



TYNESIDE LOIPERS

The NorthEast's Specialist
Cross Country Ski club



Newsletter February 2015

Welcome to the first newsletter for 2015 (I am still here as temporary editor). Any comments and suggestions will be welcome. Thanks to all contributors. The next newsletter is due in May.
Alan Mitcham.

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Club Events

Thurs 19 Feb	Pub meet and Cotswold discount evening, see page 2.
Fri 27 Feb to Sun 1 March	Scotland weekend, Braemar, see page 3.
22 nd to 29 th March	<i>Snowsport England Nordic Skills Week, Nordseter, see page 3.</i>
9 th to 18 th April	Hut to hut skiing in northern Sweden, see page 14.
Thurs 21 May	End of Season Meet, Pat's house, Wylam – see page 2.
22/23 rd August 2015	<i>Snowsport England roller-ski coaching, Hetton Lyons Park, Durham</i> plus pub meets and other social events to be arranged.

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Club website www.tynesideloipers.org.uk

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

From the Editor

Not bad so far – I have squeezed in two days of local skiing already. That is two days more than last year and we are only just into February. Various loiper members have skied in Allenheads, onto Killhope Law, and in Slaley Forest (up to 4 Feb). The tows at Weardale Ski Club have already been running 14 days this year and those at Allenheads have been doing well too. Skiing at Weardale in beautiful sunny weather and near perfect snow was a real highlight (for 3 of us) on 30 January. Only just back from a week of telemark skiing in Italy, Neil and Jon and I could hardly have hoped for such conditions back in the UK.

Sadly the forecast didn't quite turn out quite as promised. I expected a few days of heavy snow but here in Ponteland we had less than an inch. Hexham had hardly any. Still, it is better than last year and hopefully there is more to come.

Lots of club members have been away skiing in the Alps and Scandinavia. See inside for reports of some of these trips – Gressoney and Dobbiaco in Italy, Morillon in France, Seefeld in Austria, Salla in Finland. There is also a report of Alasdair's 2014 trip to Seefeld when he was acting as a guide for blind skiers.

Pub Meets and Discount Evenings

The next pub meet is Thursday 19th Feb at the Union Rooms (Wetherspoons) in Newcastle, meeting from 19.45 onwards in or near the upstairs bar. We have had a good turnout at the pub meets in Wylam and it will be nice to see everyone there. It is a good way to keep in touch with what the club is doing.

We have also arranged a discount event at Cotswold Outdoor for the same day 19th Feb (opening hours from 0930 to 2000). Do your shopping first and then come along to the pub meet at the Union Rooms. Tyneside Loiper members can get 20% discount off anything in store (except already discounted items).

Snow Reports

Hopefully we still have more snow to come, in the Pennines and elsewhere. Please would members report when there is reasonable skiing to be had in their area. I am happy to receive and disseminate snow reports though a better bet is to send to the membership e-mail list (use the latest list sent out in mid January) or post a report on the Tyneside Loipers Facebook page.

Alan Mitcham

Advance Notice – End of Season Meet – Thurs 21 May

Please put the date in your diaries... We are currently planning an End of Season Meet at Pat's house in Wylam for the evening of 21 May. This will be the usual format – you provide the food and the club will provide the wine. This is your opportunity to tell us about the ski trips you have had this year. Bring along some photos for a slide show at the end of the evening. More details available nearer the time.

Winter Skills Advice from the BMC

As always there is a huge amount of worthwhile advice on the BMC website. Much valuable information is brought together on the webpage www.thebmc.co.uk/winter-skills-the-next-steps which includes winter weather, avalanche theory, winter mountaineering, ice axe skills and links to some useful videos.

Tyneside Loipers Scotland Weekend, Braemar – 27 Feb 2015

Twelve of us are booked already for the long weekend 27 Feb to 1 March, staying at the log cabins run by the Braemar Lodge Hotel <http://www.braemarlodge.co.uk/log-cabins>

We have two of the log cabins (each with room for 6 people) but there are also places available at Braemar Youth Hostel. If you would like to join us at this late stage, contact Alan Mitcham. There is currently good snow cover on the high tops and we are expecting to do some hill touring and perhaps some skiing at Glenshee ski area (all dependent on weather and snow conditions at the time). Hopefully there will be more snow before then.

If the weather is fine and there is good snow, some of us will stay an extra night in Braemar and get at least one extra day of skiing.

Tyneside Loipers Hut Touring Trip to Sweden – April 2015

There are four of us currently booked for this trip, flying out from Edinburgh to Kiruna in Northern Sweden on 9th April. We will be following the Kungsleden (King's Trail) from Abisko to Nikkaluokta. We will be skiing between mountain huts along the route, with six or seven days of skiing between huts (total about 104km) plus one or two extra days for day touring, including an ascent of the highest mountain in Sweden, Kebnekase, at 2106 metres.

