

# HUNTLY NORDIC SKI CLUB

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

NEWSLETTER No. 38

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**PRE- SEASON Science ISSUE**



**Clash snow days = 0**

## Editorial

*I recently received a copy of a dissertation written by Jamie Johnston at Edinburgh University on the Mar Lodge Ski Centre. This centre only operated for two seasons, 63/64 & 64/65 before shutting down, but it was a pioneering development being one of the first ski centres in Europe to operate snow-making equipment. Jamie's dissertation suggests that with modern snow-making equipment & positioning the centre on a forested north-facing slope there is a possibility that a ski centre built at these lower altitudes could be feasible. The Clashindarroch Forest Ski Trails are at a similar altitude to where the Mar Lodge ski tows were built & it makes one ponder if snow-making could work in the Clash. But this is of course wishful thinking. However there are ideas that are more realistic for the Clash & I hope you find the article on Snow & the Clash interesting.*

*The winter calendar has a familiar ring to it but a slight variation to the Secret Clash. I went on an archaeological walk in the Clash this summer & discovered some new secrets. Then there is "the secret event" that will only go ahead if conditions are just right. I will say no more other than have your skis waxed & wait for the summons.*

*Further afield there are plans for an exciting Nordic Cross Super Sprint rollerski event in Edinburgh in December as part of the Scottish Snowsports Festival 2011.*

*Finally the Golden Boot is still up for grabs for the first person to ski the Haute Route this season. The only rule is you must do it entirely on skis – old rockhoppers useful. Will Malcolm Cooper make it a hat trick or is there someone else out there to take the mantle? Snow is the vital ingredient!*

The Club has just received a grant for £3000 from the Snowsport Scotland Special Members Fund to go towards the purchase of classic rollerskis.

## THE HUNTLY SPRINTS & CLASHINDARROCH HILL CLIMB

**28/29 May 2011**

There was a good turnout for the first two races of the British & Scottish Rollerski Series in May with strong contingents from the Cairngorm & Highland clubs, the usual RAF contingent as well as skiers travelling up from England. Club & novice skiers rubbed shoulders with several British national cross-country ski & biathlon team members. The weekend saw two racing debuts: we had 7-year old Alice Telford & then at the other end of the spectrum we had in the veteran category Steve Young (Steve must have enjoyed it as he has just brought himself some top of the range boots).

The sprints on the Saturday reverted to the traditional 655m Flat & 1135m Hill courses (the track got washed out last year & modified courses were used). Andrew Young won the senior men's race & Michael May came 3<sup>rd</sup>. Stuart Gray came a close 2<sup>nd</sup> to Robert Sircus of CBNSC in the U16/U18 race. Fergus Newman won the U14/U12 boys races with his brother, Oliver, 2<sup>nd</sup>. Olwen Thorn won the ladies race and Lynne Gray, just returning to racing after an injury which put her out of skiing for most of last winter, won the U14/U12 race. Claudia Zeiske was 2<sup>nd</sup> veteran lady. These races were followed by the usual knock-out sprints won once again by Andrew Young & Olwen Thorn.

On the Sunday the skiers headed to Rhynie & the Clashindarroch Hill Climb. In the longer 8.05km, 202m climb Andrew Young won by a big margin & Stuart Gray once again had to settle for a 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the U18/U16 to a very strong Robert Sircus from the Cairngorm club. Fergus Newman came in ahead of Duncan Gibb & Oliver Newman in the shorter U14/U12 4.85km, 133m climb & Lynne Gray was 1<sup>st</sup> U14/U12 girl.

