centre was Vallehermoso (in the north west) where we stayed at Hotel Anaterve run by a very hospitable couple where the vegetarian food was wonderful – this turned out to be such a pleasant place and so much great walking we returned there for our last 4 nights. Centre no 2 was Chipude in the centre of the island where we stayed at Hotel Sonia, a simple, clean, warm and welcoming village hotel with local specialities. In Hermigua it was Hotel Rural Casa los Herrera – no evening meals but fantastic breakfasts and a small swimming pool.

The first thing we noticed on arriving in La Gomera is that it is very different from the little bit of neighbouring Tenerife that we'd seen. Los Cristianos, the ferry port on Tenerife, was full of new building work with all the old agricultural terraces disused. Walking to the ferry was through Cardiac Arrest Boulevard! Every cafe was offering Full English Breakfast, the Belly Buster, tapas and chips, steak and chips, pollo and chips, or toasties, chips and beer... In comparison, San Sebastian on La Gomera was much more relaxed and human in scale, much greener and, as yet, unspoilt. There were views back to Tenerife with the iconic view of the volcano, El Tiede, with a layer of cloud about a third of the way down.



The view across to Tenerife and El Tiede

It was getting dark when we left for Vallehermoso, even so, we could see the mountains looming ahead etched against the darkening sky and the first stars coming out. The roads twisted and turned through the north part of the island and the lights from Tenerife were clearly visible as, later, were those from La Palma; there were times too when it was pitch dark with no signs of habitation, just the convoluted

road and the cliffs towering above and below. An hour and a half later, the town appeared out of the darkness and we could see our hotel perched above us looking down to the town square.

La Gomera has a wonderful variety of walks; high ridges, coastal cliffs, hidden valleys, deep primaeval forests, tiny bays, huge natural rock pillars (vestiges of ancient volcanoes) tower above brilliant red sandy paths and black volcanic rock. Paths are well maintained and clearly way-marked, the steep ones are zig-zagged with forgiving gradients; some wind through vegetable gardens and small holdings with bamboos (and frogs) in the boggy bits. Even in November there was an abundance of wild flowers, nasturtiums, geraniums and snapdragons still in flower; poinsettia trees (not tiny pot plants) and bougainvillea climbing walls and terraces. Higher up there are valley sides thick with palms, prickly pears, juniper and other scrub plants. Deep in the forest it is magical - dense and dark with patches of bright, brilliant green, especially the young growth of ferns; trunks and branches are covered with thick moss and lichen, great dinner-plate sized fungi - a lush, rich damp place. You can see across to Tenerife in the east, La Palma to the north, El Hierro to the south west and, on very clear days, to Gran Canaria.



Laurisilva Forest

We saw traditional “long houses”, old salt workings, abandoned banana warehouses, tiny working small holdings, terraces full of potatoes or cabbages, rows of lilies and the ubiquitous banana plantations. There is an excellent visitor centre near Hermigua and the information boards in the National Park are genuinely informative! We met locals and tourists, incomers and people whose families had lived there for generations; a friendly place, advice offered, routes described, local produce given.

We definitely want to return, probably in spring or autumn when there will be more flowers. We also want to go to nearby El Hierro (an even smaller and less developed island).

Recommended guide books

1. The Cicerone “Walking on La Gomera and El Hierro”
2. The Rother guide to La Gomera.

Judi Webb & Peter Sedgwick

Snowsport England Events

Cross Country and Telemark Skills Week, Kvitavatn, Norway – 30 March to 6 April

The SSE Coaching week is back in Kvitavatn where the course was run successfully for many years using the combination of excellent cross country ski tracks and the downhill pistes together with the excellent accommodation and facilities of the Fjellstoge. There is top level coaching from highly qualified and experienced British instructors. It includes 6 days of instruction with lectures on technique, equipment and waxing in the evening, and opportunities to swap between telemark and cross country during the week.

For cross-country skiers, the week is designed for those who want to improve their skills whether their interests are in touring or racing. Participants should be able to ski at a minimum standard of improver/intermediate level.

