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NEWSLETTER No. 58

April 2021

LOCKDOWN SEASON

Editorial

Our last newsletter came out just as we entered our first lockdown. This long overdue newsletter comes as we slowly move out of hopefully our last strict lockdown. I expect restrictions in some form or other will continue for the rest of the year but end is in sight and club activities will slowly resume. Thank you to everyone who has contributed articles & photos.

Peter

THE CLASH SEASON – 2020/21 – (64 ski days, 68 good, 16 marginal)

The season commenced on the 19th Nov allowing Roy, Eileen & Claire to claim the Golden Boot in very dubious conditions but the International Ratification Committee confirmed their claim and their names are duly entered onto the roll of honour. As quick as it came the snow disappeared and we had dribs and drabs of skiing up until the festive period. And, oh boy! what a change we saw from the 29th Dec until early March. Fantastic skiing conditions in the Clash & elsewhere. And yes, you can have too much of a good thing. At times the car park disappeared under feet of snow. 10ft+ deep snowdrifts saw the road closed. Crazy scenes as the masses descended on the forest to experience a winter wonderland. Enraged locals berating irresponsible skiers, although I suspect most skiers were responsible. But lockdown meant lots of walkers, maybe unfamiliar with the etiquette of accessing the countryside in winter, started building snowmen & igloos on the trails. Maybe seeing skiers effortlessly making progress, as they waded through deep snow, might have tempted them to try skiing in future. There were a couple of weeks when we were unable to groom the trails because it was unclear if this was permitted under the lockdown rules, but once that was cleared up the trails were once again groomed until the big storm came with heavy snow causing devastation in the forest with trees down everywhere – it will take some work to clear in time for next season. Many an interesting deviation was needed to by-pass these trees and, I hope like me you were able to find some new avenues through the forest.

The good skiing conditions finished in early March with a late reprieve of a few days in early April. Skiing ended on the 11th April. A season & year to remember and not only for the skiing. I count myself very fortunate to live in an area with access to such wonderful countryside.



Roy, Eileen & Claire claim the Boot 2020



A full car park Feb 2021



You can have too much of a good thing – the garage collapsed under the weight of over 1m of snow. Fortunately the snowmobile suffered no damage. Thanks to all who helped dig it out.



Lockdown Skiing.

Rollerskiing 2020: All races throughout the U.K. were cancelled but we weren't totally thwarted and managed to have a Clash Hill Climb Challenge in September. As part of their permitted personal exercise, members self-timed themselves anytime throughout September up the traditional 8.05km course. Although there were only seven official times posted it was a quality field with an Olympian, several of the best British juniors and Britain's top coach, Roy Young, taking part. Hamish Wolfe set a cracking time of 25:30 while Elspeth Cruickshank's 35:36 edged out Posy Musgrave from the ladies' top spot. Roy missed out on a sub 1hr time by two-hundredths of a second, but he was 1st Super-Vet.

Ski Orienteering – first week of January, 2021: To start with, lockdown rules were a bit unclear as to what we were allowed to do and organise. Our on-snow events were effectively cancelled but we felt able set out a Ski Orienteering course in January. Maps were emailed and skiers were invited to search for the nine hidden markers at their own convenience. I was gratified by the enthusiastic response from both club members and others & I received 22 results and I'm sure there were others hunted for the deviously hidden markers. It was more about exploring and enjoying skiing in less frequented areas so you were all winners. Some sped around like Jakob Ipsen who completed the course in an astonishing 1hr 10min while Hilary & Frank Musgrave took several days to collect the markers in an aggregate time of 3hrs. Lauren Bate set the fastest lady's of time 2hr 25min. Luke Nicholls set a strong time in the long course and also shot around the short, 5-marker course in a ridiculously fast 10mins. Astrid Ipsen beat her mum, Caroline, in a close fought short-course race while a young team of Robert, Euan & Andrew worked together to complete their route finding. The competitive nature of our members saw some trying to shave off precious time by using modern technology (smartphone) to record markers but unfortunately this didn't work for Rod Campbell who had all the right notes but not necessarily in the right order, maybe pencil & paper next time...

