**Skiing Hemsedal and the Jotunheim – March 2025**

Eight Loipers arrived in the small town of Hemsedal in mid March – Neil, Paramjeet, Alan, Jon, Keith, Ros and Peter and Alison. Our plan was to have a week of day touring in and around the Hemsedal valley and then move on for a second week in the Jotunheim. We had 5 of us on telemark skis and 3 on alpine touring gear.

With two good-sized hire cars to carry us and our skis and other gear, and helped by the recently published guidebook '111 Safe Ski Touring Routes in Norway', we were eager to explore the local mountains.

It was likely that we would also do a day or two of skiing on the local ski hill. Hemsedal is generally reckoned as having the best and most extensive ski hill in Norway.

We soon learnt this was not a good snow year for Norway skiing! Whilst there was full snow cover on the north facing slopes of the ski hill (visible from our apartment), there was no sign of snow anywhere in or around the town, at 600m altitude.

On our first morning we drove about 25 km to the head of the valley. We contemplated doing a summit called Slettind which was only a 500m climb (two and a half hours in the guidebook). But it was a bleak spot, windy and uninviting (we skied it the following day when it was a less windy). Meanwhile we retreated towards Hemsedal and skied another more sheltered peak, albeit not quite to the summit.

*Day 2 – On the Summit of Slettind*

On another day we skied a nearby mountain called Harahorn (1591m). The summit was more mountaineering than skiing. We left our skis and climbed the final rocky/icy ridge (with care, without crampons). Most of these first few days skiing was on scrapy hard-packed snow. The poor snow cover rather limited our choice of routes and mostly we were only doing short day tours.

*Day 4 Good Snow! Enjoying the telemark skiing!*

*We skinned back up for a second run!*

On Day 4, we drove up a side valley beyond the Hemsedal ski area and we had a super day skiing on Systerskardfjellet (1498m). It was a joy to be on good snow, at least for the bottom 2/3rd of the hill. Those of us on telemark skis made the best of the conditions. After a joyous descent, we ate lunch in the sun beside a snowy gully and quickly decided to reattach our climbing skins and head back up for a second run. It was definitely a more worthwhile day, and we did about 800m of ascent/descent.

Day 5 was also a fun day! We skied a 1435m peak called Storeskardnose and clocked about 700m of ascent/descent. For a change it was relatively non-windy and we had lunch sitting on the rocky top. The first 200m of ascent wound steeply upwards through a typical Norwegian birch forest, occasionally

crossing snow-filled gullies, and eventually opening out onto the snowy hillside with more varied terrain, bowls and gullies and occasional steeper ground requiring us to use ski crampons. Returning through the trees at the end of the day was managed more easily than we expected. It was an all-round great day!

*Day 5 Keith on the summit of Storeskardnose*

After 6 days skiing (none of it on the Hemsedal ski hill), it was time to move on to the Jotunheim. We had a last evening at the Hemsedal Café (highly recommended), tidied the apartment, packed up all our gear and loaded the cars. The poor snow season had one advantage; it gave us a shorter drive north, using the summer road past Bygdin (where usually the road would not have been opened until 1st May). It was a perfect blue-sky day, and we stopped en-route at Beitestolen and Bygdin for coffee and lunch respectively.

The last stage of our journey was a 2 and half hour bumpy ride in a convoy of three snow cats. Glitterheim was just opening for the spring season that very day and we were not the only people taking the journey. Any expectation of having more (and better) snow in the Jotunheim (further north and higher) was soon dispelled. The snowcat journey was as much on tarmac as it was on snow.

Glitterheim is a lovely staffed DNT hut (lodge) at almost 1400m altitude. It is perched at the base of Glittertind, at 2452m the second highest peak in Norway (only marginally lower than Galdhoppigen). It is also well positioned for various other skiable 2000m summits – but sadly not this year – a lot of slopes were strewn with rocks/boulders that would have been well covered in a normal year. This was reckoned to be the least snowy winter for 50 years and we had only the tiniest dusting of snow during the week, despite snow being promised by the Norwegian forecast (yr.no). The hut manager Knut told us that this is the driest valley in Norway!!

We did indeed climb Glittertind (on our first day) – though sadly we didn't quite make the top. The initial part of the ascent was sheltered and we stripped off clothing layers in the warm sun. But the upper part of the mountain was seriously windy (40mph?). At our eventual turning point just below the summit, we were in the dangerous position of having to remove our climbing skins and make clothing adjustments in the full force of the wind, being blasted by quantities of spindrift. My rucksack quickly filled with snow and with skins already in the rucksack, I struggled to find my gloves. If we had properly noted the forecast, we would have tackled Glittertind the following day. Nonetheless we got some fun skiing on

the lower, more-sheltered, part of the descent. And meantime we skied vast oceans of sastrugi (which was a bit less fun) – we were already becoming masters of sastrugi – the inevitable result of high winds and lack of fresh snow.

That day was a Tyneside Loipers double birthday. Peter and Alan – both on 22nd March! The staff at Glitterheim appeared from the kitchen after the evening meal, singing the Norwegian 'happy birthday' song and bearing a big cake which was carried to our table. It was very nice! The 8 of us could not quite finish it, and we offered it to some other guests.

Apart from the arrival night (which was disappointing), the food at Glitterheim was excellent! On Saturday nights they have a buffet evening with a huge range of charcuterie – cured meats (wild and farmed animals from the valley), smoked and cured fish, cheeses, etc. That was quite special.

*We became masters of sustrugi – frozen waves of snow!*

Our second day was less windy!! 6 of us did a 14km ski tour to the summit of Styggehoe (1883m). It was another blue-sky day, and we were able to eat our lunch on the summit. We had a fabulous descent down to the valley – the best skiing we had in the whole trip. Ros and Jon decided to do a longer day and clocked up about 20km of skiing. They didn't quite make their objective, being wary of venturing onto the summit glacier with its yawning crevasses.

On one other day we did a double peak. We did an easy ascent via a marked route to the south, then worked our way onto a 1750m peak followed by a great 300m descent, skiing in good visibility, back towards our up track. Then we donned climbing skins again and picked our way up to a 1950m peak topped with a huge cairn/pillar. Amazingly it was non-windy and we again had lunch on the top. By that stage the the light had deteriorated badly and we had a difficult descent 'skiing by feel', unable to judge the terrain. One moment we were on deep bumpy sastrugi and the next moment skidding across scrapy hard-pack!! Once back on the marked track, it was easy skiing to the hut. A very mixed day – I enjoyed

it! (Ros and Jon skied the same 1950m peak on the following day and had a much easier run down with better visibility.)

Glitterheim was a lovely location. The snow conditions were far from perfect but we had some good days and we missed only one (windy) day of skiing.

*Second evening at Glitterheim 'Northern Lights'*

The return transfer from Glitterheim was again sunny. We saw good numbers of reindeer gathered in the valley. On other days we saw reindeer droppings on the hills and on one day we had a raven land close to us on the summit cairn. Jon and Ros saw a few ptarmigan and some snow buntings (am I envious? – yes!) We even saw the 'northern lights' one evening (except me – I went to bed too early!)

We dropped Ros at Venabu on our way back to Oslo. She treated us to tea and waffles, a fitting end to the trip! We met Vivienne and Ebony who were staying at Venabu with a group of Visually Impaired skiers (Ebony confidently guiding). We also had a chat with Pete and Pam Curwen who had come up from Dalseter and we spoke for a bit to Stefan Janik and Lisa who had been involved with the Venabu guiding 'ski safari' programme.

Alan Mitcham

April 2025