Please get in touch with Alan Mitcham if you are interested in joining this trip.

Snowsport England Nordic Skills Week in Nordseter, Norway – March 22-29

There is no better way to improve your cross-country skiing (classic or skating) than on the SSE Nordic Skills week. For many years based at the Fjellstue in Kvitavattn, the venue has now changed to Nordseter but the level of coaching remains as high as ever. Top coaches Patrick Winterton and Alan Eason will be joined by a third coach Martin Watkins. The usual programme involves some fairly intense coaching activity in the mornings and more relaxed skiing activities and cross-country touring in the afternoons. This is a highly recommended week, especially for anyone who aspires to cross-country racing.

Details of the accommodation and coaching packages are available from the organiser Alastair Westell alastair.westell@virgin.net Or have a look at the latest information on <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1bNfTXI2BFoHBIFG4zCxHME1kVVx1nuNQMJoBd310mul/pub>

Telemark Skiing in Canada... March 2015

Several members of Tyneside Loipers are amongst a group from the UK going to a remote lodge in British Columbia in a few weeks time. Mistaya Lodge (about 20 minutes by helicopter from the town of Golden) holds a special affection for me (Ed.) because it was the first of the Canadian remote ski lodges that I visited – in 2008. We will take over the lodge for one week with the services of a cook and a couple of ski guides who will take us out ski touring each day. This is real backcountry skiing, using climbing skins to gain height and then enjoying the descents in the untouched powder snow. Some days we will be skiing in forest glades and some days skiing up onto nearby summits. Kevin Moore's superb YouTube video captures our last Canada trip in 2013 perfectly...

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

Going for my first ski marathon

In the last Newsletter I wrote about my experience on the SSE coaching week at Kvitavatn, trying to improve my technique and aim for my first ski marathon in 2015. That was when I met Alan Eason and found out about his Totally Nordic/Rollerski UK weeks (www.totallynordic.co.uk) that link coaching, training and preparation with performance in an actual ski marathon.

So I signed up with Alan for a week of training in Obertilliach followed by the *Dobbiaco-Cortina 38th Gran Fondo Classic* event on 8th February. This is my narrative report of that experience!!

Obertilliach is a wonderful place for cross-country skiing having a relatively reliable snow record, many tracks of varying challenge, some alpine slopes and a modern, internationally recognised, langlauf/biathlon centre. You get a 20 euro pass for one week and can use all the facilities - the nicely groomed training area, toilets and cafe; and direct access to the track network. The local buses pass the entrance.

Another factor is, that at 1500m, it counts as low/medium altitude conditioning so it is popular with many national and professional teams who have 2 or 3-week training camps in the area. The Slovenian team, some developments squads from Italy and Australia and many individuals were training, during my two weeks. Current GB champion Posy Musgrave was also there, being coached by Alan in preparation for the World Championships at Falun. Watching the interval training and shooting was a good distraction from and inspiration towards our own efforts!!

However, even over the weekends and Vienna school's half term, the tracks were fairly quiet.



The view at 0700 from my room!!

Obertilliach village, a 2.5km ski from the biathlon centre, has a wider variety of self-catering, B&B and hotel accommodation and a couple of restaurants. For self catering there is a well stocked small Spar supermarket and, for all, a lovely bakery. I stayed in Hotel Gasthof Unterwoger which is delightful as you would expect from a family run alpine hotel. High standards of care, friendliness and quality seem to be in their DNA!! I do not eat red meat but my half board package gave me full choice of main courses.

Alan is based at the biathlon centre through Sport-Auer and their Madshus ski sponsorship link.

My plan for 2015 was to check out how long I need to get back into skiing and improve. So I went for 16 days including a day/night in Innsbruck on the way back. I did a week of local skiing with three 1-hour sessions with a Sport-Auer instructor to get my snow legs going and then the week with Alan. I would do 10 days in future and I am already planning to do the Achensee/3 Valleys event in February 2016.



Obertilliach has some excellent ski tracks and great scenery

The Dobbiaco-Cortina 38th Gran Fondo 'classic' marathon (www.dobbiacocortina.org/en/)

This was a truly fascinating experience with nearly 900 competitors from all over Europe, Scandinavia and Iceland plus eleven from the UK, three Australians and some North Americans. An impressive array of colourful and garish Lycra race suits started out from the World Cup Stadium surrounded by the towering Dolomites. You will be relieved to know I used a nice blue & black Sportful number in restrained pertex!

