

Newsletter
February 2016

So it hasn't been the snowiest winter so far. But several Loipers have still found some local snow – see in this newsletter. Thanks to all contributors as usual. Next newsletter due in May.

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Club Events

March 5-12 th	Dalseter, Norway, track skiing and day touring
April 2 nd -10 th	Silvretta Alps, Telemark/Alpine Touring
April 3-10 th	<i>Snowsport England Coaching Week, Nordseter, Norway (p.4)</i>
May (tba)	End of Season Social (details coming soon)
August (tba)	<i>SSE Roller ski coaching weekend, Hetton Lyons Park, Durham</i>

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

From the Editor

Still waiting for the snow..? Not quite the snowy start to the winter that we hoped for, but some of us have managed to get some local skiing anyway. John Dark skied from Hartside to Cross Fell on Sunday morning (17th Jan). Carolyn spent a sunny day with plenty of snow at Yad Moss on the 20th. Then last weekend (mid February), Tim Elliott had a good day in the Lake District skiing over The Dodds and back almost to the car. On Monday, Graham and Bill H were surprised to bump into each other on a day of sunshine and snow on Bolts Law.

So it hasn't been that bad. And there are still a few weeks for the weather to get colder and snowier.

Five of us were lucky enough to get perfect conditions for the Loipers trip to the Alps in January though we missed the local snow back here in the northeast. The few of us who went on the Scotland weekend were not so lucky – but it was enjoyable weekend anyway.

Several Loiper members have been skiing in France and Austria and Finland. Heather and Graham are now in Norway and Steve is in Canada. Alasdair and John Peatfield are just back from the World Masters Championships in Finland. And meanwhile some of us are psyching themselves up for the club trips to Norway and Austria in March and April. There are still a few places in the world where the snow is virtually guaranteed!

Thanks as usual to those who have contributed to this newsletter – if you haven't so far been out on your skis this year, hopefully this newsletter will inspire you to get going.

Thanks to Nuala for organising the Loipers Post-Xmas meal. Back again to the Sky Apple Cafe, the food was excellent and the service very good indeed. We had a convivial group and enjoyed a few bottles of wine too.

Loipers Facebook Group

It is nice to see that a few more people are using the Loipers Facebook page. Please sign up if you haven't already done so. There are photos from recent Loipers trips, postings from the World Masters in Finland from Alasdair, video clips from an afternoon of roller skiing at Exhibition Park plus lots of other skiing-related news. It is also a good way to keep in touch with snow conditions and where people are skiing. Let me know if you need help signing up (Alan).

Banff Mountain Film Festival at Whitley Bay – 10/11th March

Frank reminded me that the Banff Mountain Film Festival is coming to The Playhouse at Whitley Bay on 10th and 11th March. There are different programmes on the two nights, with short films ranging from 5 to 40 minutes, about mountaineering, climbing, adventure travel, skiing, kayaking and mountain biking. More details about the films and ticket prices – check out the website <http://www.banff-uk.com/films/>

Loipers Telemark Long Weekend in the Alps – January 2016

Tim and Penny, Kevin and Kimberley and I met up at Les Houches in the Chamonix Valley for the Loipers Telemark Long Weekend. Only 5 of us this year – several club members offered their apologies and one of our stalwarts was away in New Zealand!

The snow came at just the right time. The Alps had a poor start to the season in but we were lucky enough to have a big dump of snow over the previous week (indeed it snowed again the night after we arrived) so conditions were just about perfect.

Congratulations to Penny who is moving over to telemark skiing and making great progress. She also proved that you don't need to telemark all of the time (modern telemark skis work just as well in alpine parallel style). I arrived on the slopes on Thursday afternoon, after a late morning transfer from Geneva and it didn't take long to find Tim and Penny. Kevin and Kimberley arrived the following afternoon.

We managed to find some excellent snow off the main pistes in Les Houches – not quite virgin soft powder but pretty good all the same. On the Saturday we enjoyed blue skies and sunshine. Tim managed to lose a section from a ski pole but we skied the run again and found it lodged in one of the scrubby trees. On Sunday, we went further up the Chamonix Valley to Les Grandes Montets. However the weather had changed and we skied in low cloud – the top of the mountain was closed. Kevin did a great job finding some adventure skiing – and we did various off-piste runs including a gun barrel, then some steep tree skiing from a ridge and a number of runs into a nice bowl and various rocky lines amongst more trees.

