

**Overseas
Meet**

**Norway
Hut to hut by ski**

**April
3 - 10**

Three members arrived a week early for this meet and put in some practice a little further north in Oppdal at the invitation of Knut Tønsberg, principal guest at the 2017 Dinner. Kjetil Tveranger even managed a five-pitch ice climb with Knut. The weather was not ideal after a winter of less than usual snowfall. The daytime melts and night freezes were to cause a problem for the meet the following week

With the six of us converging on Hjerkin in three parties on the 3rd, Kjetil received the news that ice had formed across the routes of days two and three of our intended week-long north-south traverse of the Rondane. Indeed, two women had failed to reach the third hut (in Grimsdalen), tried to sit out the benightment but were soon soaked and called out the rescue services. Progress over ice is very slow and risks falls on skis or ski boots. An hour or so over coffee came up with plan B: the eastern Jötunheim. Checks on the snow cover there, though, were not encouraging. So on to plan C: approach the central Rondane from the south rather than the north. Reports from staff in the serviced huts were encouraging and there were plenty of huts in the area to allow a choice of routes. Once decided, all that remained was to communicate to the other two parties – one skiing near Lillehammer and the other flying over the North Sea – to alight from the train earlier than planned, at Ringebu.

With food shopping done and Michael Smith installed in a four-bed Spidsbergseter cabin at 950m (incidentally, the same cabin we used two years ago before skiing south to Lillehammer) preparing a meal, Kjetil collected the others from Ringebu station at 7pm. A late evening meal, a wee dram and all were soon in beds or sleeping bags.

Peter, Malcolm, Kjetil, Richard, Michael and James enjoying the evening sunshine and a beer at Bjørnhollia



The first day, Thursday, was only 15km to the DNT huts at Eldåbu. The DNT is the Den Norske Turistforening or Norwegian Trekking Association which has over 500 cabins in the Norwegian mountains and forests with the largest ones being staffed and providing meals and hot showers. Most though are small self-service cabins with water from a stream or snow, a basic larder and simple gas rings for cooking. They are generally maintained by local DNT volunteers. The padlocks on all the small cabins are identical and our party's two DNT members each carried a key.

High cloud with the sun breaking through now and again made a good day for skiing along the stick-marked route north from the nearby frozen lake over Storfjellet and past Svartkampen to briefly join the pisted tracks of the Trolls Way before turning off west and into the thin silver birch forest to reach Eldåbu. The keys were not required. The place was heaving with people. A DNT guided party almost filled the main hut, a Dutch/French couple were in the overflow hut and more parties were steadily arriving then hunting around for space. The six-bed overflow hut looked like the best bet for an undisturbed sleep so we staked a claim for four beds and some floor space there. Later arrivals were discouraged.

The other couple were highly amused by our catering. Most parties use the dried or tinned food from the larder but Kjetil likes good food so we were slicing up a joint of beef to fry with onions. This was eaten with mashed potatoes and a bottle of red wine followed by fruit salad and ground coffee. Our clear view to the west over to the Jötunheim flooded the cabin with sunset hues.



Passing the evening with cards, Eldåbu

The Dutch/French couple were also amused by Michael, who having crept about from 6am making porridge and tea then used a spoon and pan lid as a gong to rouse the rest of the party. The hut cleaned, a start was made by 8:30am.

The tops were shrouded in thick cloud and the snow heavily crusted in ice so skis were sometimes hard to control. However, without skis, boots simply punched through the crust. Three possibilities lay before us: a long contouring loop to the west on the stick-marked route; northwest over a col and round a spur, both of these to Rondvassbu; or north over a lower col to Bjørnhollia. We took the unmarked middle one. As we rose gently up Steinbudalen the cloud lowered obscuring the broad flat col. With the aid of close attention to the GPS and compass, a small shed close to the col was passed and the col reached at about 1pm. It was now difficult to tell if one was skiing or stationary. Then came the descent. Shallow but needing caution as any slight steepening resulted in acceleration in minimal visibility – almost a white out. The lunch stop was short because of the chilling damp wind.

Visibility had improved as the valley bottom was reached and a westward contour started to round a spur to join the northern track to Rondvassbu. Half the party had used pulks

(sledges for dragging kit rather than using rucksacks as on previous Club meets) so they were interested to see four youngsters pulking along southwards. We met up on reaching the track and fell into conversation. They were an unsupported 'gap year' outdoor schooling group on their tenth day out and happy to chat. The large serviced cabin was reached eventually at 5:45pm.

A hot shower was welcome before the evening three-course meal with the option of a bottle of wine for an extra £50, lager £7 a half litre. Michael stuck to water – lots of it as he was suffering from dehydration after the longer day.

DNT waymark and stick-marked ski route at the col between Rondvassbu and Bjørnhollia



Again, there was a choice of routes for Saturday. Skiing a day north would take in more of the intended route but would leave us retracing our steps. A circuit could be made around the north of Rondane mountain but we took the more direct route eastwards along its southern flank. This was the only day of sharing the route with others as there was a DNT guided party ahead of us on the stick-marked route. Another gentle rise took us to a col, this time under clear skies from the middle of the day onwards. The descent wound smoothly down an increasingly V-shaped valley with a narrow track winding through trees and by a flowing stream. As this became a ravine the route climbed the northern flank. Sun and wind had stripped snow from the last few hundred metres to the Bjørnhollia serviced cabin so skis were carried.