The race was reduced to 33km from 42km due to lack of snow at the original finish in Cortina and on the day this proved a good decision with an adverse weather forecast for the afternoon. The main ascent at 20km (with 330m of climb over 10km) and descent are along an old railway line across the Cimabanche Pass (altitude 1530m) but the first 3km and final 2km were on some more technically challenging loops. Our start was a bit chaotic with 100s queuing to get up the 1st steep climb, having to ski around fallers and human pile ups and having to do a slithering emergency stop to avoid being stabbed in the groin by a flailing ski pole.

I went around with a Vet60 Australian medical consultant who I met in training with Alan. Since we skied at similar pace we decided it was more social to pair up than flog around alone. That made it a great experience rather than a chore.

Although the whole route was stunning there was an amazing part where the railway used to cross a gorge at 1450m. There were cuttings with 500m drops, a bridge over a chasm and two tunnels – one was so long there was no light (just a few faint bulbs) and if you didn't lift your sunglasses you had the scary, liberating, experience of skiing blind!! I tried it for 50m then realised this was a bit silly for a 64 year old!

The last section in Fiames was a challenge as Tony was getting really tired and is less that confident on steep downhills and tight turns. This really slowed us up. But I was not about to leave my Aussie mate to his own devices . . . though his sporting gibes tempted me (I would just mention Jonny's drop goal in 2003 and he went very quiet)!

The snow storm hit at 25km which made the last bit very taxing, but we finished laughing and I out-sprinted Tony with a World Cup style slide across the finish – this looks brilliant unless you fall (then you look totally stupid)!! Luckily I did not fall and then there was a lovely welcome by the hosts who gave out finisher's medals, removed timing chips and gave each of us a warming hug!!

We were in the final group but by no means last. And amazingly I had no aches the next day. I have become obsessive about yoga type stretches after all training, rollerskiing, nordic walking, rowing and light weights and that seems to work as well as helping to create endurance conditioning. It is even more important for the relatively inexperienced and older skier. Waxing choice is obviously vital as losing grip and sudden slips can lead to groin and calf muscle strains. Alan's advice was spot on, and the fresh layer of wax at the Swix 'stop' just before the long climb was perfect.

The only downside was the 45 min wait in snow squalls with 60 others to get a shuttle bus back to the start and our lift home to Obertilliach - it was the Tower of Babel with various chants of 'why are we waiting' in many European languages - much to the amusement of the Carabinieri and Polizia who were trying to get us to queue instead of huddle like Emperor Penguins!! It was all in great humour with a true sense of exhausted and elated camaraderie!!

On the bus back Tony and I agreed that while the experience which may have re-defined the word 'enjoy', it was immensely worthwhile for us 'lowlanders . . . and I am so inspired I am looking towards the Achensee 3 Valley Races which coincide with my 66th in 2016.

John Peatfield

Tyneside Loipers go Telemarking in Italy...

Three lucky members of Tyneside Loipers had a superb week in the Aosta Valley with great weather and superb snow, and with expert coaching by one of the UK's top telemarkers. It all started when I was approached by Ros Grant-Brown after the inaugural 1-hour roller ski event at York last August (Ed.). She told me there were 2 or 3 places available on a holiday that she was organising in Italy. I and Jon Mellor and Neil Waters jumped at the chance. This is Ros's story of our week in Gressoney...

**A Smashin' Telemark Trip to Gressoney, Aosta Valley, Italy
(18-25 January, 2015)**

Having had no telemark tuition for several years and aware of the recent demise of the SSE telemark/cross-country week at Kvitavattn, I decided to get together a group of friends and hire our own telemark tutor. Our coach was Chris Stewart, former UK telemark ski champion and son of well-known telemark guru Andy Stewart. Although aged only 27, Chris comes with excellent qualifications: he has the highest level of BASI and SSE telemark coaching awards as well as a first degree in sports coaching, and he is currently preparing a Master's degree in strength and conditioning; he also owns his own gym near Clitheroe and works as a fitness trainer for local rugby clubs and schools. His professionalism, ski knowledge, coaching eye, patience, helpfulness, and sheer youthful good humour, are all second to none. The group of friends I hired him to coach are a mixed bunch in terms of age (from 37 to 72), skiing experience (from gnarly heli-skiers to those from a more touring or alpine background), and equipment (from the latest NTN gear to the more classic 7TM and Chili bindings). Chris coped with all of this diversity extremely well.

We chose Gressoney in Italy, a number of the group having already been there a few times and it is something of a well-kept secret (so please keep it to yourselves...!). Situated in a beautiful valley that culminates in the stunning Monte Rosa massif, which leads the eye towards the Matterhorn, it is an excellent resort that is only an hour and a half from Turin airport. Moreover, being in Italy, it works out much cheaper than either France or Switzerland and there are hardly any queues for the lifts, especially during the week. It is suitable for intermediate and advanced skiers and offers a lot of possibilities for off-piste touring.