The 2-star hotel in Les Houches was very convenient and there was a good choice of cafes a short walk down the road. On our last evening we had pre-dinner champagne provided by Tim and Penny. They had brought along a bottle so they could celebrate the birth of their first grandchild whose arrival was expected at any time. We enjoyed the bubbly and the baby grandson duly arrived two days later! We returned to our favourite Savoyard restaurant and had a raclette and a table-top barbecue (with plenty of local wine).

Alan Mitcham



Off-piste at Les Houches – Telemark superstars, Kevin and Tim

Cross Country Skiing in Fieberbrunn, Austria, by Carolyn Hawkes

Pat, Nuala, Jane and I set off to our Rosenegg Castle hotel on January 9th. The first day we skied the Hochfilzen loops many times - in slushy thin snow! We desperately needed new snow. One loop even had the snow-making machine out the previous week.

The following day we went by train to Kitzbuhel and St Johann, while we awaited the next snowfall, which duly arrived that evening, along with the wind! At last there was enough snow by the hotel to fill our bins – to chill the pre-prandial prosecco!

For the rest of the week we were able to ski all the Pillerseetal/Hochfilzen/Waidring routes, in conditions ranging from blizzards to our one day of sunshine. We were skiing deep untracked (black) routes. Then much to our surprise (on the last morning only!) we came across a machined loipe (the Rosenegg red).

Hidden hazards under the untracked snow included sudden drops - one into a garden (which caused us to speculate about encountering garden gnomes!) Pat had a potentially more serious encounter when one of her skis caught under one of the bars of a hidden cattle grid.

We were in Rosenegg in February 2013 when it also snowed all week. We wondered if the Tourist board might invite us for a free stay in future when they are short of snow!



Lots of snow! And most of it was untracked.

Back to Glen Feshie – Loipers Scotland Weekend – 5-7th February

Glenfeshie Hostel was always a favourite Loipers venue. In the 1990s and earlier, we regularly stayed at Glen Feshie for the early May Bank Holiday and we always found enough snow for some good skiing. Returning there a few weeks ago was like going back to a familiar old haunt, but sadly without much snow. The hostel has changed a lot (all for the better), with a new kitchen, larger lounge and dining area, drying room, proper showers (which worked!) and even an upstairs bathroom.

Four of us, Steve, Graham, Bill (Haylock) and I, had the hostel to ourselves. We arrived in time for an evening meal at Loch Insh Watersports Centre, a short drive from the hostel. Good food, good service and nice beer – a great start!

Saturday morning looked fairly promising. The illuminated sign at Inverdrue on Friday evening had indicated 'Cairngorm Ski Area opening at 9am'. So we headed up to the ski hill in anticipation of skiing across in Lurcher's Gully. That seemed a good idea until we arrived at the carpark and it was blowing a hoolie! There certainly wasn't much snow to be seen on the lower slopes though the ticket office was selling day passes to go up on the funicular - £28 for the day (not for us)! The skiable area would have been very limited – the Ptarmigan plateau was a no-go area due to the high wind and the M1 was apparently unskiable.

We hardy souls got ourselves ready to trudge across to Lurcher's Gully with our skis strapped to our rucksacks. There was very little snow and the stream crossing on the way across to Lurcher's was a little challenging with the weight and wind resistance of skis on our backs (it is usually filled in with snow). Lurcher's Gully had almost no snow in it at all, when normally at this time it is well filled. So we tramped back and ended up in the cafe. Graham skinned up the thin line of snow under the Fiacail Ridge Poma and came back pleased that his new boots had passed the comfort test. (With hindsight we could have skied some of the patches of snow on the way back to the carpark but the conditions were not that appealing.)

Saturday afternoon we did a bit of shopping at Cairngorm Mountain Sports and debated going into a bar and watching the 6 Nations rugby. Instead we went back to the comfort of the hostel and in the evening we cooked a chicken curry and drank beer and wine – a pleasant and sociable evening putting the world to rights.

On Sunday morning the wind strength had increased horribly. We parked at the road end so we could do a walk up Glen Feshie (walking south with sleety squalls driving into our eyes and faces). Graham and Steve sensibly decided to drive home, whilst Bill and I had a 12km walk up the glen (very pleasant in between the sleet squalls) and started home at about lunchtime.

It was an enjoyable weekend but we were unlucky with the weather and the snow. The previous Sunday, Glenmore Lodge forest tracks were all pisted and in good condition but, such is the Scottish weather, it lasted only for one day! (Tyneside Loipers had booked the whole hostel and indeed at one point we had 9 people booked for the weekend. Thankfully the hostel owners were very understanding and charged us only £300 for the 16-bed hostel – so we just broke even!) In better weather and with more snow, it would be a perfect venue – I am sure we will go back.