Break for lunch after the col en route to Bjørnhollia

Most in the party were using Nordic touring skis but Malcolm Lynch was on narrower track skis he had used extensively in the Alps. These were difficult to control on the backcountry unpisted terrain. His endless patience and persistence were needed most days given our route.

Sleeping cabins, showers and the toilet block were each separate from the main building with its refectory and bar. The half-board stay at the cabin with a beer cost about £87 for DNT members, £100 for others. Paths between the buildings were pure ice in places – treacherous to cross.



Preparing to carry the skis approaching Bjørnhollia and the DNT hut there

Peter Chadwick, on a nocturnal excursion having slipped and fallen heavily, laid there wondering if he might freeze to death before being discovered. Thankfully he didn't.

Sunday dawned colder and with a brisk 15m/s wind from the north. Handy as our route was to the south. Preparing to leave we noticed an ermine checking out the rubbish bins for tit bits.



Skins (carpet-like strips to reduce the chance of sliding backwards) were put under our skis as there was an initial descent to a bridge then a steep climb up through woods and the slope above. From above the col a herd of wild reindeer was spotted to the west when we stopped for a break. A short steep walk down to the frozen stream bed took us to a wind-assisted ski run down over a chain of lakes until lunch was taken huddled in the lee of a private summer fishing cabin. There were traces of fishing holes in the ice from weekend visitors. Turning slightly right a hillside broke the wind so we were relying again on grip from wax, sticky strips (rather like double-sided sticky tape) or fishscales. James Marson took out his sleeping mat and held it aloft between raised ski poles as a sail. He was soon shooting along and having to spill some of the air. This worked even better with the mat unfurled further and held between two skiers.



Reindeer spotted during early lunch stop

A section of undulating ground took us back to Eldåbu. Quieter this time though we still used the smaller cabin. The stove was soon lit and tea brewed. Whiskey and warm water were followed by soup, fish stew, fruit salad and a candle lit game of cards. The wind slackened overnight but the temperature remained about -8°C.



Wind-assisted crossing of a lake south of Bjørnhollia

Leaving Eldåbu on Monday it was again cold and windy. After crossing the pisted track we headed east-southeast over moorland to the 1,138m Flåtjønnglupen pass between rocky Ramstindan and snowy Nødre Bølhøgda. After a break on that windy col it was another straightforward gentle descent southeast this time, crossing at its highpoint the E27 road which the previous week had carried all the Oslo-bound E6 traffic following an accident. Onward a steady rise over the lower slopes of conical 1,424m Muen was the small Gråhøgdbu cabin, hidden until we were close to it.

There was surprise awaiting us in this 8-bed cabin. Six women from Oslo were already in residence. We managed by taking turns to prepare food and each party using four beds with two relegated to mattresses on the floor. The women had been melting snow for water but there was a marked water supply about 140m away.



Richard skiing past Stor Ramshøgda

Unfortunately, this was under 1.2m of snow and the gusts were blowing spindrift around. Undaunted, Richard Taylor excavated the source and James descended the manhole to patiently use a scoop to fill the buckets lowered on a string. Not having to melt snow saved fuel and speeded up cooking.

As it was still only mid-afternoon an excursion was made to ascend Muen. On ski into the wind until the slope steepened then on foot. A little short of the summit the surface proved too iced over and without crampons or ice axes it was only prudent to return.

The larder supplied fruit soup, meatballs made of reindeer, vegetables and pasta with the usual fruit salad to finish.

The temperature had fallen to -10°C by the time we turned in for the night.

Peter and James arrive at Gråhøgdbu in spindrift.
Just visible 140m away on the right is the water supply marker



Tuesday, the last skiing day, did not need an early start so breakfast was drawn out. Today's luxury was porridge made with powdered milk rather than just water. After a thorough clean of the hut a departure was made at 10am. An easy-angled slope was made a little trickier by areas of the ice-crustured surface being covered in patches of loose spindrift which acted as sudden brakes, sometimes on just one ski. A couple of hours though and we re-crossed the road and were soon at the cabin with Kjetil's car.

An hour or so of the afternoon was spent practising with the avalanche safety gear for skiers by burying a transponder, using others in detector-mode to locate its approximate position then find it using probes and shovels. Even working in a relatively small area and without the inconvenience of avalanche debris or inefficiencies resulting from concern for lost friends, it still took a soberingly long time to recover the device.

Malcolm shopped and prepared a grand final evening meal. Then Kjetil settled to his accounts and worked out the cost of the trip – about £450 each plus flights. Four returned to Oslo in the car while two travelled by train taking advantage of an elders' discount. All arrived at Gardermoen airport at the same time to fly home via Brussels.

Thanks go to our Norwegian member, Kjetil, for organising and quickly reorganising the trip besides providing transport, skis and safety equipment for the party. Having in the party a native speaker thoroughly familiar with local norms certainly helped at every stage and facilitated negotiations in the busy overcrowded huts.

Michael Smith

Attendees: The route:

Kjetil Tveranger
Michael Smith
Peter Chadwick
Richard Taylor
Malcolm Lynch (G)
James Marson (G)