We booked the holiday through Crystal, which was a little complicated since we were coming from four different UK airports. By luck we chose the right week to go in January, since it was only shortly before our arrival in the resort that a decent dump of snow arrived. We were also lucky in having a top-up of fresh powder snow at the start of the holiday which gave lovely skiing for much of the week. Gressoney itself is a series of three different villages, the lowest of the three being St Jean (where our hotel was situated) which is a delightful medieval village full of interesting houses and buildings, as well as having a rather attractive small cross-country ski track that we vowed to make proper use of in future years...

Chris had a different theme for each half-day of coaching. He covered key topics such as posture (more forward-leaning than I previously appreciated), rate of turns (varying between long cruisy GS turns and short turns down the fall line), range of movement (standing tall to unweight the skis and deep flexing and pressurising to increase grip on the snow, particularly on icy slopes), rhythm (trying to achieve evenness through a series of turns), and line (looking down the slope and anticipating where to turn). We had a full range of conditions to work with during the holiday, some of them more testing than others, as we learnt how to cope with hard-packed, scraped steep slopes towards the end of a day, and to enjoy freshly powdered pistes whilst the snow fell continuously for hours on end in the middle of the week.

Although the variable visibility proved challenging on one or two days, we were also rewarded with a couple of stunning days where we were able to cruise around the resort, skiing into some beautiful areas, such as the small ski stations of Frachey and Champoluc on the one side, and Alagna on the other. Our mornings of coaching were enlivened by Chris's encouraging cries of "That was awesome!" when we managed to perform correctly one of the many warm up exercises we did each day, or "You've smashed it!" when we were able to complete a run in the style of telemark skiing that we were attempting to use for a particular terrain and set of conditions.

My favourite day was that when Chris taught us how to identify and practise the different telemark skiing styles used by different nations. The one thing we were determined not to do was to be too easily identified as British skiers with arms and legs all over the place and foot pressure randomly applied. Unfortunately, our nationality was all too evident when we attempted to do 360-degree turns on the snow and succeeded only in amusing the skiers on the chair lift overhead as we fell all over the place as if a sniper were picking us off one by one...

In short, we had an excellent and inspirational week under Chris's leadership, in a beautiful area that poses excellent challenges and offers real treats for the skier who is prepared to rise to the occasion. Our heartfelt thanks go to our wonderful coach who truly "smashed it" in delivering top-quality tuition to a group of skiers who are already eager to get back out on the slopes with him in charge next year...

Ros Brown-Grant

Just a few days after we returned from Italy, Jon and Neil and I spent a day at Weardale ski area. Feeling very confident from our week of coaching with Chris Stewart, we soon got into our stride and put on a good show, telemarking in near perfect conditions. The sun was shining and there were good stretches of virgin snow beside a gully to one side of the lower lift and on the higher part of the hill too. We really enjoyed our day.

The Weardale Ski Club has two drag lifts (Pomas). They took a while to get going on the day that we were there but normally they work quite effectively. Jon had joined the club last season when there was little or no snow, so this was his second year of membership and his first day of skiing at Weardale! Temporary Membership for one day is available at a cost of £20 but is usually only allowed on weekdays. More information is available on the club website <http://www.skiweardale.com/>

Alan Mitcham



Jon telemarking the gully at Weardale... and Alan skiing down the lift line.



Gressoney Italy... Our tutor Chris Stewart. And top telemark skiers Neil Waters, Jon Mellor and Ros Grant-Brown



And more from Weardale... Jon carving through fresh snow



Guiding Blind Skiers in Seefeld

Last year, 2014, after deciding to do my usual trip to the World Masters, I came across a plea for competent skiers to guide blind cross-country skiers on a week in Seefeld. It tickled my fancy as I felt I wanted to do something a bit different. Also I was familiar with the idea, since there is a partially sighted skier who regularly competes in the World Masters and back when I got the cross-country skiing bug in Kvitavtn (in 1976!) I remember a couple of young blind skiers being guided round the loipe there. As it turned out the dates worked perfectly, so I could easily travel west from Pillerseetal (the venue for the Masters) to Seefeld to join the blind skiers group. Another bonus was that the group were going to stay at the Krinserhof which the Loipers have used before and enjoyed.

I confess to being a bit nervous to start with but, as the group began to assemble in the hotel on the first evening, it became clear that it was going to be a friendly experience. The lead guide Pam, turned out to be very experienced and we also had another couple who had guided on previous such trips in the past. Linda was co-organiser and is an old-hand as a blind skier. There was roughly one guide per skier.