Secret Scotland – February 2021: For the first half of February the road up to the Clash was blocked with huge snow drifts. It took the best part of two weeks to open the Cabrach road fully. Even if we had been able to get up there Covid rules would have curtailed any organised club event. But snow was everywhere and in place of the Secret Clash trip we had a Secret Scotland event where members sent in reports of their own local ski adventures. From golf courses to moorland, hills and farmland you guys certainly got about.....

Roy's message for winter parking
"Keep Access Clear".



There were lots of skiers out and about around Leith Hall.



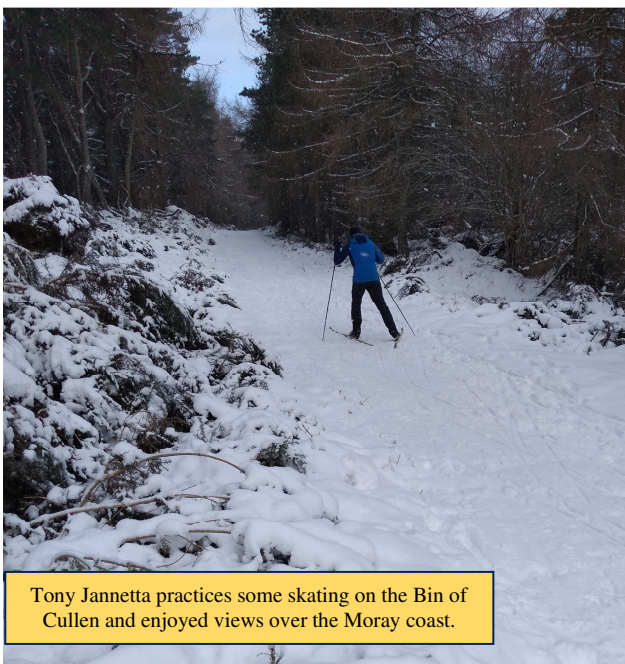
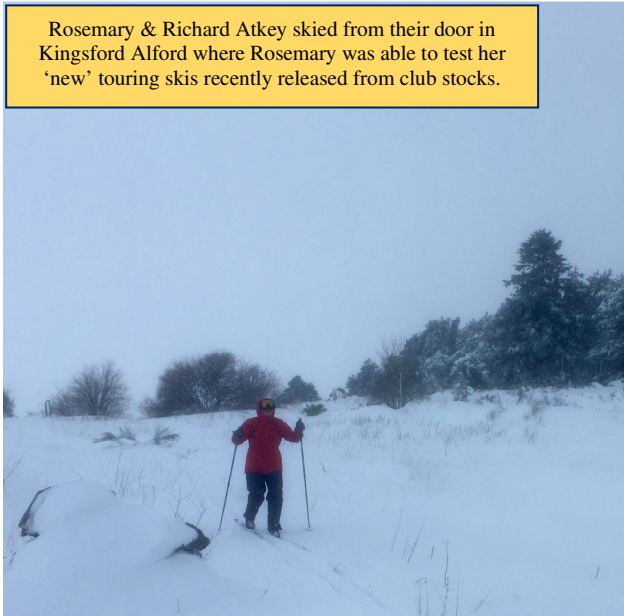
One of the Williamson clan out on a nighttime tour on the moors around the Clash

Anne Skitmore enjoying the snow around Daviot learning new skills of stile building (to get out of garden), gate climbing, dyke scrambling & burn hopping. I bet they don't teach these on BASI.



Frank Musgrave disappears along a narrow trail on the flanks of Bennachie near Pittodrie then strikes a Shackleton type pose as he tries to catch Hilary between Watch Craig and Oxen Craig.

Rosemary & Richard Atkey skied from their door in Kingsford Alford where Rosemary was able to test her 'new' touring skis recently released from club stocks.