Alan Mitcham

A Cross-Country Training Week in Obertilliach, Austria, by Fiona MacCormick

Last year, as I was planning my annual leave, I was keen to get a week of cross-country skiing and I also wanted some coaching in both classic and skate technique. I had hearing good things about the coach, Alan Eason, so I booked one of his ski weeks in Obertilliach, Austria, at the end of January. He runs ski weeks in Austria and other countries in Europe throughout the winter and spends the UK summer teaching at a ski school in Australia. To see his Totally Nordic website, visit www.totallynordic.co.uk/ The week I had chosen was followed by the Dolomitenlauf cross country ski races. This meant that we had the opportunity to train and then take part in the races. Prior to the trip I learned that five others from the UK had signed up for that week. Alan Eason put us in touch so that we could coordinate travel plans.

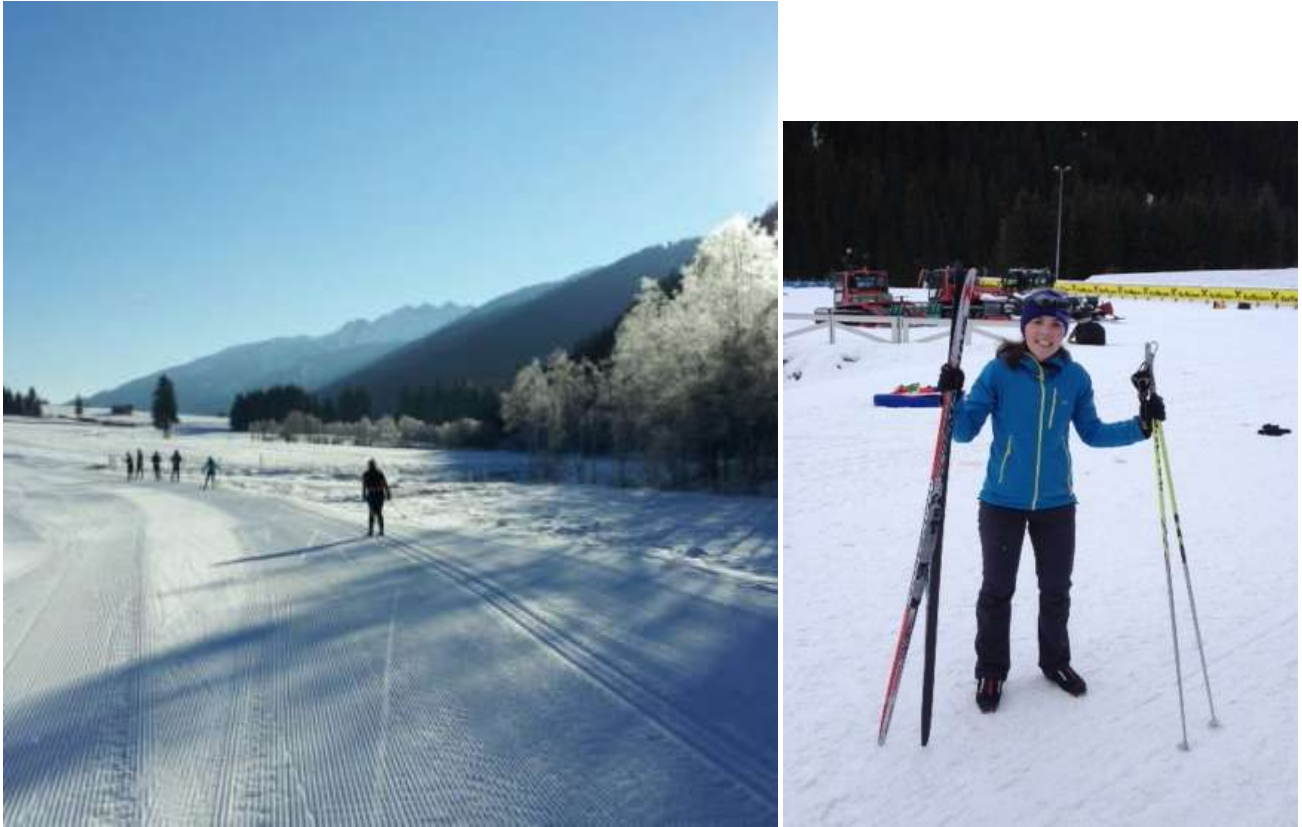
Obertilliach is a beautiful and quaint Austrian village, situated in the mountains at 1400 meters, not far from the Italian border. Because of its location, the village has an excellent record for reliable snow and is now the site of an international biathlon and cross-country ski stadium. National ski teams travel to train there throughout the winter months, and it was also to be our training ground for the next week. It was also the site of an excellent ski rental shop, which provided top class rental skis at a very reasonable price for the week. The biathlon stadium is situated about 1.5km down the hill from Obertilliach and was an easy walk or quick bus ride on the free local bus. Though we had each booked different accommodation, the village is small and we could easily meet up to walk to and from the stadium.

