

# HUNTLY NORDIC SKI CLUB

[www.nordicski.org.uk](http://www.nordicski.org.uk)

NEWSLETTER No. 37

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**END of SEASON ISSUE**



**Clash snow days = 107**

62 good, 45 marginal

## Editorial

*Although the snow wasn't as good as last season we still topped the ton for Clash skiing days. As this snow season closes we have a busy rollerski summer to keep us busy. Even if you don't take part it would be great to see you at our local race, we can always make use of "volunteers".*

*Congratulations to Kay & Malcolm Cooper, Paul Gray, Claudia & Rachel May, Ruairidh Newman, Alex Standen, and Alan Telford for recently passing their Snowsport Scotland Nordic Coaching Level 1 award. Their expertise will be added to the tremendous pool of coaching skill we have in the club.*

*To prove the club isn't all about racing whippets, some of whom ended up at some low-key event near Oslo, there are accounts of a trip to the Engadin Skimarathon by a few of our more mature members, some of whom would never have dreamt of doing a ski race a few years ago. A tremendous effort & achievement by all of them to finish the 42km within the cut-off time.*

*So I hope you find this an interesting & varied newsletter & are inspired to try something new in your skiing.*

## THE LOCAL SCENE

Malcolm Cooper once again won the "Golden Boot" for being the first to ski the Haute Route back on 24th November. The snow lasted right through to our first on-snow events, the Ski-O & Clash Dash in early January (see Newsletter 36). Unfortunately the great skiing conditions disappeared mid-January & although there continued to be skiing in the forest, conditions became marginal & there was not enough snow for Club Championships. This meant that Oliver Newman & Katy Homyer (Highland Nordic SC) became this year's winners of the Clashindarroch Cup & Quaich for their triumphs in the Clash Dash. This is the third time Katy has won this trophy. As usual all these prestigious trophies were presented at the JDS Certificates Day & this year we had British international Alex Standen to award the prizes. He didn't need to be asked twice, as a former JDS member, he knew all about the cakes. The good news is Alex is on the mend from his broken ankle & should be running again in a few weeks.

During a bit of a mid-season barren spell in the Clash Colin Miller & myself got up one of our more bizarre trips – snow patch hunting. Via the [www.winterhighland.com](http://www.winterhighland.com) forum we had been in touch with a young lad who was doing an undergraduate project on snow holding & the potential for extending the Cairngorm skiing down to Glenmore. He became very interested when Colin & I told him we had snow records for the Clash & thought they might help in his project. So we arranged a fieldtrip to the Clash & this is where the bizarre bit comes in. The snow had melted rapidly, good for looking at snow patches & snow holding, but not so good for skiing. Colin insisted on taking his skis & the lack of snow didn't stop him. The student impressed Colin & myself taking bearings & making copious notes. Not sure if we've pushed back the boundaries of science but we had a pleasant few hours in the sunshine discussing snowpatches.....



A few days later a snow storm ended the snow drought giving a final nine days of excellent skiing to round off the season. This storm scuppered our planned mountain tour on higher ground & we reverted to plan 'C' – a tour on the moor above the Clash treeline, more of a cross between the Secret Clash Tour & Mountain Tour. A doughty band made up of Colin Miller, Andrew Shanks, Alan Telford & Peter Thorn, set out across a windswept moor that definitely had an Arctic feel to it.

One week later  
Arctic conditions in Clash



## THE STORY OF THE CLASH

No not a review of a rather good compilation album of one of the best punk bands, but a little bit of Clashindarroch skiing history. If you've been up to the forest you are bound to have noticed the old portacabin is no longer there. With its caved-in roof the Forestry Commission asked us to remove it – a more complicated task than you may realise. Risk assessments, waste licences & a seemingly never ending bureaucratic paper chase delayed the removal, but we got there in the end. This all set me thinking just how long had it been there? Who put it there? I haven't got definitive answers so far & this is the best I can do at the moment.