After a briefing the next morning we headed for the start of the tracks (down by the Olympic Centre for those who know Seefeld). This gave us a chance to learn how our blind companions like to be steered and warned of steps and kerbs. Some were completely blind, others had some degree of sight (some had tunnel vision or could just see light and shade).

The great thing about classic skiing is that most of the time we ski in tracks so to an extent the tracks guide the skier; but the tricky thing is to guide a blind skier into those tracks. This can be a bit like the old "Golden Shot" game show but there are accepted instructional words for the guide to use and gradually the team of guide and skier get better at the task. Once in the tracks the key for the guide is to be looking ahead and giving sufficient verbal feedback for the skier to be confident that they won't get any nasty surprises, so they can be ready to cope with the accelerations of downhills and corners and also adjust their effort to keep momentum uphill.

If you watched the Sochi Olympics you may have seen guides skiing in front of their skier and having a loudspeaker in a bum bag. This wasn't the preferred option in our group. Mostly the guide skied a few metres behind, either in the same track or, where it was hard to see around a corner, in a parallel track or to one side. During the training phase of the new guides we swapped who we guided to learn different styles of communication. One of my biggest challenges was skiing with Jimmy from Scotland who is a very competent downhill skier who practises at Hillend. Going down some of the steeper hills it was hard to keep up and even harder anticipating how he would manage the bends and advising him how hard to turn. Luckily he was unhurt when he crashed and he was quite sanguine about my incompetence.

Teaching the less experienced skiers was also a challenge, particularly herringboning and snowploughing since the usual method (demonstrating the technique for them to copy) was ruled out. Choosing effective words became the key to success from our side but the courage of the skier to launch themselves down a hill they are dimly aware of was impressive (and humbling). Their success, when it came, was very satisfying.

The trip wasn't all concentration and slow steady skiing. There was plenty of time for light relief, laughter and conversation, on all sorts of subjects, both at the strategically sited track-side cafes and bars and back in the hospitable Krinserhof hotel. For me the trip was an enlightening experience and also a great way of recovering from my exertions at the World Masters the week before. I'd recommend it to anyone who is a reasonable Nordic skier and would like to help others enjoy the sport. I would be happy to pass on the contact details of Pam and Linda if you are interested in next year's trip.

Alasdair Wilson Crow.

Tyneside Loipers go Telemarking in Morillon, France (2-13th Feb)

Down out of the clear, crystalline world of the summit ridge, the piste suddenly plunged headlong into the sea of fog that filled the valley. We had already skied two thirds of the 10 mile long Piste des Cascades, starting from the 2480m summit of Les Grandes Platieres, skating and loiping along the long flat sections of the track that contoured around the ridge. We were getting hungry, and the piste map showed an intriguing possibility for a late lunch – a restaurant in the middle of the forest. Sure enough, there was the sign for the Le Gite du Lac de Gers at a junction in the track. Even better, since the track towards the restaurant was uphill, the sign advertised a “taxiscoot” service - and there was a phone to summon the transport.

Five minutes later a snowmobile roared out of the mist and pulled up beside us. Off stepped the Old Man of the Mountains, with a face honed by sun and wind as hard and sharp as an axe. As he handed each of us a rope tied to the snowmobile's trailer he looked down at Neil's skis and his flinty face cracked into a broad smile. Then he glanced at my skis too and beamed. “Telemark!” he said. He raced off at a cracking pace with us in tow like charioteers.

At a rather ramshackle old wooden chalet, the Old Man of the Mountains gestured to an entrance around the other side of the building and vanished into another door. The welcome from the *maîtresse d'hôtel* was as frosty as the weather outside, though. She shooed us back out onto the terrace telling us there were many people waiting before us. But in a moment the Old Man of the Mountains reappeared, beckoned us inside, ushered us to a cosy corner and brought us drinks while we waited for our table. Two hours later, fortified by the *Plat du Jour* of wild boar with rice, we headed back into the fog to ski down the steep, narrow and icy final few km to Sixt and catch the free ski bus back to Morillon. What a civilised way to ski!

Neil had been offered the use for 10 days of a friend's small apartment in a small, attractive family resort of Morillon 1100, part of the Grand Massif ski area. He put out an invitation to other Loipers to join him and I flew out to Geneva with Neil on 2nd Feb. His friend Jo, from Edinburgh, joined us two days later. Tim and Penny were due to join us the day after that, but sadly due to a family illness they were unable to come.

Half a metre or more of snow had fallen just before we arrived and the avalanche risk was high, but the pistes were in perfect condition. With Neil fresh from his Telemark course, he set about coaching me. I've skied downhill on freeheel gear for the past few years, but after trying – and failing quite spectacularly – to learn Telemark technique, I had always reverted to parallel turns. This time I cracked it – the technique that is, rather than any bones. Soon, under Neil's tuition, I was linking Telemark turns on a lovely gentle green run through the trees. I have to confess, however, that on the steeper runs I reverted to parallel.