## THE SCOTTISH ROLLERSKI CHAMPIONSHIPS, HUNTLY 10 September 2011

A very large RAF contingent & some Army skiers boosted numbers at a very wet Scottish Rollerski Championships in September. The day started wet & proceeded to get wetter developing to monsoon proportions, but fortunately without any wind. Despite soggy timekeepers & lap sheets the day went without serious mishap other than one or two of the



No skiers were hurt in the taking of these photos!!!!

military skiers taking a detour onto the mud. It really was atrocious weather & the skiers & officials coped very well. Marshalling was ably assisted by Chris Barton & about 10 students from Gordonstoun School. Our new banners got their first official outing & one could be excused for thinking it was a proper FIS event.

In a superb demonstration of skiing the senior men's race was won convincingly by Calum Irvine of Cairngorm. First senior Huntly skier home was Posy Musgrave who won the ladies title by a similarly convincing margin. Not far behind Posy was a fast improving Andrew Shanks who won the Huntly club battle ahead of Dave Horsley.

The U18/U16 race was won by Cairngorm's Robert Sircus closely followed by the first Huntly skier home, Stuart Gray. Throughout the season there has been close competition between three Huntly skiers Duncan Gibb (U14), Oliver Newman (U12) & Fergus Newman (U12) but Duncan coped best with the wet conditions to win the boys 3.7km race & in 2<sup>nd</sup> place Oliver took the U12 boys title. Beth Maclean won the girls U14 race. One of our Edinburgh based members Oliver Bohle was racing on the Huntly circuit for the first time, it is technically challenging track & Oliver put in a great performance with little practise. And finally Brodie Murray had a bit of a disastrous day but showed tremendous character to complete the race. First his pole broke; he was then given the wrong length pole & after a second change of poles finally got into his stride only to head to the finish a lap early. When told of his mistake & really wanting a hole to swallow him up, he headed back out on to the circuit to complete the race.



Posy Musgrave

A chaotic Le Mans type start in the senior relay



Lynne Gray closing the gap in the junior relay

There then followed the relays & one of the most exciting finishes ever seen at Huntly in the U14 relay between Huntly & Cairngorm. With the lead changing each lap Lynne Gray went into the final lap 50m behind & despite a storming finish just couldn't quite catch the Cairngorm team. A very strong Cairngorm team won the senior relay ahead of an experienced RAF team followed by a very young Huntly 'A' team. The last I heard the Huntly old Men were still racing ;-)- no guys you did a great job.

On the Sunday we headed to Glenmore for the Cairngorm Classic where the best results came from Duncan Gibb & Beth Maclean who both won their U14 races.

## THE BRITISH & SCOTTISH ROLLERSKI SERIES 2011

In the 6-race Scottish Series Fergus Newman managed to hold off a late season surge by Duncan Gibb to win the U14 boys series by just 2 points. Lynne Gray had a good rollerski season after her return from injury to comfortably win the U14 girls title. Her older brother Stuart (U16) had to settle for 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the U18 series.

The 11-race British Rollerski Series concluded with the Wessex Sprints in October. Fergus Newman added the British Series title to his Scottish one, closely followed home by Duncan Gibb & Oliver Newman. Beth Maclean displaced Lynne Gray into to take top spot in the U14 girl's competition. And yet again Stuart Gray had to settle for 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the U18 men's contest.

The British Series continues to be popular with 145 skiers taking part this year. The format of next years British Series is under discussion & there probably will be a change in the number of races & venues. The Scottish Series future is more secure & expect to see the familiar 6-race series for 2012.

### BOOK REVIEW:

***Cool Britannia. Snowier times in 1580-1930 than since.*** by Adam Watson & Iain Cameron

(63 pages, A4 softbound, illustrated with numerous photographs. Paragon Publishing, 2010 (£12.99)

Dr. Adam Watson, a native of Aberdeenshire, should need no introduction: a renowned biologist, ecologist & mountaineer, is recognised as the pre-eminent authority on the Cairngorms. One long term interest Dr Watson has is the study of snow cover on the Scottish mountains. If you ever visit the [www.winterhighland.info](http://www.winterhighland.info) forum you will find a strange group of people measure & record the extent & longevity of snow patches on the mountains. Dr Watson is a regular contributor to this forum. Dr. Watson & his co-author Iain Cameron jointly produce the annual Royal Meteorological Society report on snow patches. Although I, with tongue-in-cheek, describe these snow patch hunters as strange this is really a great example of amateur enthusiasts helping serious academic research.

