

## On ski in Norway by Bernard Smith

In late 2012 Josie and I were invited to join a Nordic ski tour. We could see no reason why not except that we didn't have any equipment. On our only previous venture into this style of skiing we had managed to borrow the gear. However we had enjoyed the experience and so were ready for more. Having a garage already full of alpine touring kit it seemed like a new adventure as we took advice on what to buy, very often conflicting advice. In the end we settled for crown soled skis which don't require waxing, and plastic boots, but more of that later.

The plan was to start in the Setesdalsheine, in the south of Norway and ski north using the DNT hut system and "see how it went". The team consisted of Dave Buchanan, who had attempted this route before, several of his friends from previous trips, and ourselves. So we were very much the new kids on the block. During the planning stage I began to realise that the team and the route were remarkably flexible, so much so that we started by flying to Oslo, which was less than convenient, but at least was in the right country!

We flew from Edinburgh in late February 2013 together with Brian Donaldson who turned out to be the chief perpetrator and organiser. We travelled light wearing our ski gear including boots, not the ideal footwear for exploring Oslo. However we managed to meet the other three members of the team, Rob, Rory and Anna, and enjoyed a meal, before catching the overnight train SW to Sandes. Here we were met by a minibus which took us through stunning scenery, reminiscent of Wester Ross, to Adneram, from where we were to start the tour.

The objective for day one was the Grautheller Hytte, a distance of about 16km. It was very cold, well below zero, and our waxless crown soles were having difficulty gripping on the refrozen snow. However those with waxed soles were also struggling. In fact Rory with old fashioned fishscales was doing best. We eventually resorted to skins which did the trick. Our route followed the track up the Flatstolana, down to the Holmevatn (lake) and across the Grauthellervatnet to the hut. I crawled in last feeling like death, but it is a very comfortable hut which we had to ourselves. We soon had the stove blazing away and a meal on the cooker. The huts are mainly unguarded but well stocked with food and fuel. You pay for what you use on an honesty basis. It's a great system, although we carried tea bags rather than pay 25p/bag, and large quantities of lentils for improving the soups. Anna soon established herself as kitchen supremo and found many novel ways of varying what could have been a monotonous diet. Anna is Danish and spoke Norwegian which proved very useful at times.

We awoke the following day to snow and very strong winds so after some debate it was decided to stay put. I was pleased as this allowed me some time to rest. I now had a temperature and a cold. I supervised the stove while others did a short foray into the gale just for the exercise. As we prepared dinner that evening we noticed two, then four, people struggling into the wind across the lake. We welcomed them with a brew only to find that 25 scouts and their leaders were on their way. The hut was hastily reorganised as it filled to capacity. The scouts had done remarkably well battling into the wind for seven hours, and some were only about thirteen years old. Tough folk these Norwegians.



Day three dawned bright and windless. We were up early to avoid the kitchen chaos, on with the skins and away. Navigation was complex but we eventually dropped onto a huge lake, Svartevatn near Fitjaholet which we judged was the best access point. Access to some lakes is difficult as they are used for Hydro. As the level drops so does the ice, leaving tens of metres of icefall to be negotiated. We skied north

for an eternity along the lake. Originally the plan was to stay at Little Auradal but we were persuaded to carry on to Storsteinen to make up for our day off. The rest is a painful blur. We arrived at dusk after a 26km slog. Along the way I discovered that Rory perfected his technique on a trans-Antarctic trip via the South Pole. This was child's play for him. There was one resident in the hut, Roger Wild, a British guide from Fort William on a solo trip. The fourth day was, by comparison easy, a mere 17km to Hovatn Hytte where Roger had called here for lunch and left a note for us. Anna treated us to lentil and fish soup, meatballs and potatoes and tinned fruit salad, it was already becoming familiar. A late start on day five was mainly due to Anna's excellent drop scones which she produced for breakfast, followed by a stack of ham crispbreads. The morning was through delightfully complex country on great fresh snow. We lunched at Vassdassdalstein hut before following Roger's tracks to Krossvatn Hut where we caught him up and shared a very convivial dinner.



**On the Svartevatn 1**

A long and eventful day to the Bleskestadtmoen Hut followed. An early start across Krossvatnet (lake) led to a long ascent. While having lunch by the Kaldevatn two Rangers arrived by Skidoo and stopped for a chat. The conversation was in Norwegian, and so was entirely with Anna, until Rory commented dryly that they probably thought we were six mutes with a Danish guide. They then moved the conversation smoothly into English. After lunch an Alpine style descent led to another ascent up a narrow ridge. The final descent to the hut was through birch forest which was quite challenging on skinny skis with free heels, even though we had 80mm steel edged mountain touring skis. We arrived at dusk after a ten hour day of 28 km. A well earned rest day followed.



**Hovvatn Hut 1**

We had now been going for a week and were settling into a routine. We continued to the Holmavatn Hytte where, first we lost Rob and Rory who had to depart for home, and were then met by Roger Wild who skied onto the lake with a kettle of hot water in one hand and a rucksack full of goodies for a sub zero picnic. The following day to Haukelisetter signalled the end of phase one. This is a very large, catered “hut”, more akin to a hotel, by the Oslo to Bergen road. It is much used by tourists and kite skiers and while we were there as a wedding venue, but has the advantage of showers, a restaurant, very expensive beer and electricity for charging things. We were now about to cross into the Hardangervidda for part two of the trip. One of the main advantages of these catered huts is the buffet breakfast. Cereal, eggs, ham, cheese, salami, pickles, fresh bread, coffee and take as much as you want for lunch. Its not cheap but worth every penny and we took full advantage.



