



# TYNESIDE LOIPERS

The NorthEast's Specialist  
Cross Country Ski club



## Newsletter May 2015

A bit later than planned, this latest newsletter has lots of good articles – thanks to all contributors. Good to hear that everyone had a successful winter and did lots of skiing. The next newsletter is due in October.

2	From the Editor	7	Mistaya Lodge, the sequel, by Tim Owen
2	Summer Outings	9	SSE Nordic Skills Coaching Week, by Mike Hall
3	Roller Skiing and Snowsport England Coaching	10	Cross Country Skiing at Dalseter, by Susan Dark
3	Indoor on-snow Telemark Festivals, June-August	11	Ski Touring in Skarvheimen, by Heather Dickinson
3	The End of Season Meet in Wylam	12	Graham Harkness - Thoughts on XC Ski Equipment
4	Tyneside Loipers Scotland Weekend Feb 2015	14	Norway at its Best, by Vivienne Brown
4	Tyneside Loipers in Arctic Sweden	15	More roller skiing
5	Tyneside Loipers at Mistaya Lodge in the Rockies		

### Club Events

Thurs 21 May	End of Season Meet, Pat's house, Wylam.
Tues 16 June	Coastal bird-watching walk, Druridge Bay. See page 2. Contact Alan
Tues 14 July	Evening walk and pub meal, Hexhamshire. See page 2. Contact Jane
August t.b.a	Saturday bike ride, quiet lanes, contact Keith.
August t.b.a	Saturday off-road bike ride, Kielder or Alston, contact Alan.
22/23 <sup>rd</sup> August 2015	SSE roller-ski coaching, Hetton Lyons Park, see page 3.
27 June, 11 July, 22 Aug	SSE Telemark Events - Tamworth, Glasgow, H/Hempstead, page 3.

Keith Walker (Chair)	<a href="mailto:jkeithwalker@hotmail.com">jkeithwalker@hotmail.com</a>	07969 021680
Charlie Fisher (Secretary)	<a href="mailto:charlie.fisher@phonecoop.coop">charlie.fisher@phonecoop.coop</a>	0191 261 7719
Pat Lynch (Treasurer)	<a href="mailto:trishwylam@yahoo.co.uk">trishwylam@yahoo.co.uk</a>	01661 853475
Alasdair Wilson (Racing Officer)	<a href="mailto:awilson.craw@blueyonder.co.uk">awilson.craw@blueyonder.co.uk</a>	0191 266 2327
Alan Mitcham (Membership Sec)	<a href="mailto:alanmitcham@metronet.co.uk">alanmitcham@metronet.co.uk</a>	01661 823960
Paramjeet Bhogal (Child Protection Officer)	<a href="mailto:paramjeet.bhogal@newcastle.gov.uk">paramjeet.bhogal@newcastle.gov.uk</a>	0191 266 5052
Neil Waters (committee member)	<a href="mailto:neilstanleywaters@hotmail.com">neilstanleywaters@hotmail.com</a>	01661 853361

Club website [www.tynesideloipers.org.uk](http://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**

Most of us have had a pretty good ski season from what I have heard so far. Norway seems to have been popular, judging from the articles in this newsletter. And many of us have been further afield. Several of us went to Canada (British Columbia) and had some great skiing, though apparently this was not a great snow year for western Canada (more in this newsletter). And several Loipers have been skiing in the Alps and cross-country touring in Finland.

Commiserations to Barney Pilgrim who signed up for a guided tour in the Silvretta Alps (Austria) and suffered a serious injury (ruptured ACL, torn meniscus and tibial plateau fracture) after a slow speed fall on the first day, when his (alpine) bindings failed to release. Good luck for your recovery, Barney. Make sure you are fit for next season.

There was unexpectedly good skiing in Scotland towards the end of the season. Bill and Cally Cooper were touring on the top of the Cairngorm ski area as recently as the May Bank Holiday weekend. They both seem delighted with their lightweight Nordic skis and boots, bought just a few months ago.

They are not the only ones with new skis – Heather has ditched her old Asnes skis and upgraded to some very nice lightweight skis which can be fitted with half-skins for waxless touring when none of the usual waxes seem to work. Their trip to Norway in March has prompted Graham to write down some interesting observations about ski touring equipment.

The club weekend in Scotland in February was excellent. Not the best weather or snow conditions that we could have expected, but it proved to be a very enjoyable and sociable weekend and everyone (12 of us) got to do some skiing, and some of us a bit of munro-bagging. The club hut-touring trip to Sweden was very good also. There are a few photos in this newsletter – a full report will be published in October.

### **Summer Outings**

We have a few ideas already for Loipers summer activities. Hopefully you can join us on one or more of the following. (More outings are planned – a bike ride on quiet country lanes, led by Keith for a Saturday in August, and an off-road bike ride, led by Alan, also probably in August).