The authors have compiled numerous historical references, going back to the 1580's, to long lasting snow cover in the British Isles & compared these to more recent observations. The book concentrates on Scotland - well that's where we get most snow - but also covers England & Wales. The accounts contain some fascinating & often surprising information. Did you know that the single biggest loss of life to an avalanche in the UK happened at Lewes, Sussex in 1836. Then there was one unfortunate Elizabeth Woodcock who in 1799 was buried in a snowdrift near Cambridge for 8 days before being rescued.

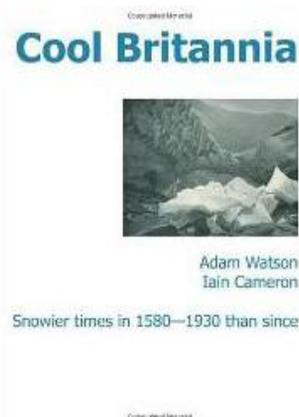
The authors are able to demonstrate from these accounts that, yes it was snowier between 1580-1930 than it has been for last 70 years. The book does not try to explain why these changes have occurred, that isn't its purpose. What it has done is to compile in one place probably the most comprehensive account of snow observations in the British Isles. To anybody interested in snow, & most skiers are, this is an absorbing read.

### THE SNOWY CLASH



Earlier this year Colin Miller & I took a geography undergraduate from Edinburgh University on a fieldtrip to the Clashindarroch (Newsletter No.37). Jamie Johnston wanted to use the Clash as a case study in his undergraduate dissertation '*Snow Business or No Business. Factors that affected the technical viability of the short-lived 1960's Mar Lodge Ski Centre, with particular regard to the potential influence of technological limitations*'. Not surprisingly the Mar Lodge Ski Centre would have been more viable with modern snow-making equipment but more interestingly it was sited in the wrong place; an open, south facing hillside. A better site would have been the now tree-covered north facing side of the valley.

This set me thinking about the Clash & the factors that control the snow accumulation & its survivability on the ski trails. The Mar Lodge Ski Centre (339m-505m) was at a similar altitude to the Clashindarroch ski trails (360m-510m) & the Clash is definitely tree covered. Then I read 'Cool Britannia' so I contacted Dr. Adam Watson & received an interesting reply about snow. What follows is a summary on the factors that make the Clash one of the best snow-holding forests in Scotland. Of course while I acknowledge the contribution from Adam Watson & Jamie Johnston any errors or misunderstandings are mine alone. While these are not earth shattering revelations they may help understand what things can be done or shouldn't be done to improve the snow conditions.



The Clash ski trails average 40-45 skiable days each winter but snow is lying in patches for a lot longer than that. Most of our “weather” comes from the prevailing west & northwest polar maritime air masses, unfortunately this “weather” is often wet rather than snowy. Better is the cold arctic maritime air coming from the north. But better still are the less frequent polar continental air masses that approach from the northeast & east. These can bring huge dumps of snow particularly if they have picked up moisture from the North Sea. What is important to remember is what appears as rain in Huntly (altitude 140m) will often be falling as snow at the Clash car park (360m) as it will be about 1.5°C colder. So snow falls in the Clash because it is a little bit higher & a little bit colder, altitude is important.