With help from Gordon Seaton (RAF biathlon & currently manager of East Grange Biathlon Centre) I am beginning to piece together the story. The first UKLF Ski Championships (UK Land Forces) took place in the Clash in 1974 or 75. Gordon first took part in Exercise SNOW COUNTRY, as the championships were known – it was a military operation, in 1983. At its peak in the mid-80s over 150 skiers, mostly from the armed forces but with a sprinkling of civilians, took part. There was no car park & everyone was bussed up from Rhyndie, the bus starting from the barracks in Braemar. There were three races, all classic, 15km, 10km & 4x10km relay. There were no facilities, no hut, just a start tent. The trees were much denser. The biathlon range & a car park area by the trail leading to the range were built in 1989, I assume by army engineers. The first biathlon race was in January 1990 when 8 teams were entered into the 4x7.5km biathlon relay. In 1991 a 10km biathlon sprint was added to the programme. With the coming of the biathlon races the 4x10km cross-country relay changed to a two-leg classic, two-leg skate format. It was in 1991 that I briefly tangled with exercise SNOW COUNTRY, not as a participant, but as a novice skier on metal-edge kit discovering the Clash. I had skied in from Backstripes & wound my way around eventually to Secret Passage at which point I came across a race marshal who told me I was in the middle of a race. I quietly disappeared from the scene somewhat impressed by this huge, well-organised event thinking that this was typical of Nordic skiing in the UK. How disappointed I was when the truth became known to me a few years later. Anyway, back to the history of the Clash. 1991 was the last year for ex SNOW COUNTRY. A succession of poor winters made it increasingly hard to justify the effort of organising a large scale event in this forest. After five or so attempts the army conceded defeat & concentrated on organising its championships in Germany. So the biathlon range was used in competitive anger twice. Its licence was withdrawn in 2001/2.

I suspect the portacabin went in around the time of the biathlon range, 1989-90, & survived there until its roof caved in during the epic 2009/10 winter & it was removed in March 2011. Twenty years of shelter, storage & running repairs. A sad day. But while we are at it let's not forget other notable landmarks in the Clash history such as Chris Barton claiming the first Haute Route Challenge in November 1999. Or the toilets arriving in 2000. Or Andy Cox & the pupils of Gordonstoun School creating the "leak-proof?" turf roof in 2003.

Gordon says he has photos & even video of the hay-day of skiing racing in the Clash. Our races may not quite be quite as grand as ex SNOW COUNTRY but we carry the torch & continue the tradition.

## Six Go Mad in Engadin

**SANDY THORN** - I believe the origins of this tale go back to sometime last Spring when, in passing conversation with Eileen Cosgrove, Andy Miller mentioned that he had always fancied doing the Engadin Skimarathon. Now Eileen is always up for a little challenge, especially one that gives focus to keeping fit, and this idea lingered. She suggested that it might be a good idea for the next 'Huntly Ski Wifies' trip to be to participate in Engadin 2011. Of the other Wifies, Hilary Musgrave was keen in principle, Jayne Osgood interested, Anne Skitmore unavailable, myself unenthusiastic and Claire Newman already committed to the European Youth Olympics as Ruaridh was competing there.

Aided and abetted by Pete Gurney's love of the race – 'almost entirely flat or downhill, wonderfully sunny and beautiful scenery', by October Hilary and I had weakened in the face of Eileen's enthusiasm for the project and Mr Gurney's firm view that 'his' ladies could go out any day and ski 42km in 6hrs 20mins (the time limit) as 7km per hour is no problem on the flat....

Hilary and I were quite good about doing extra Nordic Walking sessions through the Autumn along with our usual Thursday cycling sessions. Hilary booked flights and hotel for the three of us, and race entries were paid. Meantime Jayne and her partner Dave Graham decided that they would both enter and booked in at the Hotel Sonne, St. Moritz Bad, along with us.

Just into the New Year the race entries arrived, which was a bit of a shock as it all became horribly real! For various reasons my training took a bit of a downturn in the New Year, although Eileen and Hilary got some on-snow training in at the World Championships in Norway. Roy suddenly realised that he would be home for one of his rare breaks exactly when Eileen was away in Switzerland, so there was a last minute re-shuffle which left Hilary and I with the luxury of a triple room between two, and our numbers swollen to six in the race. It also meant that we fortunately had a knowledgeable waxer with us, which was to prove invaluable on the day.