On Tuesday 16 June we will be doing a coastal bird-watching walk, starting from Cresswell. Coffee and scones at the Drift Cafe and then a gentle wander up the coast calling in at Cresswell Pond, Druridge Pools and East Chevington. The Northumberland coast has lots of good birds to offer, and we would hope to see spoonbills and little egrets, terns, marsh harriers, lots of wildfowl and waders, nesting swallows and various warbler species, and many more. The likely meeting time is early afternoon, depending on who is coming along. Let me know if you would like to join us – we can fix the time to suit the majority (Alan Mitcham).

We are also planning a sailing and canoeing outing, across in Ullswater in September, courtesy of Bill Haylock and Jane Brantom. Bill and Jane both have sailing boats and there will be room for quite a few people to sail together. The date, or weekend, will be confirmed shortly.

On Tuesday 14 July, Jane Brantom is organising an evening walk, about 4 or 5 miles around Devil's Water near Slaley, finishing with an evening meal at the Traveller's Rest. We are expecting to be shown some of the industrial archaeology at recently restored Dukesfield Arches.

### **Roller Skiing and Snowsport England Coaching Weekends**

I enjoyed a good roller ski session with Alasdair earlier this month. We skied around the tarmac paths and up the (dreaded!) hill at Weetslade Country Park. It was a good session and Alasdair as usual gave me a few useful tips on technique. He is happy to give formal lessons too. A number of Loipers have shown interest in roller skiing. We will shortly be setting some dates for group skiing at Hetton Lyons CP (near Durham) through the summer.

The Snowsport England coaching weekend at Hetton Lyons is August 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>. If you are interested in learning or improving your skiing skills on rollers, please sign up soon. There will be coaching for all levels from near beginner up to advanced. More details from the organiser [helenbell115@btinternet.com](mailto:helenbell115@btinternet.com)

The Hetton Lyons weekend will also feature a roller ski race on the Saturday afternoon. This year it will be an 8-lap race (4 laps of classic style and 4 laps skating). There will also be a shorter race for novices. Help would be appreciated with marshalling, timing, lap-counting, etc. Otherwise come along to spectate.

### **Telemark Festivals at Manchester, Glasgow, Tamworth and Hemel Hempstead**

Snowsport England are organising a series of Telemark Festivals through the summer, skiing indoors on artificial snow. The series started off at the Chill Factore in Manchester and continues with events at Glasgow, Tamworth and Hemel Hempstead. The respective dates are 27/28<sup>th</sup> June, 11/12<sup>th</sup> July and 22/23<sup>rd</sup> August. The Saturday dates are primarily for coaching of telemark skiing technique whilst the Sundays are for competitions. I understand there will be a high standard of coaching for all levels from beginner onwards. If you would like to sign up for any of these events, get in touch with the organiser Stephen Johns, [johnsy8grimsar@gmail.com](mailto:johnsy8grimsar@gmail.com)

You might also like to have a look at the promotional video on YouTube, See <https://youtu.be/Zihsrrp5RM0>

### **End of Season Meet – Thurs 21 May**

The End of Season social has been and gone – sorry, the newsletter was meant to be out before the event!

Many thanks to Pat Lynch for hosting the evening in Wylam, especially when in the throes of selling the house and moving to Hexham. It was an excellent evening with a good turnout (15 of us). Lots of good food and wine were consumed and we finished with a slide show - your photos from this winter's ski trips, including Morillon, Gressoney, Scotland, Seefeld, Canada, Sweden, Weardale, Finland (a really good mixture). Thanks to all who turned up and made the evening a success!

### **Tyneside Loipers Scotland Weekend – Feb 2015**

The helpful information from Braemar Mountain Sports was not quite what we wanted to hear “You should have been on Wednesday”, they said. John Dark and Neil Waters and I travelled up on Thursday evening and checked in to one of the log cabins at the Braemar Lodge Hotel. Everyone else arrived on Friday afternoon or evening and we had a full complement of 12 Loipers in two adjacent cabins (Tim and Penny, Steve, Paramjeet, Gillian, Lewis and Dave plus Bill and his son Tim). The accommodation was ideal for the twelve of us and we somehow managed to sort out the self-catering between us. (Thoughts of having a bar meal at the Fife Arms on Saturday night were soon dashed when we realised that the hotel was closed for renovation.) It was a convivial weekend.

Apparently the snow conditions mid week had been just about perfect, with lots of snow down right down to Braemar village centre. Then on Wednesday evening the temperature shot up to double figures accompanied by lots of rain. By the end of the week, the snow was looking very patchy, even right up on the ski hill.

