

Tyneside Loipers go ski racing...

Three Loiper members (Mike Hall and Les and Gwenda Cavill) spent the last week in January at Obertilliach in Austria for a week of expert instruction with Totally Nordic, run by ex-Olympic skier Alan Eason. Then at the end of the week we tested our skills in the 50th Dolomitenlauf, Austria's largest cross-country ski marathon and part of the Worldloppet series, with both marathon and half marathon distances, and skate and classic options available. Mike's wife Sally (not yet a Loiper but may be soon?) joined us for the week.

The biathlon centre in Obertilliach provided a convenient practice area for morning drills and, in the afternoons, we explored the surrounding trails. The weather all week was sunny (albeit cold in the shade) with great snow until race day when the temperature increased as the skies became cloudy and the snow sugary. The Totally Nordic team offered instruction in skate and classic technique each day to a friendly group of mixed ability skiers, many from the London Hyde Park Cross Country Ski Club. Mike opportunistically (hopefully) persuaded some of them to come to the Hetton-le Hole roller-ski weekend in August!



At the Biathlon Centre – Mike shooting standing and Sally shooting prone (both nearest camera)

Mike discovered an unexpected talent with a rifle when he and Sally and others tried shooting on one afternoon at the biathlon centre.



Waiting for the start – Gwenda, Les and Mike



Gwenda in race mode

After an excellent week of instruction, Gwenda and Les entered the skate marathon while Mike entered the half marathon. The courses consisted of either one or two 21 km laps up and down the valley, starting and finishing in the biathlon stadium. Each lap included a big hill! The three of us lined up on the start line with nine hundred other skiers. All of us enjoyed the challenge and finished in times with which we were reasonably satisfied. One of the Hyde Park club members completed her first ski race (the half marathon classic race the following day) at the age of 76. I believe this is giving Alan food for thought...!

Gwenda Cavill