Over six days we explored a lot of the Grand Massif area, but without fresh snow and with increasing crowds as the French half-term started, the pistes became rather less fun. So, over the last three days we snowshoed and skinned up the hill. Skinning up a path through sun-dappled pine-woods was magical. Thickly laden with snow, the trees hushed all sound from the pistes only 200m away and we only heard birdsong. What a contrast to the hurly-burly of crowded Flaine, where we had been just a couple of days before. I'm not a fan of the huge Alpine resorts, but this trip showed that you don't have to go far to escape from the crowds and to enjoy a more authentic and unsullied experience of the mountains.

Bill Haylock

More Photos

Tyneside Loipers in Morillon – The Piste des Cascades, Plenty of Snow (outside our apartment), and Skinning through the Forest



Heather in Switzerland....

Pat skiing along the Allenheads flue

..... and Alasdair's trip to Seefeld guiding blind skiers



Seefeld comes up trumps again

Seefeld proved itself to be perfect once again for a week of great track skiing, nice cafes and brilliant snow – a week without ice, Bliss!

Five of us went out for the last week of January. Our cross-country ski gear was excellent, hired from Modern Ski Rental and Service, Moosweg 394, www.modern-ski.at. They even happily lent different size right and left boots to help cope with odd feet! Groundwork done by Carolyn Hawkes whilst in Seefeld two weeks before may have helped the good deal – pay in cash, but they are highly recommended.

Day one was getting our ski legs back on the extensive local tracks. This included a break to watch England play (and win!) in the international snow polo championships, a far more gentle sport than we imagined, and, of course, a visit to the Tennis Club bar. Day two was lessons for our two beginners and a first explore of the excellent walking tracks. Jane D and Marge were breaking themselves in gently but took to the skiing like ducks to water and were soon with us on some of the red loipes (and a bit of black). We skied over at the Wildmoos area and rendezvous-ed with the others for ‘the best apple strudel’ (according to the Crystal rep) at café Fereinheim Wildmoos (it was good).

On Day 3, we all headed to the Leutasch Valley, into strong winds, and driving snow. The warmth and soup at Zur Muhle at the bottom of the valley hit the spot very nicely. Next day, the sun shone on us as we explored the upper part of the Leutasch Valley, skiing between the villages and round the Panorama Loop. During the rest of the week, fresh snow meant that the run to Scharnitz was open (a first according to Carolyn who is a veteran of Seefeld) giving a lovely ski down through the trees, past the car skidding play area, to the open valley to Scharnitz and nearly to the border with Germany. We splashed out 2 euros to ride back to Seefeld on the train, and some of us then carried on skiing. Other runs, previously closed, were also open and explored by Carolyn and Pat. We enjoyed a floodlit ski after looking at the ice sculptures and even managed to fit in a good ski on the morning of our flight home. Quite apart from the 250 km of ski tracks and excellent value bus and ski pass (21 euros all in, for the week) another bonus of Seefeld is that you can fly from Newcastle with a transfer time of only 30 minutes.

Loipers Carolyn Hawkes, Pat Lynch and Jane Brantom, and cross country beginners Jane Dammers and Marge Craig, booked through Crystal Holidays and stayed at a combination of Hotel Stefanie, Krinserhof and Garni. Food and facilities at the Stefanie were fabulous and we all really enjoyed the family feel – and a concert too at the Krinserhof one evening.

Jane Brantom

Fresh back from Seefeld, Pat and Jane were skiing up the Allenheads flue the following day and then out again a few days later with Carolyn heading up and down Doctors Hush towards Killhope Law. It was great to get back to local snow! ...Jane



The Loipers in Seefeld
...and Carolyn, slightly off-piste!

WALKING IN LA PALMA & SKIING IN SALLA

+30 deg to -30 deg in 8 weeks - from lava fields to snow fields

In December 2013 we discovered the joys of warm weather walking on the volcanic island of La Gomera in the Canaries. For December 2014, we decided to explore the neighbouring island of La Palma. It is the most westerly island, still largely unspoilt, and probably the greenest. Although quite small, it rises from sea level to 2400m in a very short distance.

Some guide books suggest using a car but we prefer using local transport to give us more freedom with routes. We decided on 2 centres – Los Llanos (Aridane Hotel) on the east and Barlovento (La Palma Romantica) in the north east. This proved to be a great solution as there are plenty of buses connecting Los Llanos to most parts of the island (it is the second largest town on the island) and buses were cheap and reliable. The occasional taxi also proved useful. Both centres have very different landscapes and climates.