We took advice from Braemar Mountain Sports on Friday morning and then headed up to the Glenshee Ski Centre. We soon found more than enough snow and we skinned from the car park past the western boundary of the ski area and eventually topped out on a Munro, Carn Gheoidh, at 975m above sea level (a new Munro for me – not that I have been counting!) We had a good ski down on almost continuous snow (only took skis off once) ending up at Loch Vrotachan and then a short ascent with climbing skins back to the ski area where we chanced to meet Tim and Penny. We hitched one ride up Butchart's for a quick run down the piste and then departed for an afternoon cuppa at The Cairnwell cafe.

Everyone was keen to get skiing on Saturday morning. The forecast was for high winds and above zero temperatures but in fact the wind speed was not as bad as expected. Again we skinned up from the car park (twelve of us) and headed over towards Loch Vrotachan. Gillian was using a split snowboard – a first for Tyneside Loipers. Above the lochan there was a good band of snow going up around 100 metres. We did two or maybe three runs (those of us on Telemark gear managed to do some reasonable linked turns). But by that time it was beginning to rain. A few of us decided to decamp to the cafe, The Bothy, attached to Braemar Mountain Sports (much recommended) down in the village. Others carried on and found a bigger and better snow gully. Gillian even bought a half day lift ticket and explored the rest of the ski area!

On Sunday morning the weather had changed again. The wind appeared to be stronger and there were frequent snow showers coming in. We decided to drive up to the Linn of Dee and we had a very pleasant walk up to Derry Lodge. We all went our separate ways home late Sunday morning, though a few of us met up again for a late lunch at the pottery cafe down in Glen Shee. It was an excellent weekend!

Alan Mitcham

### **Tyneside Loipers in Arctic Sweden – April 2015**

This too was an excellent trip. Alan, Greg, Dave and Lewis flew out to Kiruna north of the Arctic Circle. We took the train to Abisko, which is at the northern end of the Kungsleden, and from there we skied south, staying on the way at some of the very good mountain huts run by the Swedish Touring Federation STF. We skied through some excellent and very scenic terrain and we met some interesting people along the way. Sadly we didn't manage to ski to the summit of Kebnekaise which was one objective of our trip. We nevertheless did some great skiing and hope to return to that area another year. A proper report will appear in the next newsletter.

### **Tyneside Loipers go Telemarking in the Rockies - Mistaya Lodge, Canada, March 2015**

Twelve Brits (6 of us from Tyneside Loipers) flew out to the Canadian Rockies in mid-March. Most of us took the BA flight to Calgary on Thursday 12<sup>th</sup>. Tim and Penny, Kevin and Kimberley, and Greg were already in Canada, acclimatising to the altitude and getting in practice at the local ski resorts (Sunshine Resort just west of Banff had good snow and offered a good range of pisted runs). Those of us who arrived on the Thursday had just a couple of spare days before we were due to meet in Golden BC to be helicoptered out to Mistaya Lodge.

Tim and Penny had also been in touch with a local guide based in Canmore and roped me in for one day of ski touring, starting from Bow Lake, on the Icefields Parkway between Lake Louise and Jasper. The route took us across Bow Lake, then up the canyon and beneath a large glacier to the Bow Hut, where we had a short coffee stop. Then the most interesting part of the tour, we had another 600m of climbing to get to the St Nicholas col at about 2900m above sea level. Having only arrived the previous evening (with a 10-hour flight and 6 hours of jetlag and no chance to acclimatise) I struggled to make it up to the col. But Tim and Penny were very supportive. We finally made it and had a great run down to the Bow Hut, then down the canyon and back to the car. It worked out at about 14km, with 1000m of climbing – Phew!

Mistaya Lodge was fantastic! We met up for a meal in Golden on Saturday evening (which was very good) and early Sunday morning we were all kitted up and ready for our briefing at the local airfield before the helicopter transfer to Mistaya. Memories of my previous trip to Mistaya came flooding back as the helicopter came in to land on the snowfield just above the lodge. We helped carry bags and supplies down to the lodge and then had our introductory talk from the chief guide Dave (who is also the lodge owner).

After lunch we set out on the compulsory avalanche rescue drill (an hour or so of practising techniques for finding and digging out avalanche victims using our transceivers, probes, shovels). Then for the remainder of the afternoon we went out for a ski tour – about 300 metres of ascent with climbing skins on the open slopes above the lodge. Unfortunately the weather was closing in, the visibility was poor and it was lightly snowing – not the easiest of conditions for our first run down!