We arrived on Sunday 17th January, and spent the next five days training to improve our cross-country ski technique and fitness. We spent the first two days (Monday and Tuesday) focusing on skating. I am relatively new to skating and found these days challenging, especially as the land around the stadium is very hilly. We typically spent the mornings working on training exercises to improve our technique, with and without poles, on the flat and on some rather steep hills. In the afternoons, we would go out for a longer ski, to explore the local countryside and to put our new skills into practise. Over the second two days (Wednesday and Thursday) we focused on classic cross-country ski technique, with training exercises in the morning followed by the chance to ski longer distances after lunch.

As the week went on it was exciting to see different national ski teams arrive from all over the world to train at the stadium and take part in the upcoming Dolomitenlauf. I met and chatted with some of the skiers on the Slovakian national team, as well as two of the skiers from the US team who were staying in my hotel. It was even more impressive to watch the teams train in and around the stadium, doing things like double pole races up very steep hills at an incredible speed!

We spent Friday on classic skis in preparation for the race the following day. Over the week we had skied the entire course of the race and knew what to expect. The Dolomitenlauf took place over two days, with the classic race on Saturday and the free style race on Sunday. For both races there was a choice of distance, either 42km or 20km. Despite the fact that world-class athletes come to train in Obertilliach and take part in the race, the race organisers stress that the race is for everyone. To quote Franz Theurl, the president of the organising Club: "Regardless you're professional, amateur or hobby skier – the Dolomitenlauf in the middle of our beautiful Dolomites is the perfect competition for everyone". I chose to take part in the 20km classic race. It was a fantastic atmosphere and everyone was very friendly. It felt quite a privilege to take part in an event alongside world-class athletes, albeit starting a long way behind them! I thoroughly enjoyed the race and was glad to finish

after 20km in under two hours and in 17th place (out of 39 women completing in the 20km race). All those who take part are then entitled to a hot lunch in a big marquee beside the stadium, which was much appreciated!



The following day I chose not to take part, but instead enjoyed watching the freestyle race. After most of the contestants had finished, I got my skis on and went out to skate-ski the 20km course. I was encouraged to see how much my technique and ability had improved since the start of the week, and it was fantastic to have the course almost entirely to myself! For our final evening together, we all met up for dinner at the hotel where I was staying. It had been a fantastic week, with excellent coaching, really friendly people, beautiful blue-sky weather, and a great location! I would highly recommend a week of ski training with Alan Eason and Totally Nordic!

Fiona MacCormick

More Roller Skiing...

It won't have escaped your notice that Fiona is a keen roller skier. And so is John Peatfield whose article appears on the next page. Roller skiing can certainly help improve your skiing technique and fitness. And it is good fun too. Contact Alasdair or Alan if you would like to join us on Town Moor or at Hetton Lyons Park. We can get you kitted up with club gear and we can also get you started with learning to cross-country ski on good tarmac paths.

The World Masters 2016 – Finland, 4th-12th February

In a previous article for the newsletter I explained how I had set goals for myself having learned to cross-country ski in 2010 – first to do a ski-marathon and then to get to a World Masters . . . really to create a focus for training, development and fitness.

In 2015 I had some great coaching and tuition from Alan Eason at Obertilliach and did the Dobbiacco-Cortina Gran Fondo. This went reasonable well and I continued to get skate roller skiing coaching with Alasdair. In May I started to think about getting to WMC'16 and took advice from Alan and Alasdair. In essence they reckoned I was competent and obviously madly enthusiastic and, if I accepted it as worthwhile experience, then go for it!!

So I worked hard in terms of endurance fitness (I do a lot of nordic walking trail races, a few 1/2 marathons and an Ultra 1/2 (58km), plus rowing and biking) and a lot of roller-skiing and balance exercises. I was realistic about performance... I had done no more than about 50km of skate skiing; I had done very little racing; and I was about to become the second eldest 'debutant' to the GBR Masters team!!