We see so much snow in the Clash because the trees act as a huge windbreak or snow fence. This is particularly obvious in blizzard conditions when the snow is swept over the tops of the trees until it reaches the far, lee end of the forest, the wind speed reduces & the snow is deposited. This also happens at any longitudinal break or track. A wider track is probably better as it allows more snow to accumulate but too wide & it will let in sunshine. The firebreak of Hedder Wye is wider (10-20m) than most of the forestry tracks (5-10m) & it typically has a greater depth of snow. If the track is too narrow then it does not cause sufficient turbulence to reduce the wind velocity & deposit deep snow. Snow is also deposited on the windward edge of the forest which acts as a huge snow fence. This is clearly seen on the western edge of the Clash along the Timberline snowfield where huge depths of snow bank up against the trees. Blizzard conditions aren't ideal for grooming the trails as massive snowdrifts, particularly along the Haute Route, can make it almost impossible to get the snowmobile & groomer through. I much prefer gentle winds giving a more even blanket of snow. Timberline typically has hard packed snow, and whereas you might sink to your knees or waist on the forest trails you can often walk over the top of Timberline's snow. I think this is largely due to Timberline's moorland/forest edge situation & continual winds blowing fine spindrift & that is also subject to the thaw/freeze effect.



Timberline & the Clash snow fence.

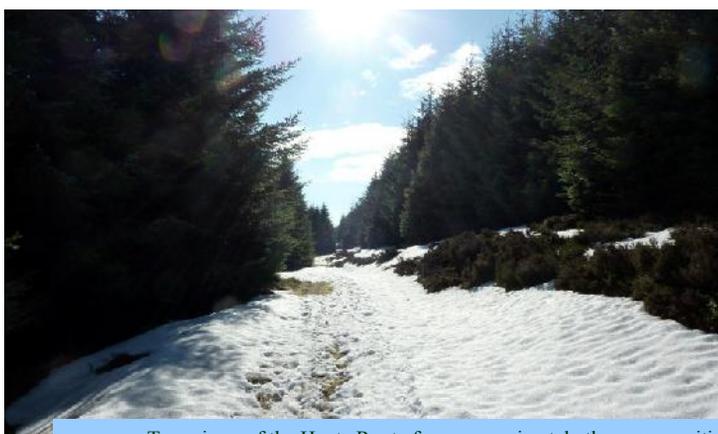
© Simon Bartholomew 2005



The 2011 Clash Dash was moved to the deep lying snow of the wide firebreak of Hedder Wye

We now know why the snow preferentially collects around the trees & how the snow is frequently blown clear of the open moorland & hills perhaps collecting in gullies & hollows. But why is the snow preserved on the trails when the surrounding hills are bare? First of all, if more depth of snow has been deposited there is more to melt. If I understand Jamie's dissertation correctly then significant snow melt doesn't start until the temperature starts to exceed +1.8°C so temperatures of 3-4°C in Huntly probably won't see too much melting, or ablation, in the forest.

Dense coniferous woodland lowers the ground temperature simply because of the shading from the sun. This is obvious on the north edge of woods or stone dykes. This is a major reason for not having the track too wide as more sunlight is let through. Lower ground temperatures are also good for when the snow first falls. Ideally the ground is frozen. If it is too wet then melting starts from below & this can be seen in the boggy sections in The Fingers & bottom of Short Cut.



Two views of the Haute Route from approximately the same position, at the bottom of Snowgoose (Timberline). On the left the trees have shaded & protected the snow. Behind the camera along a more open stretch of track the snow had gone. To the right, deep freshly deposited snow. But note the wind scouring starting to blow the snow clear of the track.

Much of the heavy rain & fog that affect moorland is greatly reduced in dense coniferous woodland by being held up in the foliage & not reaching ground level. Water is a far better conductor of heat than air so melting is less under the trees than on the nearby moor. Freeze-thaw changes are much less frequent under & beside dense conifers than on open moorland because the canopy prevents heat loss to the sky by convection & radiation, especially on starry nights. Because of this the snow remains more uniform & dense under the trees reducing its rate of melt.

A further factor that reduces the rate of melt in the forest is that the ground surface & vegetation remains permanently moist whereas on the moor it varies from sopping wet to dry. Melting is reduced because much of the heat energy in the mild air is taken up by evaporating water in the foliage, bark & patches of tall vegetation poking through the snow.