Mistaya Lodge is very comfortable. The lounge and dining area has large picture windows with views of the mountains dominated by the impressive Mount Baker and Mount Trapper and the snow-filled col which lies between them. We had plenty of room for us 12 Brits plus a Canadian couple, Steve and Carol, who were known to some of the group from a similar trip in 2014. We were well looked after by our cook, Grant, who served up excellent evening meals and energy-giving breakfasts. Outside the lodge there was a separate sauna hut which was fired up every evening (it was very well used).

On the day after our arrival, we had blue skies and little wind. We skinned up to Nexus Peak (about 800 metres of ascent) and had lunch sitting a little below the summit with fantastic views of neighbouring peaks. Most of us took off our skis and did the short walk up to the summit. Then we had perfect (indeed flattering!) snow for some 300m of descent. I was happy that I hadn't altogether lost the art of telemark skiing (though, needless to say, there was scope for improvement during the week!). Then we took out our climbing skins and did it all again. A great first day!

Day 2 was similar – we went up onto a peak called Boomerang, with a similar amount of ascent and more great snow. One very steep pitch proved quite challenging. Most of us managed fine, though the only person telemarking down this section was Kevin. David, our chief guide admitted it was 'more than 35 deg slope angle'. (Realistically it was 40 degrees!)

Day 3 dawned equally bright and we skinned up to the Baker-Trapper Col with fantastic views over the Wapta Icefield stretching for a great distance south towards Lake Louise. The good weather was coming to an end – it was getting cloudy and there was a biting wind coming over the col. That was the one day that I opted out of the extra run in the afternoon.

The next two days we suffered from mixed weather – some of the time we had sleety snow and poor visibility. But the conditions remained good enough to ski each day. I enjoyed it! Most of the time we avoided the open slopes and skied in the trees. One of the runs was called The Abyss – it was an interesting route skiing down through the trees (as long as you didn't carry on over the big drop)! Another route took us down a gully and finished in a big boulder field – around or over the boulders, it didn't really matter (either way was deep snow and very entertaining).

On our final day we again had good skiing and we did several runs. Sometimes it was almost sunny. At other times we waited a while at the start of the run for the light to improve so it was easier to ski. For the last run, we did the ascent and the ski down under a steady snowfall (wet snow). We finished as usual with a beer and a hot snack back in the lodge followed by a good soak in the sauna.

At breakfast on the Sunday we were briefed for the return helicopter transfer. As for the ride out, it was a very slick operation. I was on the third (and last) transfer and, because it was my birthday, the others let me sit in the front (next to the pilot). That was a great experience (and a slightly emotional one too). Will I be back again on another Canada lodge holiday? You bet! Special thanks go to Chief Guide Dave, Assistant Guide Dale, and Trainee Guide Jesse for making it such a great trip.

Alan Mitcham



Mistaya Lodge Day 1, setting out for Nexus Peak – blue sky and great snow!

Mistaya Lodge, the Sequel....(by Tim Owen)

After a great week in Mistaya Lodge various groups set off for home or other ski destinations in The Rockies. Penny, Alan and myself said our farewells at Golden airport and drove west in our hired car to Revelstoke via Rogers Pass. Revelstoke is an old railway town with a very much less touristy feel than Banff. The town preserves its basic structure from Victorian times. The ski resort has only been seriously developed in recent years and the economic downturn has probably prevented too much development so far. The ski "hill" is the massive Mount Mackenzie with a two mile gondola offering stunning views out over the wide Columbia valley. From the top, keen skiers climb up steep snow steps for 20 minutes to access the un-groomed North bowl. It claims the largest vertical descent of North America. I've seen figures from 1829 to 1713 as the vertical descent in feet. The local mountains host a large number of heli and cat skiing operations.

We found our accommodation, Guesthouse Mountain Escape, quite far out of town but closer to the ski area. This was a very comfortable two bedroom apartment with kitchen, BBQ and large hot tub in the garden, a very good base for the next few days. We took Alan out for a birthday pizza meal in town that evening.

The following day (Monday) we had a great day skiing with a guide exploring the back country. The group was small with just one Canadian teenager and us. The chat on the way up suggested he was a suicidal cliff jumper but the reality was less extreme. Our guide, Simon, found some great powder snow and believed that fast skiing outside one's comfort zone was technically helpful! We survived and felt we had earned our beers, hot tub and steak BBQ.

The next day (Tuesday) we decided on a gentler approach and hired cross country gear (classic) in town and drove five miles to The Revelstoke Nordic Ski Area, 17 miles of various grades of skis tracks run by volunteers. It was a lovely sunny day and great to be out in the woods. The tracks had plenty of climbs and descents. So we had an active fun day. We made a stop for a snack at the log cabin warming hut. Signs at the start warned of bear tracks having been seen but we returned having seen no bear. We headed back to base for the hot tub and BBQ.