Tony Jannetta practices some skating on the Bin of Cullen and enjoyed views over the Moray coast.



Richard & Rosaling Gale enjoyed perfect conditions around Auchterless.

AULD GITS ON THE GOLF COURSE – A LOCKDOWN ROUND

by Timberline

After frustrating days of globally-warmed sleet and wet snow in lowland Aberdeenshire, an overnight freeze and generous dusting of proper snow brought hope once more for skiing close to home. Living as I do on what was once part of the Inverurie Golf Course, a round of the perimeter of the existing course used to be a frequent option in most winters offering the added bonus of evening skiing by the light of the moon and/or the general illumination arising from the streets of Inverurie. So it was a pleasure to open the curtains one Sunday morning and find the slush frozen and generous carpet of powder on top.



Out on the course, situated on rising ground west of the A96 Inverurie bypass, conditions were ideal. Despite the snow depth being little more than 5cm, it consisted of a frozen base topped with powder – perfect for effortless glide. Around the perimeter, and keeping off the greens themselves, there is a variety of terrain with mini-challenges here and there as well as long and delightful stretches of smooth turf along the edges of the fairways. Getting lost is well-nigh impossible. The route is well-trodden by dog-walkers and, under snow, by families out sledging. And it was encouraging on my tour to see from another set of ski tracks that someone had beaten me to it.

Situated in the heart of the Garioch, it is no surprise to find the Doric alive and well in signage which greets one along the way, all crediting the Auld Golfers of Inverurie Traveling Society (the acronym is available on request).

Only an auld git would be churlish enough to point out that “Traveling” should have a double “l”. One recalls the scene in “Local Hero”, where busybody advice addressed to a man painting the name on a boat’s bow brings the response “*And there are two “g”s in “b----- off”*”. Incidentally, Hole 15 is called “Hemmed In”, which seemed appropriate for a lockdown ski. Another hole is christened “Heich O Fash”, which needs no translation except that one assumes the golfers find it challenging.



Encouraged by a hint of blue sky, after days of grey, it was time to head west up the gentle gradient to the farthest limits of the course, overlooking the valley of the Don.

The highest point, which the golfers call The Knap, is near the summit of Corsman Hill, an area rich in archaeology and offering prospects far and wide.

A wintry scene from “Ower the Knap”



Then came the reward of a long and gentle descent back towards the town.

“Mugs Alley” (author’s naming) used to offer a pleasant schuss, but today it was too thin, and sporting as it does a barbed wire fence along one side and a rope across the run-out at the bottom it proved to be well-named. Better options exist around the fairway edges.

Mug’s Alley – do not be tempted!

In case readers are wondering, the land in question was purchased with a gift from a local resident for the purposes of creating a golf course, but with the far-sighted proviso that the citizens of the burgh would be allowed to walk there as well as play golf. This was long before legislation confirmed a somewhat similar right of responsible access nationwide.

Lammermuirs by Andy Cox.

Two months since we made the crazy decision to move home and business to the south of Edinburgh! We were greeted by appropriate weather for two passionate Nordic skiers! One week even able to ski a four hour loop out of our front door, along the cycle track up across the A1, up the fields, to the local hill of Doon, where the 1650 battle against Cromwell was lost, around south past the cement factory, back through the town centre of Dunbar home. I think the only time this has ever happened, Golden Dunbar Boot.? We did find one other tracks of a Nordic skier, so there is one other around. Like all good skiers, if you find the tracks you follow them, they led across the A1 to a wee village called Spott.

It is very much hillier than we expected and close. Having travelled up to an hour from Duffus north of Elgin for the last 20 years, to be able to find local snow is just fantastic. One forest with a couple of tracks but most of it is higher at trig points, very exposed to high winds in most places. We have spent many days at a trig point called Rangler Kip, parking near an iron age fort just 20 mins away, but in the last few weeks travelled a bit further to just south of Gifford to find large patches of snow. More metal edged tourers now but lots of fun still being had in March! A roadside moorland quarry is giving lots of fun with a strip of snow down past a burn. Who would have thought it, already skied my age in days this year and half of them on snow in East Lothian! Would love to find a snowy forest next year as we are now confident (yea right!) global warming will cause us to have snow drifts of two metres deep every March from now on.