This Winter was particularly busy for me at the Ski Centre, with extra courses having to be scheduled to accommodate unprecedented demand and March 9<sup>th</sup> was upon me before I knew it, flying out to Zurich with only three clear days before the race. We successfully met up with Roy at Zurich airport and then had a three hour train journey to St Moritz. With three changes, we quickly became very adept at the 'human chain' method of getting seven bags and four ski bags on and off trains.

The hotel was warm, clean and comfortable. The food was reasonably priced for Switzerland and there were plenty of fresh salads and carb-heavy pastas and risottos to fuel the skiing. We found we were only 100m from the Engadin Loipe ready to receive the race route and under 1km from the race centre where bibs etc. had to be collected. Couldn't have been more convenient.

#### **Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> March**

We decided to ski from St Moritz towards Pontresina – the half-way point – to familiarize ourselves with the more challenging parts of the course. The section around St. Moritz and down to Pontresina is the only part of the race with substantial gradient, including the infamous 'Mattress Alley', a downhill between trees wrapped in padded mats. Stopping for a late lunch at a rather fancy café, who did we see racking his skis but Mr Gurney? After coffee with him and his elder daughter, Rachael, we carried on some kilometres further and caught a train back up the valley in time for dinner. I was beginning to have serious worries about my fitness and strength, as whatever I did I just seemed to be struggling and constantly falling behind all day.



#### **Friday 11<sup>th</sup> March**

We skied out in the other direction, towards the start of the race, to get a look at the hill coming in to St. Moritz. After this hill the entire route was on lakes, with slight bumps between lakes, so the promised 'almost entirely flat'. Despite this I was still struggling and starting to panic substantially. We found a lovely place for lunch on a sunny balcony and decided to ski the 10km back so that we experienced the hill requiring herringbone on the way into St Moritz. We skied this in 2.5km sections almost continuously to get an idea of the pace required. It still seemed unnaturally hard work. As we came back into the town, for some reason Roy and Eileen insisted that I try her skis. I was so despondent that I didn't see the reasoning behind this, but magically my skiing was improved! On closer inspection my skis had softened so much that I had been glued to the ground – I could flatten them with my hands! There was hope... Hilary and I picked up our race bibs and she took me

for a restorative coffee in a really nice café which did fondues. We thought that might be nice for after the race.

#### **Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> March**

Roy and I went down to the Ski Zentrum, hired me some stiffer skis, and bought some extremely expensive high fluorine glide wax. Glide was going to be critical on this race course. Having checked that the skis worked for me, I decided to rest and help Roy with the waxing in the afternoon. Waxing was going to be tricky as the forecast was for 7cm of new snow up at the start, moving onto old sub-zero tracks, with the temperature rising to well above zero after Pontresina. Roy followed Mr Toko's race wax advice and I got my first experience of putting a harder wax over a klister – very interesting. We also applied three different glide waxes with much scraping and polishing. We all carried the warm wax for the second half of the race. I have never experienced having to wax in layers for different conditions over time. Normally we have lots of wax with us and just adjust as becomes necessary. This was a bit of a leap of faith, but Roy seemed to know what he was doing and I just scraped and polished as hard as I could! The restaurant was booked for the fondue for after the race as any amount of calories could then be justified.

#### **Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> March RACE DAY**

Early breakfast as we had to get a bus around 8am. Not really able to eat that much. Hilary had kindly said that she would ski with me to Pontresina, which was the first time cut-off point, at which point I could decide to continue alone or stop and get a time for the Half Marathon. There are three further points to be reached ahead of cut-off times, Zuoz 5km from the end being the last one, and a maximum time of 6hrs 20mins to complete the Marathon.

