

## Fabulous Norway! Back to Dalseter – then to Hovringen!

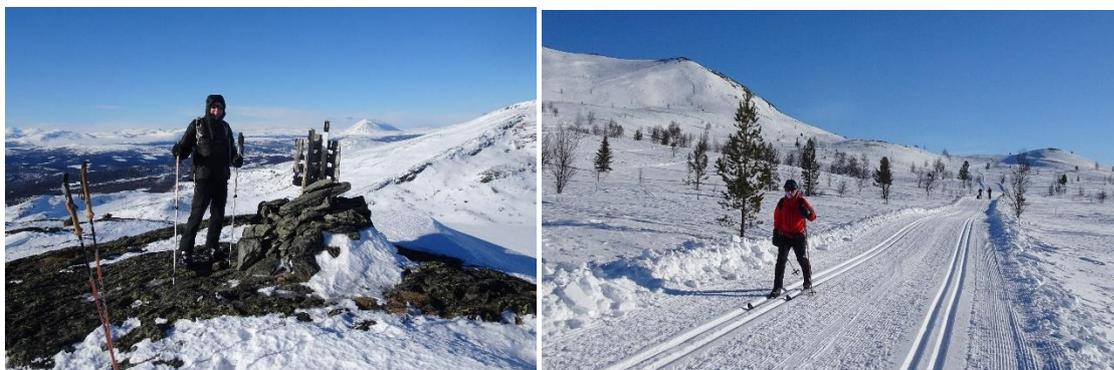
March 2023 saw several groups of Loipers heading again to Norway. It was a little different this year as members were scattered between Dalseter, Hovringen, Venabu and the Jotunheim. Here is the view from those who went to Dalseter and Hovringen. In short, we had good snow, fabulous Norwegian scenery, great company and both of them very nice hotels.

We arranged to be at Dalseter for the second week of the 'GB Nordic Season', which delivers guided skiing, with the team this year including Pete Curwen, Dagmar, Glennis, Stefan, and Nigel Williams. They did a great job as usual coming up with a varied programme for each day, tailored to the weather and snow conditions. 'GB Nordic' has now been running for at least 6 years, with the original formula being started by John Mordue. Unfortunately John had broken his hip in a freak accident a month earlier and didn't make it to Norway this year (though good to hear he is recovering well and now getting around without crutches).

The temperature in Dalseter was well below zero and it was due to stay that way all week. However, the snow conditions were somewhat compromised by the warm weather and high winds of the previous week. The best snow was on the recently groomed tracks and off-track amongst the trees (we needed to avoid the high tops)!

Loipers - Alan, Dave, Paul, Vivienne, Ebony, Martin and Steve – all arrived on Sat 4<sup>th</sup> March. Paul and Dave arrived early and managed to get a couple of hours skiing on Saturday afternoon. But then Paul slipped on the icy surface outside the hotel, badly damaging his left elbow and leaving him in a lot of pain. On Sunday he managed to get to A & E at Lillehammer and was relieved to find it was not broken. He tentatively went skiing on Monday and battled on all week, then even did the big day from Dalseter to Fefor and back at the end of the week!

Also on Monday, some of us did a big day of off-track touring, led by Nigel Williams, aiming for the summit of Sprenpiggen at 1329m. As expected, once above the tree-line, the snow conditions were pretty rubbish – but the day was nice and sunny and not too windy. We ate lunch, sitting in the sunshine, outside the warming hut at Bingsbu (the hut being occupied by an guided group from the UK company, Tracks and Trails). We then skied on around the *rundloipe*, from where headed toward the top of Sprenpiggen (3 of us made it to the summit). The initial part of the descent was challenging skiing, with solid waves of frozen sastrugi, interspersed with tricky variations of snow and ice! But once away from the exposed tops, we had a lovely run down an endless bowl and onto groomed tracks and an easy ski home in the late afternoon sun.



*Cold and windswept Sprenpiggen summit – back to the loipe, Sprenpiggen and descent behind on left*

Another memorable day (for me and Paul and Martin) was up to the little DNT cabin at Tonebu. Martin and I both used track skis, hired from the hotel (it being all on-track). This was a very scenic

route winding up through the trees (in brilliant sunshine) on the far side of the valley, with lots of steep hills (up and down). Bizarrely, we first had to walk from the hotel down to the valley bottom (carrying skis) as the track from the hotel was too hard and steep and icy, as well as being strewn with pine needles from recent high winds. That was 150m of height loss that would normally have been skied!

On another day the weather was a little less kind (cold and windy). A few of us went with Stefan for one of his tree-skiing days. That was a fun morning of making up routes between the trees and coming out into open pastures with deep snow and staying sheltered from the wind. Steve stuck with Stefan for much of the week and is a master of skiing the trees!

On our final day, Dagmar took a bunch of us on the big tour to Fefor and back – allegedly 40km (though I think it was a little less)! Martin and Paul and I were all on track skis since there were groomed tracks all of the way. The route to Fefor is part of the scenic Peer-Gynt Loipe and has good skiing all the way. Despite the long downhill of about 2km on the way out (and 2km uphill slog on the return trip) Fefor is about 50m higher than Dalseter, set at about 925m, just above the lake Fefor-vatnet. The hotel offers waffles with lashes of cream and jam which is a reward for making the trip!