We had booked in for two days cat skiing with K3 whose terrain is West of Revelstoke. This winter was a very poor snow year for Western Canada with milder temperatures and much less snow than usual. We had enjoyed excellent skiing so far, despite this, but it did affect the cat skiing. We were picked up by the operator on Wednesday morning and left the highway near Sicamous to start the ascent to the snow-cats in a 4 wheel drive vehicle. Snow was obviously short. We were allocated a snow-cat with 4 others, two father and son pairs, who were all extremely good skiers (two were telemarkers). We did a transceiver search drill before starting skiing. Conditions were tough with very poor visibility with the first few runs being crusty and steep. The snow quality got better but was at best heavy and wet as we did more northerly-facing runs. But tree skiing in poor visibility on steep runs is challenging! The guides coped well with our differing ski abilities. We returned back to base pretty exhausted and with varying degrees of satisfaction with the day. We packed up that evening and drove off early to Sicamous on Thursday morning where we were based for the second day cat skiing. It had rained all night with a freezing level just below where the cats set off from. Unsurprisingly the snow was again heavy. We were two large groups in two cats - we were looked after (again) by the patient and helpful French tail ski guide, Maille. It was another day of poor visibility and tough day skiing but it was good to have done it.

We had a night in Sicamous with a few jugs of beer with dinner to mark the end of skiing for this trip. The next day we drove to Vancouver stopping for lunch in Kamloops. We stretched our legs with a short walk in Derby Reach Regional Park through temperate rain forest. We dropped Alan off at the airport that evening. We stayed in Vancouver to meet up with friends for the weekend, reminding ourselves after a long gap what an amazing city it is before too returning home.

Tim Owen



**Mistaya Lodge**

Up towards the summit of Nexus Peak  
Perfect for Telemarking (Kevin Moore)  
The view across the Wapta Icefield



**Arctic Sweden**

A great touring day near the end of the trip. And evening sun at Kebnekaise Fjallstation.





**SSE Nordic Skills Week, Nordseter, Lillehammer March 2015 - by Mike Hall**

The train journey from Oslo Gardermoen to Lillehammer especially alongside Lake Mjosa provides for some stunning scenery. It was only at this point that I seriously began to ponder what I had let myself in for in signing up for the Snow Sport skills week. On arriving at the station in Lillehammer there were plenty of athletic-looking skiers, just having finished the arduous Birkebeiner. I had the feeling of having arrived late to the party. In fact it had suited me to arrive a day early and sneak a bit of extra practice in before everyone else arrived for the skills course the next day!

Whilst I had picked up the odd tip or two over the years, I had never really had any formal lessons on snow in skating and classic style. I knew I could cover the ground and get around Hetton Lyons on a pair of roller skis but I hadn't appreciated just how much my technique needed a make-over.

The quality of tuition was absolutely top class thanks to Patrick Winterton, Alan Easdon and Martin Watkins. I had gone with the intention of just wanting to improve my skating but began to appreciate the complimentary benefits of improving both classic and skating. For the most part we rotated instructors and disciplines on a day by day basis.

I was placed in the middle group which was self ranked by virtue of the order in which we arrived up the first hill on the first day! The days were largely spent concentrating on drills and technique rather than covering particularly long distances which suited me fine.

The food both in quality and quantity was excellent and the evenings usually included some form of talk by one of the experts. I never realised until then how much I didn't know about wax – thank you, Alan Easdon!

The trip was well organised, great company and hopefully I've learned a great deal although I will need to brush up on my waxes if I go down the waxing classic ski route next time. My only hiccup was a two day delay on the way back due to a power outage in Schipol the weekend of my return. Even this had a silver lining with the opportunity of an extra day's skiing north of Oslo, courtesy of KLM!

It was a great week and much to be recommended.

Mike Hall



### John and Sue's Cross-country Skiing Week at Dalseter in Norway

John and I went for one week to Norway in late March. Dalseter Hoyfjellshotell is situated in the Espedalen area of Norway, to the south and east of the Jotunheim, 40 km from Vinstra and 80 km from Lillehammer. It is conveniently about 3 hours from Oslo Airport by train. It is a large, comfortable hotel with a decent-sized swimming pool and very good food, especially the buffet lunch with at least 6 different puddings. Alcohol is expensive!



The hotel is set in mixed terrain, with lakes, woods and reasonable mountains. There is an extensive area of cross-country tracks of between 5 and 30 km in length (totalling over 150km) with huts and shelters along the way (two of them with stoves) and also there is a children's trail with a quiz. There is one downhill slope with a lift. The hotel taxi will take you to nearby villages and there is an (infrequent) bus service too.

The hotel is at the start of the 74km Peer Gynt trail, and several groups were using it as a setting-off point. Ski hire for us was just £25 per week for excellent equipment, and the hotel shop sells waxes and other necessities.