The start was very crowded and we all had trouble with our skis catching on the snow at first, but fortunately this settled quickly and grip and glide seemed OK. Disconcertingly, your name is printed on your bib so all the spectators encourage you by name 'Hilary, Sandra, heya heya!' As we approached Pontresina we thought we were doing reasonably well on the time. On the downhill just below Mattress Alley we found Jayne on the ground and in obvious pain. We waited for the First Aider and called Dave back then carried on. It was decision time. Still, having made it within the time limit, was there a decision to make? Feeling very unsure of my ability to keep myself moving fast enough to stay ahead of the cut-off, I decided to give it a go. At one point I heard the announcement that time was up in 5 minutes as I was setting off, at which point Jayne and Dave skied into the check point. At Zuoz I was surprised to find I was still within time and now would finish as there was only 5km more to go (even I knew I had that left in the tank). The last few kilometres go steadily uphill, with a long downhill to the stadium and the finish. My wax was not gripping very well, but I was loath to put more on in case it made the downhill more difficult. With a couple of kilometres to go,

Jayne and Dave caught up with me, at which point he asked if he could zoom off to the finish and Jayne and I did the last bit together, eleven minutes inside the time, and ahead of some much younger men! All six of us finished with a time and celebrated with huge quantities of hot cheese and some red wine that evening.

### Monday 14<sup>th</sup> March

The train journey back to Zurich was stunning – we had been in the dark going over the Alps on the way out and it was just spectacular in the daylight.

All in all, a worthwhile trip. It was satisfying to manage to do the race and get my medal, and it was lovely to be skiing with my friends again. Some of them were already talking about going back and getting a better time. I would go back and ski with them, and be waxing assistant, but my feelings about racing haven't really changed. I personally don't go skiing to be amongst a large crowd of people in front of an audience and flog myself for six hours. I'm happy to work hard for that long and almost as far even with much bigger hills, but prefer to be chatting to my friends, have a mid-morning stop, lunch and afternoon tea and no threat of not being able to finish my day! My account is only mine. Below you can see other takes on the experience. I can see a Club trip to this race being a good intro to Ski Marathons. The scenery is fabulous, and the race is extremely well organized. We have done the reconnaissance and Hotel Sonne was a good and affordable base, well situated for the race admin and to explore the route. If I can do, so can you!

**JAYNE OSGOOD & DAVE GRAHAM** - Excited, enthusiastic **Jayne and Dave** arrived in St Moritz for the Engadin Skimarathon. Ill prepared, Jayne with damaged ribs and Dave sporting a spectacular black eye & bruised posterior, but hoping our years of technical expertise would see us through.

During our stay in St Moritz at the Sonne Hotel (comfortable and affordable) we spent the first few days with our team mates honing our racing skills as we lapped up the sunshine and surveyed the more technical aspects the race route.

Race day - suddenly very at home as conditions much more like Scotland. huddled together from the wind and snow, we made the final waxing adjustments and set off to the start with minutes to spare, and we were off!

What a journey through some of the most spectacular scenery with the wind on our backs amidst the other competitors in one of the largest marathons of its kind. An unforgettable experience, our skis expertly waxed (thanks Roy), we glided effortlessly with just the extra wax top up required now and again as things warmed up.

All going well we successfully steered our way through other hapless skiers negotiating the somewhat tricky and aptly named Mattress Alley, only for Jayne to misplace re-entry back into the striding lanes at the very last moment. Up again after dusting herself off and ignoring the advice of Paramedics and YES we still managed to make the half way point before cut off.

The rest of our race was spent trying to make up time but with luck the wind stayed with us and we eventually caught up with Sandy at only 5 km to go. Dave decided to knock a few minutes off his somewhat 'hindered' time, and sped off for a sprint finish, whilst Jayne and Sandy skied in gracefully across the finish line, united.



**HILARY MUSGRAVE** - I thoroughly enjoyed the Engadine adventure. It's such a beautiful place to do such a masochistic thing as a marathon on skis! But it must be the kindest marathon possible - downhill or flat most of the way, though the few uphill there were did begin to feel much bigger than the map said by the end. It was great to have a personal waxer with us - and his assistant was pretty good too!

The atmosphere during the race was great - having our names printed on the race bibs meant that we were encouraged by the spectators by name, which was a bit disconcerting at first. The sheer number of participants was impressive, seeing the line of black dots disappearing into the distance in front of us. The conditions were not the best for (relatively) slow classic skiers so that by the end the snow resembled brown sugar. But apart from the middle (hilly) section and the last kilometre the tracks were good and even someone with puny upper-body strength like me could double pole in them for kilometres at a time.