Along with rain the big villain is wind: be it wet, driving rain or those insidious dry fohn winds that turn snow from solid to gas without melting. The trees act as a big windbreak that protects the snow. I'm sure you all will have got out of your car & thought about getting straight back in & driving home because of the wild conditions. Yet once you've battled into your ski boots & skied a few minutes into the forest all is peaceful & calm (well all things are relative).

Then there are those factors that I can't just seem to put my finger on, something to do with the local aspect of a small area of forest. There are parts of the forest where I can regularly find deeper snow or, less helpfully, thinner snow cover. The hill on the main track leading up to Rollercoaster is often bare or has thin snow, particularly on the bend at the bottom, which isn't particularly helpful when you are schussing down at speed. And it is at the bend the snow is thinnest & here there are tall trees either side of the track. Yet a little way higher up the track, where it is more exposed the snow is deeper. I suspect the wind funnels through & increases in velocity on the bend whipping away the snow. The Glace de Clash can almost guarantee to have deep snow, & interestingly you feel the temperature drop in this short section of a few hundred metres, it seems to have its own microclimate probably caused by cold air being trapped at this low point.



So what does this all mean, what can be done to enhance the skiing? First of all clear felling is definitely bad. The Forestry Commission recognises this & plans to do no clear fell in the vicinity of the ski trails. They will clear small patches & thin as necessary. Even thinning has an adverse effect as it allows more wind & sunlight onto the trails. We need to encourage vegetation moisture retention at ground level, & this is probably environmentally sound. However we don't want too much moisture i.e. boggy ground or running water – good drainage is essential. Ski trails 5-20m wide are best. Narrower & they don't get enough snow & eventually become impassable, wider & they let in those horrible things sunlight, wind & rain. Experience shows that grooming the trails helps prolong the skiing by compacting & making the snow denser, the last bit of snow to melt on a trail tends to be the two ski tracks.

We are probably never going to see a major investment in, say, snow-making in the Clash but there might be lower-cost projects that might improve things. We have seen new trails created, for example The Fingers & ramps into the Biathlon Range. Grassy trails are better than stony trails as you can ski on thinner snow cover. Judicious positioning of snow-fencing may improve local black spots; you could even make the fencing from brash which might be more aesthetically pleasing. I don't know if the above has confused or informed but one thing I can guarantee is that skiers will always talk about snow.

## **COACHING**

Prior to 2010 there were instructor courses on offer through BASI (British Association of Ski Instructors), but nothing that certified those who were involved in local club level activities. BASI courses, which are really for professional instructors, are very expensive & usually run overseas. These sort of courses were beyond the need (and often the pockets) of someone who maybe just wants to help out for example with the Huntly Junior Development Squad (JDS). The Centre & Club overcame the JDS problem to a certain extent by running in-house training such as the “coaching for coaches”.

In 2010 Cross Country Coaching awards were developed within the Snowsport Scotland (SSS) structure which brought our discipline in line with other snow sports & also very importantly follow suggested best practises by UK Coaching.

Roger Homyer of Highland Nordic SC has been the driving force behind getting The Snowsport Scotland Nordic Performance Coach scheme up & running & this year it has really taken off. Level 1 is the entry level and suitable for a parent helper at the JDS, they need to be under the supervision of a Level 2 or higher coach but have the basic skills needed to assist with coaching. A lot of coaches will feel this is as far as they want to go and they are a valuable asset to the club. The level 2 coach is the club coach & can operate independently. It requires a higher level of commitment but should be accessible to most skiers. Level 3 are national coaches & Level 4 international level coaches. One of the major attractions of this scheme is that it requires the coaches to demonstrate their skills by actually coaching not just passing a course. So all the Level 1 coaches will be enhancing their logbook every time they help out &, probably without realising it, progressing to Level 2 if they want to.