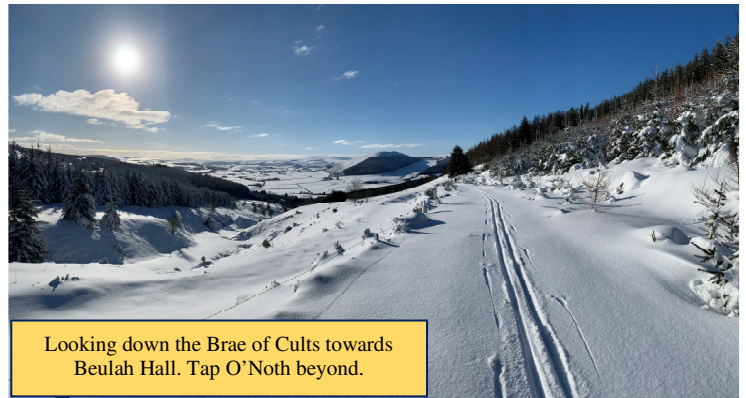
Andy Cox (age 60) Fiona Cox (age 21)



GREAT DAYS AT GARTLY

by Timberline, with photos by Roy Young.

“A fine day for’t” commented a passer-by as I walked up to the Four Mile bus stop with skis and poles in hand. It was 5th February 1983, and my first XC trip of the season. Forearmed with a recent clipping from the “Evening Express” announcing the creation of ski trails at Gartly Moor, it was with some anticipation that I stepped cautiously out of the bus onto the tussocky verge of the road at Beulah Hall, where a track up the glen gives pedestrian access to the west side of the forest.



Looking down the Brae of Cults towards Beulah Hall. Tap O’Noth beyond.

Although I was perhaps one of the early skiers to try out the new trails, I wasn’t by any means the first to explore the rolling peat-blanketed moorlands situated between the Glens of Foudland and the Kennethmont-Gartly road. Long ago, a young lady used to ride her pony from the Newton, a farm on the Inch side of the hill, up the peat road that led over to Huntly via the windswept Malsach Moss and the Bahill. Ann Davidson was clearly a woman of some independence, with an adventurous spirit. Time moved on, and when she would have been in her mid-thirties, the railway came to Wardhouse Station, making shopping trips much easier, although Ann may have moved elsewhere by then. In another time, would she have tried the journey on skis? I reckon so; and there is indeed a skiing link to this memoir, for Ann’s family tree reaches all the way down to today’s HNSC membership*.



Eileen negotiates a water hazard & it’s Eileen’s lineage that connects back to Ann Davidson.

Although sheltered in the forest, it was anything but calm on the day of my first visit to the ski trails. My diary notes the roar of the wind in the treetops, and occasional glimpses down steep rides to the snow-streaked green parks below Wishach Hill. A couple of seasons later, by using 3 successive buses, I reached Beulah Hall in the late morning of 23rd January 1985, this time from the Huntly direction. It had been an interesting journey, with spindrift visible on Bennachie, blurring the parks and smoking off the spoil heaps of the slate quarries in the Glens. In the slowed traffic it was tantalising to be following a blue and gold Cadbury’s lorry in the realisation that I had no chocolate with me to look forward to that day.

When at last I arrived at Beulah Hall, the householder appeared outside and described the track up from there as having been “sheeled” and that it had been a “disagreeable nicht”. Willie Jaffray, for that may have been his name, had a grand command of the Doric and it added a richness to one’s day to exchange greetings in the passing. A day later, and Alpine visibility prevailed – of the sort experienced during our “mini-beast” spell in February 2021. The panorama from Corskie Hill took in Mormond, Lochnagar, Ben Rinnes, and even a suspicious band of haze where Caithness might be. Low-flying jets made their own contribution to the experience.