For telemark skiers or for alpine skiers wanting to convert to free-heel downhill/telemark technique, the minimum standard is the ability to perform basic parallel turns on most blue runs on alpine/telemark equipment.

See https://docs.google.com/document/d/1VPjczUegMxYtmx5Ob9zW7mZmFP4ax_wNPqu8z6XeTvY/pub for more information and costs. Contact Alistair Westell ASAP for bookings alistair.westell+kvit2014@gmail.com

Hetton Lyons Roller Ski Coaching Weekend – 16/17th August

The SSE Roller Ski Courses will improve your skiing technique (classic and skating) and give you confidence for skiing on snow. Pick up loads of helpful training tips and just have a fantastic time. The courses are open to everyone, whether you are beginner, intermediate or expert, and whether you are a tourer, a racer, or just want to try cross-country skiing.

More details and booking arrangements will be posted on the SSE website soon. Or contact the organiser Helen Bell (e-mail helenbell115@btinternet.com) - Don't forget we also have our own qualified roller ski instructor Alasdair Wilson who is keen to hear from club members at any time.

Snowsport England website – an excellent new information source for Nordic skiing!

I recently had a look at the revamped SSE website www.snowsportengland.org.uk/ and was surprised and impressed by some of the excellent information now available on Nordic skiing. Stephen Johns from the Nordic Key Committee has done a great deal of useful work. Click on 'Cross Country' and there are a series of pages...

What is Cross Country Skiing?

Start Cross Country Skiing

Cross Country Ski Equipment

Roller Skiing... and many more.

The information is very informative and it makes for good reading. The advice on equipment is particularly good. And there is a huge list of useful links to equipment suppliers and manufacturers.

Alternatively you can click on 'Telemark' and there is a similar series of articles including 'What is telemarking?' and 'Telemark Ski Equipment'. Again the articles are very informative and readable. Curiously the 'Telemark' menu also leads you to articles on 'Ski Touring' and 'Ski Touring Equipment' (mostly this is about lightweight Nordic touring and is nothing to do with telemarking). Again these are really good and well worth reading. The advice on equipment purchase is very good and the distinction is nicely made between the different equipments for each branch of the sport.

Bits and Pieces

We have had some enjoyable social meets at the Union Rooms in Newcastle and The Boathouse in Wylam, with typically 6 to 8 people turning up and joining in the discussion on future trips and general chat about skiing and outdoor activity. If you would like to suggest a different pub venue in your patch, please get in touch.

Other social meets have been very enjoyable. The AGM and social at Charlie's house was held in October starting with Charlie's excellent veggie chilli and finishing with a short slideshow. The AGM business was short and sweet.

The Victoria Tunnel trip in Newcastle was enjoyed by 15 of us and was very interesting indeed. Several of us then moved on to Tim and Penny's house where we were treated to an excellent meal –a very good evening.

The Xmas (New Year) meal was held at the Sky Apple Cafe. Again there were 15 of us – the food and the service was outstanding. Thanks to Nuala for organising.

Looking forward to the summer, please let us know if you have any suggestions. I heard that someone will be organising a canoeing or sailing trip (or maybe both) – watch this space! And of course we will try to organise some roller skiing and biking now and again.

Meanwhile we are still waiting for snow! Let us know if there are good skiing conditions near you. Send an e-mail, or better still use the club Facebook page.

Club Skis and Boots

Just a reminder... the club has a good stock of skis and boots for hire by club members (at a nominal charge of just £10 per weekend). Climbing skins are also available. The keeper of the club equipment is Pat Lynch who lives in Wylam (e-mail and telephone details on the front of this newsletter).

We also have roller skis along with a range of sizes of track skiing boots. These are held by Alasdair who lives in Forest Hall (again see front of this newsletter).

E-mail addresses

Most of our club activities are advertised by e-mail or on Facebook. Do please keep the Membership Sec (Alan Mitcham) informed of any changes to your e-mail address. And do please remember that the e-mail list is to be used for skiing or outdoor related activities only.