The attraction for us was that John D had been there with an XCUK group three years ago, and knew it offered a range of options as well as comfort. This year, for three weeks in March, John Mordue (Loipers' member and previously of Hexham) and Richard Davies were "skiers in residence". Earlier in the month there had been one other guide and up to 28 skiers from the UK, but by the end of March we were down to a handful.



Most of the skiers in the group had some previous connection with XCUK or Waymark, or knew John or Richard. We were a very mixed ability group, from a couple of keen roller-skiers who had never previously skied on snow to one who was making his 4<sup>th</sup> trip of the year. For £10 per day, you could join one of Richard or John's groups and either be guided or have real tuition. Despite the range of abilities it all worked very well and John and Richard made it feel like skiing with a group of friends rather than "having lessons".

This arrangement was perfect for someone like me who had not been cross-country skiing (apart from the odd day) for more than 5 years. At the beginning of the week I was a bit stiff and anxious but by the end was thoroughly enjoying the track skiing

The off-track was “interesting” – judging the snow condition was quite a skill and choosing wax in the relatively warm conditions was especially difficult. John Mordue’s catch-phrase was “Blue-extra, and lots of it!” We were lucky – the prepared tracks were rarely icy, but off-track it was easy to fall into large holes! John D did much more off-track skiing and climbed several local hills. One of them was Ruten, 1517m above sea level and a 650m climb from Dalseter, the last 20m climbed without skis.

John and Richard were very good confidence boosting teachers and leaders, and Richard’s stretching exercises at the end of the day were another bonus. They will probably come to a similar arrangement next year – the hotel appreciates the custom from the UK. I would really recommend the week at Dalseter. It helps to be sociable, but we both really enjoyed skiing with the group and having people to eat with and talk to in the evenings.

Susan Dark

### **Ski Touring in Skarvheimen Norway, March 2015, by Heather Dickinson**

I have twice been to Skarvheimen in Norway and I was longing to ski there one last time. I persuaded Graham to join me.

Skarvheimen stretches from Hardangervidda in the south to the Jotunheimen in the north. The terrain isn’t as flat as Hardangervidda, but the mountains aren’t as high and forbidding as in the Jotunheimen. It was a great privilege to be able to return to this unique and supremely beautiful wilderness. We enjoyed most un-Norwegian weather: four days of glorious sunshine, cloudless blue sky and no wind. In contrast, we experienced high winds as we skied over the lake on the last day at Ragsteindalen and also in west lungsdalen. It has been windy every time I’ve skied there - this valley seems to channel the wind. On other days the low cloud drifting across the hills was eerie and beautiful but impossible to capture on camera.

We had a total of nine days skiing, mostly on a DNT tour. The DNT is the Norwegian Mountain Touring association, which maintains a network of hundreds of staffed and unstaffed mountain huts, marks the trails between them in both summer and winter, and organises group hiking holidays in summer and ski tours in winter. Our tour went north from Finse, which is on the panoramic Oslo-Bergen railway line.

Graham and I stayed three days at Finse before the tour started in order to find our ski legs. DNT huts do not always take bookings, but Graham had insisted on making a reservation. This was fortunate as the hut had almost twice as many visitors as beds (it was the weekend, the weather was superb, and the railway delivers skiers to the door). On our first day, we skied a circular route to Klemsbu which was optimistically marked with a cafe sign on the map. I was rather cynical about actually finding food and drink at the top of a Norwegian hill - but when we arrived at a small hut, climbed up the icy steps to the door, climbed down more steps into a dark underworld, and pushed open a door, we found a room with a stove, tables, benches, a food counter and a man and two small girls making waffles and serving coffee. On the next day, we skied towards Kraekkja for a few hours, over the gentle contours of Hardangervidda in glorious sunshine, admiring the dog sled teams that flew past us and chatting to Norwegians out for their Sunday exercise.

On Sunday evening, we met the DNT group which comprised nine skiers (four Brits including ourselves, one German, two Dutch, two Norwegians – five men and four women) with two DNT volunteer guides -

one very experienced male mountain guide plus one woman who was leading a trip for the first time. Apart from one young Brit, the age was from mid-forties upwards.