More Doric: I learned from the bus driver that the road from Inch to Newtongarry is known as the “Caul Waal” (Coldwell on the OS map). That road serves the car park for the ski trails, where it was good to encounter, on 10th February 1985, two youth club leaders with 5 teenagers out skiing. Thanks to the Forestry Commission, the trails were known about and serving the community!

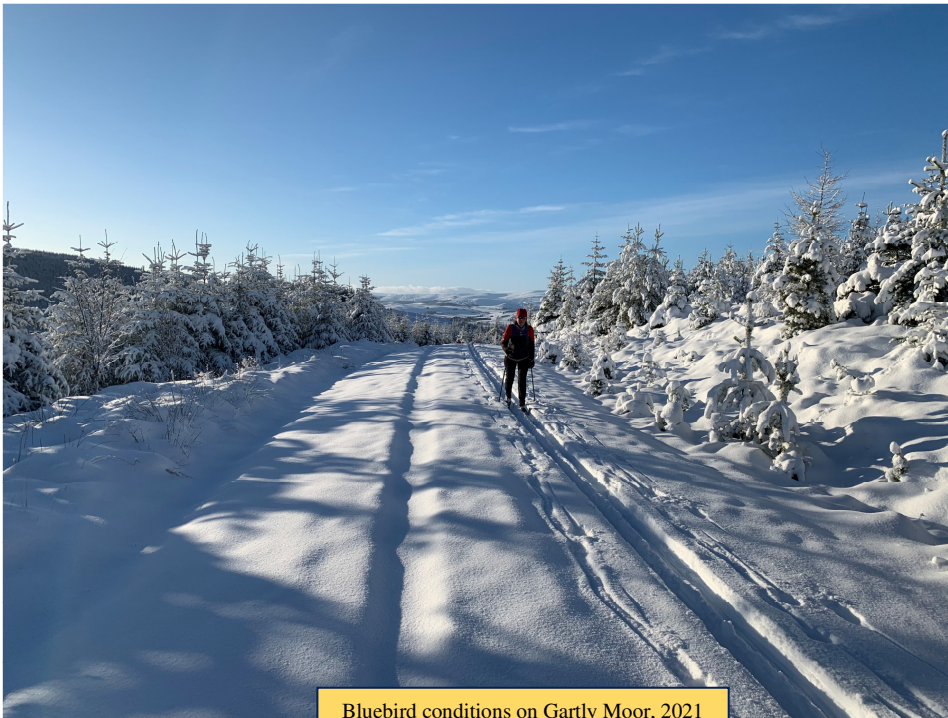
Saturday 16th February 1985: the season’s well on now, and, as Willie Jaffray put it, “the daylight’s streitching”. Up on the trails, the Bloody Corner acquired its name in penance for too much haste – the problem (apart from incompetence) being an accelerating approach to a sharp left-hander, usually with insufficient snow to allow a smooth turn. A month later, after an exceptional mid-March snowfall, amounting in the Keith area to nearly 24 inches, the sun was warm and the aforesaid Corner behaved itself. Catching the sun when viewed from the hill, the A97 was a dazzling river of ice winding out to Rhynie.

* I am indebted to Betty Cosgrove for this information.

Still in 1985, and the 2nd November marked an early start to the new season, and a late harvest, with a crop still standing in the back-lying Glen of Cults along with an unemployed combine. In the forest, an echo of the summer prevailed where a single bloom of bell heather survived – a punctuation mark of imperial purple above the snow, giving its name to a sunny lunch spot – the “Heather Bloom”. Skiing with a friend later in the same month, more names emerged -- on the long road back to the car park, in succession “Heartbreak Hill”, “Broken-Down Bothy”, and “Final Fling”.