We bid farewell to Roger as he departed for home and headed north to Hellevassabu Hytte. An hour on skins on fresh snow led to a superb descent passing a large party of Norwegians coming the other way. We caught two Germans with huge packs who had been camping. It had been very cold and they were glad to join us in the hut. It was minus 30 that night, but we had three stoves to keep us warm! Toilet facilities by necessity have to be in an outhouse so the low temperature can cause stalagshites to form which need destroying with a stick before use.

The following day was a bit of a treadmill. The skis were not gripping well nor running on the downhill. Conditions were difficult with some windslab, a good layer of hoar frost, an icy crust but mainly sastrugi. We arrived at Litlos Hut at 4pm after a frustrating day to find it almost full but we squeezed in.



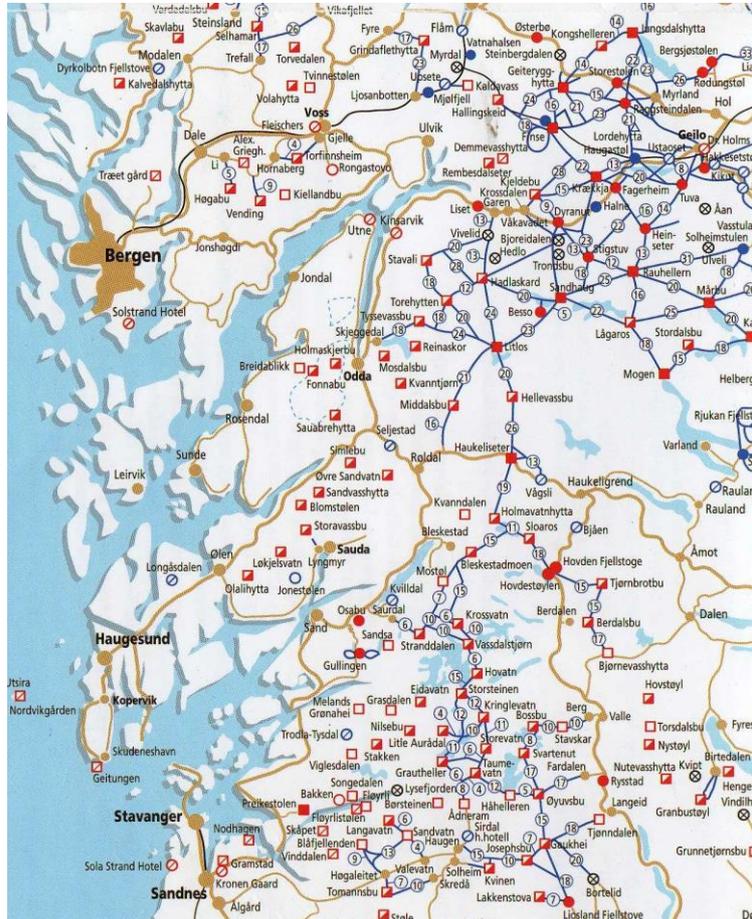
Day twelve was by contrast a joy. We had fresh snow and after an initial climb of a few hundred meters, gentle undulating going through fabulous scenery. We finished our last “Haukeliseter butty” for lunch before cruising down to the Hadlaskard hut. We found flour and yeast and as it was to be a rest day tomorrow we looked forward to fresh bread. What a treat! As Anna baked rolls between two cast iron frying pans we enjoyed a lie in listening to the wind howling and whipping the spindrift past the windows, we had chosen a good day for a rest. Now Brian and rest days don't go together. There is too much time to plan. After putting waypoints in the GPS for several routes we changed our minds again and decided to loop back to the road at Haukeliseter rather than continuing north to Finse as we had planned. The up side of this was that we headed west into some magnificent country. Accordingly we enjoyed a relatively short day to Torehytten through a beautiful landscape with the great rocky lump of Harteigen, a 1690m peak dominating the view. The hut was in an idyllic situation and it was a wrench to leave the morning after. However we pushed on back to Litlos which, as Easter was approaching was now staffed. We were the first guests of the season and although they were not quite organised we enjoyed the luxury of a beer with dinner. Breakfast, of course, provided us with lunch for our final two days out. The day to Middalsbu Hytte was an uneventful 21km. plod in flat light and light snow but we did discover an inch of Johnny Walker in the hut. The ski out on our final day, the 17<sup>th</sup>, was mainly along a lake for 10km. with winds gusting in four directions at once. A final slide down a small road brought us to the main road where we could get a bus to Hakeliseter for our final night before returning, by bus, to Oslo for the flight home.



We had travelled about 260km. on ski and it had been a wonderful experience with some highs and some lows of course. The company was always excellent and the organisation, if a little flexible, was always based on experience. In retrospect waxable skis would have been better in Norway but waxless are reputedly better in the UK where temperatures are usually above zero. Plastic boots are are warmer and

take less drying although Norwegians all use leather. Joining the DNT is essential as you save the subscription many times over and they are a great source of information and maps.

Maps used: 1:50k Lysboten 10009, Bykle 10017, Setesdalsheine, Hovn Nord, Hardangervidda Vest.



Team: David Buchanan, Bernard Smith, Josie Smith, Brian Donaldson, Rob Brown, Rory O'Connor, Anna Mikkelsen.