While on the tour, we stayed at three large, staffed DNT huts (Finse, Geiterygghytte, and lungsdalen), one non-DNT mountain lodge at Ragsteindalen, and one small, unstaffed DNT hut at Kongshelleren. All the huts were very busy as the Easter holidays had started. The large huts served dinner and breakfast and the standard of food was superb, with many Norwegian specialties at dinner and in the breakfast buffet, from which we also prepared our lunch packs. Although dinners had a set menu, special requests (e.g. vegetarian) were possible. DNT huts have been modernised since I started this game and today's skiers are clearly just softies. All the staffed huts had both inside showers and inside toilets! However, the small unstaffed hut at Kongshelleren (see photo) provided the authentic Norwegian experience: outside toilets, no showers, water from snow melt and DIY meals based on whatever tins were left in the pantry. The evening before we arrived there, tasks had been shared out around our group and so, on arrival at the hut, the leaders sat outside and basked in the sun, which encouraged the team to self-organise. Kongshellern comprises two huts; the one we were in had eight beds, but seventeen people were staying there, so the floor was covered in mattresses for a group of Canadians.

The skiing was not difficult apart from the usual Norwegian challenge of the long, steep descent off the plateau and down to the road at the end of the trip. Some wimps even took their skis off for this. We had one rest day, when most people skied, and one guy who had had the prescience to carry an ice-saw built himself a dog kennel.

The leadership was excellent: one guide led at the front and the other stayed at the back. We went at the speed of the average skier, rather than that of the most experienced. The distances between huts were not too demanding, 15-22 km/day, so we had time to build a wind shelter for lunch. Every evening, the group evaluated the day and the guides outlined the route for the following day. The leaders' priority was safety and I felt safe at all times. They also emphasized caring for each other and for the environment. Although they advised on the basic principles of downhill technique, they made no attempt to be perfectionist about clients' style.

I enjoyed the tour enormously. I achieved things I thought I was no longer capable of: I didn't get up to pee during the night for a whole week. After the tour, I bought a whole new ski set, with shorter, broader, lighter skis and much lighter boots than my current kit, so I am now committed to a few more ski tours!

Heather Dickinson

#### **On the subject of ski touring gear, Graham Harkness adds his thoughts on the subject...**

As a relative beginner at this Nordic skiing, I started by buying a pair of sound (but ageing) waxing skis with 75mm Riva 3 cable bindings from a friend who was moving onto equipment more suited to serious mountaineering. I have a lot of gear for my other interests so I can only justify one set of ski equipment

which has to be a compromise to accommodate the varying conditions and different slope angles in the UK and Norway.

I added to the second hand equipment a new pair of Garmont Excursion plastic boots from Braemar Mountain Sports. A lot of people find these boots fine for touring but be aware there are similar looking boots, meant for telemarking, which are too rigid for touring.

On my first Norway trip a few years ago I had considerable difficulty turning the long narrow skis in very soft snow and also I got a bad blister from the plastic boots, which had seemed perfect in the shop. After the trip I tried everything I knew to improve the boots using packing between the inner and outer boots but with no success. There was clearly a pressure point that I could not relieve.

Before this year's Norway tour I had a trip to Braemar Mountain Sports to buy new skis. I was keen to have broader more-shaped skis to ride the soft snow better and my preference to have a fish-scale base, instead of wax, to accommodate the variable conditions in the UK. The Braemar people were excellent and I was recommended to try a new Fischer ski called the S-Bound 88 (width dimensions 88-68-78 in mm at front, middle and tail). Apparently the core construction is tougher than on the slimmer models so better for the boot and binding combination I am using, which can pull the binding screws out of lighter materials.

The people at Braemar were also very helpful with the plastic boots and were able to relieve the pressure points that were causing the blisters by using a heat process to reshape the hard outer shell. The cost of new skis, changing the bindings (which I had transferred from my old skis) and reshaping the boots was a little over £200. Personally I do like to try equipment and talk to people in the shop rather than buying from the internet – they were not much more expensive.

On the Norway tour I used the new skis with leather boots as recommended by the DNT but found that traversing even moderate slopes on icy snow it was difficult to hold an edge and to keep the skis straight. Most of the time they were fine. My assessment was that the leather boots were flexing a little on the wider ski allowing the edge to fall away more easily. The fish scales performed at least as well as the waxing skis that others were using, even on icy surfaces. The Norwegian guides also had kicker skins under the foot area – these would have been handy but are something else to buy and carry. The skis I bought to make the trip easier were great. But the snow conditions are always different – I just have to learn to ski !!

Back in Scotland I was able to briefly try the new skis with my plastic boots, skinning up the Cairngorm. I have high hopes that the blistering problem is resolved by the reshaping of the shell. Also the much stiffer boot on the wider new skis seems to give much better control. I seemed to be reaching a point when things were coming together... but the season has now ended, so now we wait until next winter.

Heather returned from Norway with renewed enthusiasm and has bought a complete of new equipment as recommended by the DNT guide, Asnes Cecilie Skog skis 175 cm (shorter, wider and lighter than her previous skis and designed for clipping on half-skis which cover just the wax pocket). She also has new Skarvet leather boots (much lighter than her previous touring boots) and Rottefella BC bindings. For myself I will stick with what I now have (wider skis, Garmont plastic boots and Riva cable bindings for the mix of conditions that I find in the Pennines, Scotland and Norway).