Great feeling of satisfaction at completing the 42km - and yes, I would do it again!

**ROY YOUNG** - So it's flat? Well maybe not if you count the bit at St Moritz, about 7 k of hilly stuff there including the mattress alley where you sweep downhill through the trees - but with so many people having done it before you the snow is swept and the trees pretty close (hence the mattresses - some one fell badly when we went to explore it before the race so we sent in 2 first aiders and 1 Doctor and of course none them were any use because of their lack of German). As you finish the mattresses you sweep out in to a long downhill field and the speed builds. Then it was over the railway - they stop the trains until the majority of folk have gone by (note the word majority, the minority get to play chicken). Then it was flat, but into the wind. Then it was flat but on slush (at +10 snow doesn't like staying solid it prefers to morph to a more energised form of the molecule which is a lot less fun to ski through).

So when you are through the St Moritz bit down the hill, passed the windy bit and over the slush then



it's flat? Well yes apart from the last 5 k. You go through this town (they closed the streets to cars for the majority of the skiers - the minority are not supposed to be there). Then you climb up some fields discover its only 3 k to go and you have 15 mins to beat the 5 hours so your partner shoots off at rate of knots! (And she had told me off for overtaking during the double pole (dead flat - no wind and a pretty good track) bit by the air strip). So then it's flat? Well after the swoop down and the zig zag in through the slush where a germanic Mr Blobby shouts (a lot) just because he's stuck his pole under your ski then it's straight and flat to the finish. So you'd do it again? Yep, it was great fun and in a great area, although of course the skiing is all flat. Just before coming to Engadine I enjoyed getting cheered (the crowd was warming up for the race later in the day and I was checking the course) round the lap used for the Oslo 50k - now there's a seriously not flat 50k that I won't be doing.

**EILEEN YOUNG** - I really did mean to train properly for the Engadin. I got Sarah to write me a training plan which I followed for at least 2 weeks. So I tried again, coming down early before the afterschool club to do a few laps of the mat. That lasted 2 weeks too. I persuaded colleagues at work to come out running with me, but they got injured after 2 weeks. I went skiing with Frank and Hilary whilst we were in Oslo watching the world champs, but that was only 2 weeks before the event. So I arrived in the Engadin valley, a great location staying in a great hotel with great company but not in great shape! The actual day was rather surreal. Taking part in this massive event with thousands of others. Everything was so well organised and ran so smoothly, although Roy was still putting his skis on when the start gun was fired. There I was skiing along behind Roy, muttering under my breath or more loudly as he lane hopped and sped on ahead slowing down for me to catch up and then setting off again. All the things that I had been a bit worried about before, like coping with the masses at the start, the steep uphill before St Moritz or mattress alley down to Pontresina seemed to pass by with ease. I could tell that Roy and Sandy had done a great job waxing the skis. The porridge snow for the last kilometre was a struggle though. We seemed to get the hydration and nutrition about right, except it meant Roy needed 2 loo stops, and the portaloos were few and far between and not necessarily on the track. Without that we might have finished sub 5hrs! I would do another long distance ski race, I might even try to skate, and I might even manage to train more consistently!



## RACING NEWS

Since the last newsletter there have been two major competitions where Huntly skiers have been involved. As always much more information can be found on the British Nordic Development Squad website at [www.bnds.org.uk](http://www.bnds.org.uk) but here is quick summary.

### **European Youth Olympic Winter Festival, Liberec, Czech Republic, February 2011.**

A four-strong British Cross-Country Ski Team included Huntly skiers Michael May & Ruaridh Newman. The courses were challenging, as would be expected at this level of competition, & an interesting statistic caught my attention that 12% of the field took falls in the boys 10km classic. Michael & Ruaridh competed in the 10km CT, classic sprints & 7.5km FT & turned in some good results at their first major championships.