On 2nd January 1987, the New Year provided fresh snow on a firm base, with wind-packed powder creating mini-avalanche conditions out on the open slopes of Knockandy.

Postscript: fast-forward to 28th February 2004 when, having long since deserted Gartly for the lure of the Clash, we found the A941 impassable and so defaulted to Gartly Moor, threading the road between snowbanks in a white landscape. Despite our desertion, the trails welcomed us with a generous 8 inches of snow. Further forward still, and Gartly continues to be a valued asset to the community, 38 years on from the Forestry Commission's far-sighted initiative and that wee piece in the “Evening Express”.



Bluebird conditions on Gartly Moor, 2021

Skiers ready to take N-east trail

THE North-east's first cross-country ski courses are all laid out and waiting for enthusiasts.

But there's a snag — the courses need a good foot of snow before they will be in operation.

The trails are something of an experiment for the Forestry Commission who set them up because it doesn't know how much interest there will be in the sport.

But if the response is good there may be more new trails opened up in the area. The first trails are at Huntly Forest.

In the past the Forestry Commission has gone out of its way to help hill-walkers, horse-riders, rally drivers and other sports people but this is the first attempt to cater for the cross-country skier.

SIGNPOSTS

Two connecting routes have been laid out but more can be added. Both are moderately difficult but the tracks are well-defined and have been sign-posted and colour coded with a ski symbol.

They start at the car park on the minor road between Inver and the A94 Huntly road about 34 miles north-west of Aberdeen in the Glens of Foundland.

The Moor Trail covers about 6½ miles and circles Wisach Hill. The Corskie Trail, which is an extension of the Moor route, gives a

further five miles giving splendid views of the Buchan landscape.

Skiers are urged to have equipment in good order, adequate clothing and to use only the marked routes. They are warned not to ski in bad weather or in the dark, to leave a note in their car of the intended route and to observe the mountain and countryside code.

Chief Forester Roy Harvey would like to hear comments or suggestions about the trails. Contact him at the Forestry Commission, Gartly Station, Huntly.

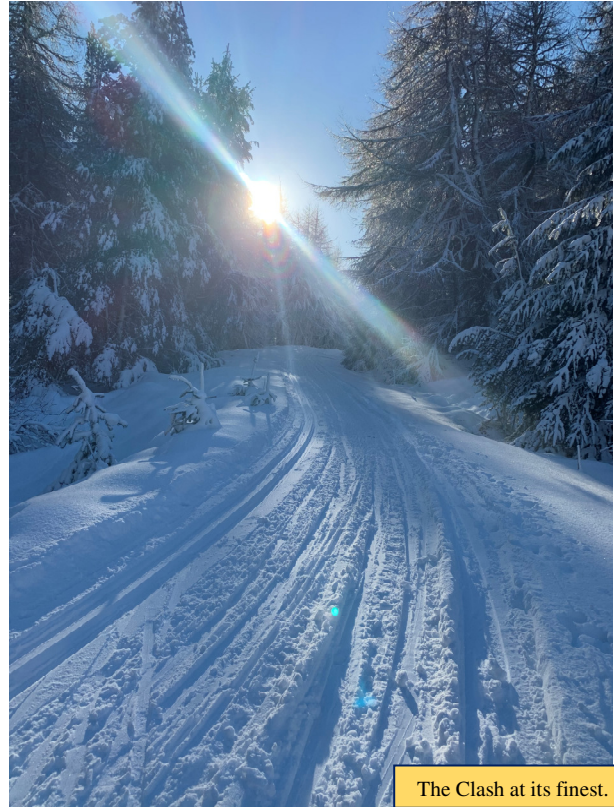
In the Cairngorms the winter sports season has arrived early much to the delight of the Cairngorm Chaisliff Company celebrating its 21st birthday. Free uplift tickets are being given at random on each day of the season.



Eileen on the Greenmires link to Gartly Moor.



Aberdeenshire at its most dreich.



The Clash at its finest.



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