A plan was hatched to work with Alan Eason this January to build and hone my limited technical skills and build some endurance in my legs; then a holiday & training in Gala, Norway, with my partner; and then join Alasdair and team in Vuokatti, Finland.

This has been a tremendous experience, and continues my steep learning curve. The brilliant thing was the welcome by the rest of the GBR team (and many competitors) through the sense of shared purpose. I loved being in a race situation with my age peers (65-70 group) with around 60+ entrants per race, ranging from some amazingly elite (former champions) to steady/slow skiers there for 'sport for all'!!

The downside was the weather - grey and constant low cloud - we joked that we would all return to UK with Vitamin D deficiency - and a THAW!!

Practice on the 15 and 10km loops (the basis of all main race courses) was perfect. The races were on slush, mush, glazed ice, soft banks that sucked in poles . . . and for classic, waxing was a nightmare with every variety of klister being tried . . . hard enough for an experienced skier and totally disconcerting at times for me!! Whereas in Austria and Norway I seemed to have perfect grip and glide on classic skis and smooth snow for skating, here I was competing and wondering what to do next.

That said I was very pleased not to be last in any race; beating more experienced skiers and setting PBs for each distance for 10km skate (with 240m height gain) and 15 and 30km classic (380 and 766m height gain). I skied leg 2 classic in the over 60s 4 x 5km relay, in a time 20% slower than Alasdair . . . our combined times made us an honourable 10th out of 10. I was pleased that I didn't let anyone down!!

My fitness and conditioning held up well to the challenge, though I was a bit frustrated that my technical skills are not yet good enough.

However this was a wonderful time - I had never been to Finland before. Vuokatti is a superb base with excellent facilities and accommodation. Rooming and laughing continually with 3 others worked so well; and, most importantly, I felt respected and valued for 'having a go' by my team mates and fellow competitors. If you are like me, an OAP and mad keen skier – whatever your level, think about experiencing a World Masters!!

John Peatfield - now 66!!



On the way up Cross Fell – John Dark, 17 January



John Peatfield at the World Masters Steve Campbell and Alan Mitcham ‘surviving’ in Scotland



Summit of Bolt’s Law – Graham Harkness, 15 February

Tyneside Loipers Trips still to come!

Thirteen of us are heading off to Dalseter in Norway at the beginning of March. We are looking forward to some good skiing on the marked trails and prepared tracks which link up with Fefor and the Espedalen area. Daily guiding (on- and of-piste) is being provided by the resident UK guides during the week (including our own John Mordue) and no doubt we will bag a few nearby summits.

Eleven of us (including six from Tyneside Loipers) are heading off to the Silvretta Alps in early April and skiing between the mountain huts. About half of us will be on telemark skis and the rest on alpine touring gear. Thanks to Tim for organising this. We have the services of a mountain guide and an assistant guide and we are looking forward to skiing some of the peaks over 3000m. It promises to be a great week and we will certainly find a lot more snow than we have seen in the UK this year!

Snowsport England Coaching Week at Nordseter in Norway, 3-10th April 2016

Booking is still open for this excellent course. But you had better get in touch very soon. The week focuses on cross-country skiing technique and is being held at Nordseter for the second year. Accommodation as per last year is in the Lillehammer Fjellstue (previously called Nordseter Fjellstue). Mike Hall and John Peatfield have both done the course recently and recommend it highly. Mike's article from last year's course was in the May newsletter.

Full details of the course and the accommodation at Nordseter can be downloaded from www.snowsportengland.org.uk/Coaching/Nordic.aspx Or contact Alan - I can forward the 5-page brochure as a pdf file.

It is an intensive coaching week with six full days of instruction with the mornings being structured coaching and the afternoons less formal with options to go touring and see more of the area. The coaches are Patrick Winterton and Alan Eason, who are both excellent coaches and both ex-Olympic biathletes. You will be guaranteed to improve your cross-country skiing skills and learn a great deal about race training if that is what you are looking for.

Club Skis and Boots

A reminder... club skis and boots are now being kept by Neil Waters at his house in Wylam. We have about 10 pairs of skis and a similar number of pairs of boots of different sizes. All of most of the skis are non-waxing metal-edged touring skis and all of the boots are leather boots which are ideal for ski touring. Hopefully we will have lots of snow for local skiing.

Neil can be contacted by phone or email (contact details on page 1). For this winter only when Neil is in New Zealand, contact Alan or Pat.

We also have several pairs of roller skis and boots which are held by Alasdair.

Please be aware that the club make a small charge for hire of club equipment (payable to Neil or Alasdair).