### **World Championships, Oslo, Norway (23 February – 6 March 2011).**

Some of the most demanding courses in the World, the spiritual home of Nordic skiing & massive crowds can only mean Holmenkollen & Norway. I'm sure most of you who weren't lucky enough to be there soaked up the atmosphere on TV. Andrew Musgrave, Posy Musgrave, Callum Smith, Sarah Young, Andrew Young along with Team Leader Roy Young were in the British Team & PJ Barron represented Ireland.

The championships kicked off to great start for the British Team in the qualification races. Callum Smith came 2<sup>nd</sup> in the 10km classic & stood on the podium for the flower ceremony in front of thousands of spectators. In the ladies 5km CT Sarah Young returned to great form with a 6<sup>th</sup> place & qualified for the main race later in the week.

The sprints followed & Sarah Young, Posy Musgrave, PJ Barron, Callum Smith & Andrew Young all skied to or better than their ranking. But the outstanding result was Andrew Musgrave's 26<sup>th</sup> place, the first ever British X/C skier to make the top 30 in a World Championships. Unfortunately no World Cup points as these don't apply to the World Champs, but next year... maybe...

Classic time trials & pursuits followed with varying fortunes, but mostly good, in which the British Team along with the others had to cope very difficult waxing conditions. Even the big teams could get it wrong as the Swedes found to their cost



Callum Smith podiums  
10km Qualifying Race

in the men's 15km classic but in general, smaller teams like Britain will always be at a disadvantage. Teams were entered in both the men's (Musgrave & Smith) & ladies (Posy & Sarah) Team Sprints. These are always really exciting races to watch, although the Holmenkollen fog did obscure this a bit.

No ladies relay team but in the men's race Britain had a great start but although pulled from the race before the final leg because the organisers could see they would soon be lapped but they had the pleasure of finishing ahead of the Danes & most importantly the Aussies.

The final weekend saw the biggest crowds & the ladies 30km FT & men's 50km FT. Thirty thousand camping in the forest & I can but only quote from the BNDS website *"Holmenkollen resembled the M6 on a bank holiday - but with much better tempered people in the tip to tail lines. Whole families wound their way up the hills - babies and toddlers either in backpacks or in a fjellpulk (the Rolls Royce of pushchair/sleds) towed by sweating fathers or mothers, children from about 4 years old skiing up as if, as reputed, they were born with skis on, and younger groups also carrying backpacks or towing sleds but these laden with beer and firewood. Children stumbled on the steeper hills so that the lines of skiers ground to a halt, but everyone waited patiently while they picked themselves up and carried on for the whole 5km - uphill all the way. When they reached the race trails skis were taken off and stacked at the racks provided and everyone scrambled along steep snowy banks to find somewhere to watch from. The 30,000 people who had camped in the forest for days before the Championship started had already got the best places of course, but they had earned them. The tents varied from big wigwams with stoves to tarpaulins tied between trees, but all had made themselves "comfortable" with fire pits, seats cut out from the snow and cushions of spruce branches. The organisers had put some portaloos and water stations in places but this was still basic camping in sub-zero temperatures - but after 2 weeks they still radiated good humour and cheered wildly for every skier that went past, be it an athlete or just a coach or ski team helper."* Into this atmosphere entered Posy & Andrew Musgrave to sample the gruelling hills of these 30 or 50km courses. By her own admission Posy isn't a long-distance athlete but she was sustained & encouraged by the enthusiastic crowd which banished any thought of retiring from the race. Andrew by crossing the finish line became to only skier at these championships to have competed in every event & he didn't just take part but competed very well.

I'll leave you to visit the BNDS website for a round-up of the final Scandinavian races of the season.

### Final Bits & Pieces.

- Sat 28<sup>th</sup> May - Huntly Rollerski Sprints
- Sun 29<sup>th</sup> May – Clashindarroch Hill Climb.  
Please let me know if you can help on either or both days – Your Club Needs You!
- Sat 4<sup>th</sup> June – Ming Summer Endurance event followed by ceilidh in evening (contact Rick Newman [ricknewman@clara.co.uk](mailto:ricknewman@clara.co.uk))
- Club Thursday evening sessions continue through the summer 7:30pm, Ski Centre.
- **Please let me have your skiing stories for the next, end of season, newsletter.**



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Motorway traffic  
Oslo style