So big congratulations are due to all our members who have attended SSS courses,

Level 1: Frank Musgrave, Malcolm & Kay Cooper, Paul Gray, Will Strohm, Alan Telford, Ruaridh Newman, Claudia Zeiske, Deborah May.

Level 2: Alex Standen, Ruaridh and William Newman, Sarah Young & Andrew Young, P-J Barron. Eileen Cosgrove, Sandy Thorn and Andy Miller have gained their Level 2 Coaching award by equivalence because of their BASI qualification and experience

And finally, Roy Young has achieved the demanding requirements for Level 4.

Some have met all the requirements and are fully qualified. Others are still completing their log book or First Aid requirement. Club Coach Eileen Cosgrove has been instrumental in organising the courses in Huntly for the aspiring coaches.

This influx of new coaches is allowing the club to start new sessions for both junior & adult skiers. For example Sarah Young & Olwen Thorn (BASI qualified) plan “Fast & Female” sessions to show teenage girls that it can be cool to be active. Malcolm Cooper, Alan Telford & Paul Gray have started a monthly group for skiers aged 6-11 who want to maintain/develop fitness & ski skills but are too young for the BNDS. Also the younger coaches have been taking more of the club sessions bringing their enthusiasm, knowledge and new ideas, much to the enjoyment of all the participants.

Anyway lots of exciting new things are happening & the club will continue to support & sponsor these activities.

## **GOVERNING BODIES**

There have been big things afoot with both Snowsport Scotland (SnSc) & British Ski & Snowboard (BSS). After consultation with its members SnSc is producing a new constitution largely in preparation for it changing to charitable status. One of the major ideas was to have more individual membership. This brought on fears from many of the clubs that this would undermine the strong club structure that already exists within SnSc. This is recognised as one of the strongest aspects of SnSc & there was no desire to change. So the clubs will remain the essential power-base of SnSc but there will be more scope for various individual members. It gets a bit complicated but hopefully it will all work out fine. It is planned to get approval for the new constitution at the SnSc AGM in November. You can follow these exciting developments at their [www.snowsportsotland.org](http://www.snowsportsotland.org) but I suspect you have more interesting things to do.

The BSS is also producing a new constitution & I think this is likely to have a rocky ride. Again they are looking to have individual membership, the idea being to engage the skiing public with their national governing body. This along with some other ideas is meeting with suspicion by some as they think BSS may be straying into areas that are more rightfully looked after by the Home Nation governing bodies. The BSS looks after the elite & the Home Nations take care of recreational skiing. BSS also propose to have committees for each of the various disciplines: nordic, alpine, snowboard, freestyle. Each having an equal say on the main board. This is of course a good idea & hopefully will result in a fairer deal for nordic. Some also feel it is not clear who actually controls BSS. Who is it accountable to? Should it be the Home Nations? Should you wish to find out more about these changes either contact me or better still visit their website [www.teambss.org.uk](http://www.teambss.org.uk)

## New Members

Several new members have joined over the summer months. So welcome to:  
Edinburgh based Arne & Oliver Bohle who discovered the delights of the Clash last winter.  
The Murray family Bruce, Anne & Brodie.  
And William King.

## Final Bits & Pieces.

- Huntly Nordic & Outdoor Centre Open Day – Sun 6<sup>th</sup> Nov, 10am – 4pm.
- Sun 18<sup>th</sup> Dec – The Ming Christmas Event (contact Rick Newman [ricknewman@clara.co.uk](mailto:ricknewman@clara.co.uk) )
- Club Thursday evening sessions continue through the autumn 7:30pm, Ski Centre.
- **Please let me have your skiing stories for the next, mid-season newsletter.**
- **Membership renewals are now due.**



Sponsors of the Huntly Youth Ski Club

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Marine Technical Limits



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The chase is on!  
Peter Thorn hunts down Dave horsley on  
the Cairngorm Classic Hill Climb.  
I didn't catch him.