From Los Llanos we could explore the Caldera as well as the long volcanic ridge which runs as a spine down the South of the island. The Caldera is a huge crater bowl surrounded by the remnants of the volcanoes which formed the island; at the highest point there are several observatories overlooking it. Inside the crater there are 'laurisilva forests' – deep, dark and lush. To the south, there are lava fields (which look newly made, almost as if they are still moving), vast banana plantations, beaches with black volcanic sand, steep barrancos (gorges) taking you from sea level to precipitous heights and small villages where there are small holdings and terraced vegetable plots.

One walk from Los Llanos took us to an eerie, Pico Bejenado, with ravens and brightly coloured chaffinches and stupendous views over the whole Caldera.

Another walk was into the Caldera itself, taxi access only, deep into the forest, crossing streams and arriving at a small restricted campsite before taking the downward walk through the chasms and river beds and the main gorge (including the multi-coloured waterfall) and eventually back to the main valley.

We also did a short walk across an amazing lava field, starting in pine forests but taking us across the field itself where already plants are striving to re-establish themselves. The rocks were black and looked almost in motion, with weird wrinkles on the surface and huge trees hanging on by their roots. The 30 year-old lava flows narrowly missed the village below.

A long, winding and interesting bus journey took us to Barlovento and our second base – a family-run hotel. It rains a lot more here but the reward is the chance to explore some of the laurisilva forests and the dramatic barrancos along the wild North coast. The coastal walks take you from sea-level to the terraces and villages on the headlands, simply stunning! There is *a lot of up and down* but the well made paths zig-zag to ease the gradients. And the flora is wonderful, all kinds of plants, some of which are only found in these areas; always lush and beautiful.

With 4x4 access, there's also a walk along a levada (water channel) which goes through a dozen tunnels (head torch and cagoule required) winding its way through the hillsides before an amazing descent through a wonderfully forested gorge.



The NE coast, with its zig-zag path

The Caldera from Bejenado

Emerging from one of the levada tunnels

La Palma is a fabulous island and worth the time to discover its beauties, views, people and walks. Paddy Dillon has written a Cicerone Guide and there are reasonable maps available. There's a good information and exhibition centre near Los Llanos. There are direct flights (with Thomsons). It is strongly recommended – we'll be going back!

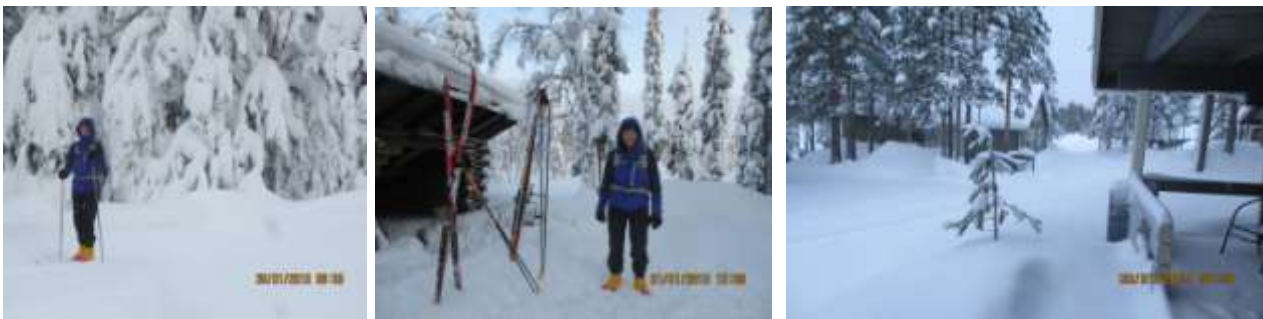
A FEW WEEKS LATER...

Browsing the ski offers on our return from La Palma in December we discovered an extremely good offer from Crystal for a week, self-catering, in a log cabin in Salla, Finland. We'd not been to Salla before so we decided to give it a go.

Sallatunturin is a small resort, very quiet (much less developed than nearby Ruka) which makes it all the nicer. It styles itself as *the middle of (s)nowhere*. It is a 90 minute transfer from Kuusamo airport. We had a supermarket stop to get in supplies for those of us who were self-catering. And we also stopped for a photo opportunity at the Arctic Circle – a plaque marks the line.

There are, in theory, 160kms of trails; however, many of these are not cut until week 7 (mid-February). This left only 52kms of open pisted tracks, but with the joy of skiing fresh snow this was just about adequate. Skiing routes several times made no real difference to the experience – no track is the same twice (or even 4 times), conditions are different, weather is different, and you are in a different frame of mind. The black runs were challenging, not because of speed but because of using skinny skis in deep fresh powder (it came nearly up to our knees before the piste basher arrived).

