

Clattering off the train at Finse station was a huge contrast to the mini heat wave we had left behind in the UK. It was 8pm, still light and very cold. The DNT hut was about $\frac{1}{4}$ of a mile away so we put on our skis and rucksacks and headed off. This was somewhat of a rude awakening (for me at least) as I could not remember the last time I had had my skis on. Fortunately I don't think anyone could see as I careered down a small icy slope onto the lake in front of the hut. We found a warm welcome at the hut and were quickly pointed to the dormitory. An early night was in store after what had been a long day.

The following morning (Thursday) was to be our "test" day. Alison and I were to test our gear, whilst Mike (a Norwegian skiing veteran) was to test us, before we all committed ourselves to a four day trip around the Hardangerjokulen, a massive glacier on the Hardangervidda plateau.

After a very good breakfast of assorted meats, cheeses and fish, we left the hut and headed North towards the Giterygg hut. We skied about halfway, to the high pass called Kyrkjedoir (Church door) before heading back the same way. With testing complete, everyone seemed happy and we returned to the hut for dinner of salmon with potatoes and fresh veg, all in large portions.

Friday morning saw our sacks packed and after another fine breakfast we were ready for the off. The guardians wife asked where we were heading.

"Rembesdalssete" we replied. ".....oh.....you know the route is not marked ". This was followed with ".....and don't go the way shown on the map". We had not accounted for this. Most of the routes between the huts are marked with strategically placed twigs so that little navigation is required. However, this was not to be the case for the next two days of our trip. We continued with our plan, confident of our ability to navigate in the hills.

The first couple of hours were shared with a marked route. As that route branched off, we found ourselves in a vast, white desert. We had climbed away from the hut and through a high valley. We were now at the top of a long decent down a shallow valley taking us towards two small lakes and close to the cliffs that marked the edge of the ice cap. Eventually we reached the point where the summer route descended a steep gully. It was obvious why we were not to follow that line. The gully was south facing and looked as if it was waiting to avalanche. The views to the South were fantastic, we could see across the Vidda and into the top of the

Hardangerfjorden. We turned West and made a long decent until it was possible to come back under the crags that we had stood on some time earlier to approach the hut. It was getting late and the snow was slushy and the skiing hard work.

We were all pleased to finally see the hut. It was in the most fantastic setting, squeezed between the cliffs of the ice cap and the lake. The water that had been left by the previous occupants was soon turned into welcome cups of tea. As the sun set and the light faded we lit candles and ate beanfeast and rice. Not quite upto the standards of the Finsehytta, but very well received non the less.

Breakfast the following morning (Saturday) was rice pudding. I had carefully measured this out at home so that it would last three people, two mornings. However, we managed to eat it all in one sitting. The final words of wisdom from the guardians wife at Finse had been "...Don't go on the lake below the hut". This was because the lake is dammed for hydroelectric use, therefore the ice may be thin and may have a gap under it. However, we had little choice as the route around the edge was barred by crags. I was more than happy to let Mike take the lead across the lake. I was a short way behind, followed by Alison. Mike seemed quite relaxed about it, but I was very relieved to get off the surface of the lake.

A long climb followed where we gained most of the days height. Again we had left the hut behind and were isolated in a vast wilderness. We continued through some little valleys and passes to come onto the South side of the ice cap, with huge views to the South across the plateau. A very long decent followed, around four miles of gentle downhill, simply standing and taking in the fantastic views, under a clear blue sky.

This carefree decent led us to the point of not knowing where we were, this was followed by a couple of frustrating hours of bugging about before we finally located ourselves. A short, but very steep decent took us to a very picturesque spot at the head of a lake. This marked the beginning of the final one hour uphill to the hut at Kjeldebu.

Arriving at the hut we found the first people we had seen since leaving Finse. Beanfeast was on our menu again tonight but with mash for a little variety, and a pudding of tinned peaches.

Monday morning, and it was my turn to fetch the water from the hole in the frozen lake surface.

To help in finding the hole there was a drawing on the wall next to the buckets, however, the drawing had been done by a 3 year old with poor (Norwegian) spelling! After around fifteen minutes wandering around at -10°C I eventually found the hole. It was about three foot deep, with a small ledge to stand on just above the level of the water. Two buckets full of water were retrieved and taken back to the hut. Breakfast consisted of porridge made by Alison, good and thick to get us through the rest of the day.

We were the last to leave Kjeldebu and whilst there were others heading the same way as us, we only caught a slight glimpse of them in the distance. We did however see three dog teams heading in the opposite direction. This was a short day, and not too testing being mainly flat. It was a welcome change to the previous two days and we arrived at the hut at Kroekkjja (pronounced by the Norwegians "kraysha") not too late.

The hut was quiet, there were only ourselves and five others at dinner that night. Alison managed to get into a conversation with an old Norwegian chap about salt and pepper, although I think neither knew what the other was saying. We were served with large quantities of roast beef and fresh veg (there were even seconds).

The final day of our trip round the ice cap began by buying more clister (sticky wax used on old/warm snow) from the guardian. This was a real bonus, we had run out and resigned ourselves to using skins, which would have been a real drag. A gentle start to the skiing soon took us over a low pass and out of sight of the hut. Height was gained gradually over many miles, passing half buried buildings and bridges over summer streams. We were passed by one of the other people stopping at the hut. He was moving much quicker than us and soon disappeared over the horizon. We saw a group of English lads from a private school down south heading the other way and later two people sitting having lunch. In fact it was quite a busy day on the hill!

A high pass took us to a small lake and views to the North, with peaks and the ice cap now to the West. Eventually we saw Finse in the distance and well below us, it was still about two hours away but at least it was all down hill. The final decent into Finse was a little sad (for me any way) whilst we were glad to be at the hut, it marked the end of the skiing.

Dinner of massed potato and fish greeted us in the usual large portions. We had our final night at Finse and made the most of the fantastic breakfast. Alison and I skied a short distance towards the glacier before returning to the hut. Mike elected to sit in the sun before we all

caught the train back to Oslo.

We spent the Tuesday night in the youth hostel in Oslo (we seemed to be the only normal people there) before catching the plane home the following afternoon. Oslo was an interesting city to look round but was a stark contrast to the empty wilderness that we had become briefly acquainted with over the previous days. This was a very enjoyable trip to an easily accessible area. The skiing was interesting, enjoyable and the company of course was excellent.

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