We also had evening entertainment with some good slide shows, plus a fun quiz organised by Glennis. Some of us also let off steam on the table tennis table. And Dave made good use of the swimming pool and swam one mile each day as training for his upcoming triathlon!

Sadly, the Dalseter week was over... but Martin and Steve and I were looking forward to the following week at Hovringen. Vivienne was supposed to be coming too, but she had only managed a couple of days skiing at Dalseter before succumbing to the covid virus (for the second time in two years). She had been very poorly, so she and Ebony reluctantly returned home via Oslo.

We arrived at Hovringen, joined by Greg and Sue who had spent one week at Venabu. We were part of a larger group organised by Dan Morgan of Classic Adventure (based in the Lake District). Also with us was Stefan Janik who had been at Dalseter. The hotel was very good and we had good snow and good weather all week until the last day which was forecast to be very stormy. Dan's team was a mix of people (several who had skied with him before) and they were good company. Most of them were less experienced skiers and so we mostly skied in our own group.

It was looking like the best day was going to be our first day (Sunday). The map showed a route up to a high summit at Formokampen (1428m) which was about 8km away. Allegedly it was a groomed track all the way. We five Loipers and two others (Nigel and Chris) made it to the summit though it was too cold and breezy to hang around. Then it was a good ski down sticking to the prepared track which predictably had the best snow (though cold with the wind chill). Chris experienced an alarming boot failure when his brand new Rossignol touring boots totally fell apart (each in turn) and had to be held together with cable ties and duct tape!

I had my own equipment failure whilst returning to the hotel. We had, by then, split into smaller groups – those who wanted to head back and eat lunch in the hotel and those who wanted to



*En route to Formokampen (the distant 1430m peak) – Greg and Sue on the summit*

meander back and have lunch along the way. Three of us found an interesting off-track route through birch woods whereupon the toe-piece of one of my bindings irretrievably broke. Despite best efforts from Nigel and Sue there was no way of it being skiable. I recall this same problem happening to Paul Gaines in 2006 when he and I were skiing in the Jotunheim (with the same bindings Rotterfella Riva 3)! In my case, the skis and bindings had given me almost 20 years of use. I had about 2.5 km of walking and sliding to get back to the hotel. With five skiing days left at Hovringen, I was hugely grateful when Stefan offered me a replacement pair of bindings which he took off from some skis which he decided he would not be using.

Hovringen is quite different from Dalseter. There is a big network of tracks, but they are mostly quite open. There are also a few areas of trees (mainly birch woods) and there are rolling hills. On one day we went over to café and settlement of summer cabins at Putten Seter, skiing over a high col which was exposed and windy. That led also to a delightful wooded 2km rundloipe and scenic viewpoint. On another day we planned to take a high route (untracked) to Steinbuho (about 1500m) but we were thwarted by the weather, which did not go according to the forecast. Instead we ended up at the café at Smuksjoseter (where we came across Dan and his group) – then a couple of us managed to fit in another nearby summit at 1307m to complete yet another super day of skiing (albeit with a long ski back to the hotel).

On another occasion, three of us (Martin and Greg and I) did a 20km+ route to the linked area of Mysuseter. The first 4km was steadily uphill. Then after a break at Smukjoseter, we skied mostly downhill to Mysuseter with the fabulous Norwegian landscape opening up all the way. We had waffles (the best yet!) at the Hoyfjellshotel in Mysuseter then awaited the bus which we had booked for our return to Hovringen. Despite skiing against a SE wind, it was a great day of skiing.



*Wide open landscape en route to Mysuseter*

On our last day, I am surprised we got any skiing at all. The forecast had a yellow warning for 'blowing snow' (in other words a blizzard). The snow and wind built up overnight and outside the hotel was wild. Dan organised a ski-orienteeing event to be run just around the local area of Hovringen. The control points were mostly hotels and public places which were to be visited in any order within a 2-hour time limit. Sue and I teamed up and headed out, initially uphill and into the wind, with a few snowdrifts on the way, then returned 1h 45m later having found all the control points (photo taken at each one to prove we had been there). Apparently, we found a winning strategy and we were both presented with a bar of Norwegian chocolate!

I had arranged to have a taxi down to the rail station at Otta in the early evening (Friday) so sadly I missed the last evening's fun and games. I needed to be back on the early flight to Edinburgh on Sat morning. It was rather a rush. Pam and I were at the opera at Tyneside Cinema just 2 hours after I got back. I tested positive for covid on Sunday, having realised (too late) that the night-time tickle I had felt the last day or two was not merely a dry cough.

They were both great venues and it was really good being with GB Nordic at Dalseter and with Dan and his team at Hovringen. At least 3 others returned with covid – hopefully all are now well recovered.

Alan Mitcham

*Postscript – Paul's elbow turned out to be broken after all! Back in the UK, he was found to have a fragment of broken bone lodged in the joint – due to be removed when the swelling has reduced. No wonder it is (and was) painful!*