The tracks were delightfully quiet and meandered through deep forest with snow laden trees making those fantastical figures, peopled with Moomins, trolls and other mythological creatures (yes, we were sober!) and it was especially vivid when skiing on the night tracks. From the track around the ski hill there were wonderful views over towards the Russian border as well as seeing the ski slopes (these too were very quiet).



Lots of deep fresh snow... and the view from our cabin

Weather wise we were lucky that temperatures were balmy for the time of the year, around minus 12 to minus 2 and lots of fresh snow (it had been minus 30 the previous week). This made the waxing easy and the grip was great. We had fresh snow most days – quite fine but settling into deep powder. The conditions were best for classic style. On our final day, it was sunny and the views were stupendous and the light created a magical atmosphere. There was a mist in the valley from the inversion which made the scenery even more spectacular.

Not many café or sausage cooking stops - but the Reindeer Farm was a real gem, a friendly café with hot drinks, doughnuts, pleasant staff and an informative visitor centre – it also had a souvenir shop and stalls with locally made handicrafts (including beautiful hand knitted shawls – one less now). This is where the husky and reindeer trips begin. The reindeer chew quietly and the huskies bay lustily, while waiting for the next trip.

One of our routes took us to the town of Salla (a small working town, not a ski resort) which has a beautiful church with a pyramidal bell tower next to it – modern architecture (Aalto style) with a sense of space and place. It's also a good ski route, undulating and meandering for about 10kms from Sallatunturin, and has a couple of

extra loops, all of which are lit at night.

We'd certainly go again to enjoy the peace and tranquillity, and the fresh clean snow, and (if the nights are clear) the Northern Lights. We are also considering a summer/autumn walking trek through Salla which is called the UKK (240km).

Judi Webb and Peter Sedgwick

Bits and Pieces

A reminder from Alasdair Wilson about roller skiing.... He is planning a 2 hour local ski tour for Sunday 22 February (contact him if you are interested). He is also happy to give roller ski instruction at other times, and keen to do training sessions on Town Moor or other local venues.

Yorkshire Dales XC Ski Club are doing another 1 hour (and half hour option) roller ski endurance race on Sunday 8 March at the York Sport Village new cycle track. Alasdair and Alan are both planning to take part and would be happy to share a car with anyone else keen to join us.

Thanks to Nuala for organising the post-Xmas meal at The Sky Apple. Fourteen of us enjoyed some superb food and a lovely venue!

Seen Kevin Moore's 2013 Canada Skiing video..? Here is another (Kevin and Kimberley's 2014 ski trip to Japan) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NCmUsq92A-Q> Skiing in thigh deep powder – very impressive!

FOR SALE

Leather boots for Nordic touring, size 7 Alico, 75mm 3-pin fitting. Brand new, never used. Too big for me! Pat Lynch – ph 01661 823960 or e-mail trishwylam@yahoo.co.uk

And lots of skis! Contact Alan Mitcham....

Asnes 215cm – quality wooden skis with 75mm 3-pin bindings. Well used but good condition. £40 minimum (donation to the club). Lovely to own and use but get some advice on base preparation first!

Alpina 200cm track skis, fishscale base with SNS bindings. £25 minimum (donation).

Kastle 185mm track skis, fishscale base, with 75mm 3-pin bindings. Offers, donation to the club.

Fischer 170cm track skis, fishscale base, NNN bindings. Plus size 38 track boots and 120cm poles. Offers!

Fischer 140cm kids skis with fishscale base and no bindings. Free!

Plus several pairs of metal-edged touring skis (between 200 and 215cm) all with waxing base. Free!

Nordic touring boots – two pairs, about sizes 8½ and 9, 75mm 3-pin fitting. Free!

Club Skis and Boots

And don't forget the club has a good stock of skis and boots for hire by club members (at a nominal charge of £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).

Finally... Skiing at Dalseter, Norway

As mentioned in the last newsletter, Dalseter Høyfjellshotell is organising a daily programme of skiing for UK guests between 21st February and 28th March 2015 with UK leaders acting as hosts/guides. Suitable for all levels, including beginners, there are options for skiing both on- and off-track.

Our own John Mordue is leading through most of March. Accommodation for 7 nights with full board in shared room costs between £450 and £550 (flights and transfers are additional).

**Contact details for further information/bookings:**

Email: post@dalseter.no Telephone: +47 61 29 99 10

<http://www.dalseter.no/engelsk-web/index-uk.html>

John and Sue Dark are booked for the week 21st to 28th March (one of the weeks being led by John Mordue). They are flying out on an early flight via Amsterdam and would be delighted if other Loiper members would join them for the week. John Dark can be contacted on j.h.dark@ncl.ac.uk

E-mail addresses

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