Graham

*It is good to have some discussion on boots and bindings for Nordic touring (Ed.) I am surprised to hear that DNT recommend leather boots. I find plastic shell boots to be more comfortable. I get blisters using leather boots and so too did Lewis Preston on our Sweden hut-touring trip this year (he was the only one with blisters and the only one using leather boots). That said, I know that leather boots are more popular with the Norwegians and also with some of the loipers.*

*The BC bindings are an interesting innovation. They are fairly new (made by Rottefella) and are like a beefed up Salomon track-skiing binding. Bill Cooper points out that the Fischer website recommends teaming their own Fischer E109 touring skis and Fischer boots with the Rottefella BC binding. It is a lighter and less rugged binding than 75mm 3-pin (such as Riva 3). I am sure it is adequate for much of the terrain encountered on a hut-touring trip. But the more rugged 75mm boots and bindings will stand up better to high touring (high cols and steep terrain). Alan Mitcham*

### Norway at its Best, by Vivienne Brown

Two years ago we found the ideal location for our Easter holiday at Gala, a village with fantastic cross country skiing and a small downhill area about an hour's drive north of Lillehammer. It had all we needed to keep us and our then eleven-year-old daughter happy, not least the luxurious cabin accommodation administered by the local hotel. So, we returned last year and, despite having to gulp very hard at the Easter price we had to pay, we booked again for 2015. I arranged flights and car hire and all was well until six weeks before we were due to go when.....the hotel went bankrupt with all of our money. Travel insurance, of course, wouldn't cover us, and payments had been made by bank transfer rather than credit card, so no joy there either. Neither did we fancy camping in snowy Norway for ten days!



To cut a long story short, we managed to book new accommodation five miles away at Fefor and, by a stroke of luck, because the balance of our payment had reached the Gala estate the day after their declared bankruptcy, the majority of our money was eventually returned to us. At this stage I will 100% recommend the company Transferwise should you wish to transfer money abroad, as they did hours of chasing, returned the exact amount which we paid, despite exchange rate differences, charged no fee at all and even sent us a box of chocolates to ease our distress. Somehow I don't think it would have been the same story if we'd used a bank!



And the skiing, when we finally got there? One day of snow, nine days of fantastic weather, a pleasant cabin and a lovely hotel, so no complaints at all. And we were close enough to Gala to go back and visit old haunts, so we really had the best of both worlds. Ebony, our thirteen year old daughter, first put skis on when she was seven and has now got to the stage of skiing 12 or 13km each day quite cheerfully. Gone are the days of shuffling along the boring bits at a snail's pace, instead the roles are now reversed and she can be heard to make comments such as "Come on, Mum, put your back into it, you're not trying".

So what of next year? We plan to fill our mountain of luggage with the usual jigsaws, card games, sledge, chocolate eggs for the Easter egg hunt, cuddly toys, baked beans, etc., etc. and return, splitting our time between Gala and Fefor, because both are wonderful locations and none of us can resist the lure of Norway at Easter time. I will, however, make sure that I book the accommodation with a credit card.....



Vivienne Brown

**More Roller Skiing**

Anyone interested in roller skiing, please contact Alasdair. He is keen to give lessons and happy to introduce you to the sport if you have yet to try it (the first lesson is free!) The club has a stock of roller skis and also various sizes of boots and poles. Roller skiing can be enjoyed anywhere with good quality tarmac paths – Hetton Lyons Park (between Durham and Sunderland) is very good, as is Town Moor, Leazes Park and several other local spots.

If you are keen to go further, the Yorkshire Dales XC Ski Club are organising a number of roller ski tours over the summer on quiet roads and paths. Tyneside Loipers are welcome to join them. Contact me (Alan Mitcham) if you would like a list of roller tour dates. They are also organising a 3km sprint race for roller skiers at the new cycle track at York Sports Village on Sunday 7 June. The track is open for practice at 9am and the races are at 9.45 and 10.15 (the first for experienced racers and the second for novices), after which there will be a prize-giving and lunch in the cafe and (I would expect) an afternoon roller ski tour along the Planetary Way. Contact the organiser Martin Appleby - [m.appleby451@btinternet.com](mailto:m.appleby451@btinternet.com)

Finally, there are more roller ski coaching opportunities that you might wish to sign up for. Details were sent out in a recent e-mail. I am hoping to go to the weekend at Lancaster on 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> October. For anyone interested there is also a Roller Ski Instructors course being run by Patrick Winterton. Contact me (Alan) or Alasdair if you are interested and would like to know more.

**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.