

Weardale Ski Club



1790 First Skier in Weardale

1957 First Tow at Durham

1964 1st Rope Tow

1964 Peat Shelter built

1965 1st Hut—a Hen Hut
called “The Chalet”

1967 2nd Rope Tow

1969 Snow Cat built

1970 3 Rope Tows running

1971 1st Snow Trike

1972 1st Roadside Garage

1975 F1 Button Tow

1977 Snow Cat bought

1979 F2 Button Tow

1983 1st Piste Basher

1985 1st Snow Blower

1988 Rolba bought

1989 Lodge Built

1994 Skidoo Lynx bought

1995 First Snowboarding

1998 10 lean years

2003 Gilbert’s Bridge

2004 New tow cables
240v Lodge

2011 Larger Piste Basher
New Garage

2012 1st Proper Toilets
4x4 Quad Bike
Flail Mower

Polaris Skidoo

2013 Best season ever?
New Ladders F2

The Weardale Ski Club promotes snow skiing and boarding in the North of England and provides facilities to be used when weather permits and tow operators are available.

The Club is owned and run by its members, on whose voluntary help it is dependent. With the application of skills, experience, ingenuity and thrift, the finite resources are maximised through regular maintenance of land and equipment, while always endeavoring to take opportunities to make improvements whenever possible.

These values have, over fifty years, enabled the development of a unique leisure area for winter sport, while ensuring that it can endure through poor and good periods, to ensure the continuation of snow skiing in the UK.



1790

First skier recorded in UK at Weardale.
Source - *Ski Notes and Queries*,
D'Egville, A. H. (Ed.). The Periodical
Publication of the Ski Club of Great
Britain, London, 1938.



Artistic license!

1957

A private rope tow belonging to Durham
School was constructed on Observatory
hill, by Tommy de Winton. This tow ran
until 1966. This is where the key people
met who started WSC.



Bill Tait skiing down Observatory Hill

A second tow was also set up by John
Stephenson in the 60's at Mountjoy on
the site now occupied by Durham Uni-
versity Science site.

This was used in parallel with the Swin-
hope tow, as often there was too much
snow to get up to Swinhope!



George Proud skiing at Durham

1963

Summer - Advertisement in the Durham County Advertiser for anyone interested in forming a ski club. Summer that year was spent surveying the Dales for a suitable site.
Autumn - At a meeting in Bede College, Durham University, attended by Eric Peart, Jimmy Harris, Bill Hall, Sluggo Slowe, Bill Saunders, George Proud, Mary Smith and William Nattrass, a site was chosen simply by looking at the Ordinance Survey maps, (Bill Tait was absent as he was at work).

The Big Winter of '63

There was snow cover from Boxing Day to middle of March! Members surveyed the Weardale area for more suitable and challenging sites.



Founding members (totaling 25-30) confirmed Swinhope Moor as a perfect private club site – due to its commutable distance to Durham and best North Facing valley that held snow.

Mr. John Vickers, the owner of Swinhope Moor, (now owned by his son and daughter) was known to one of the members.

2 Committees were initially formed:

First Executive Committee Chairman,
Doctor 'Sluggo' Slowe.

First Field Committee Chairman, Bill Hall.



The Fell wasn't cleared in those days so there were many obstacles such as rocks, grass clumps, water etc.

Great physical effort was needed to move 'everything' by hand across the Fell.

First rope tow (left hander), which was a **standard 1" ordinary hemp rope**, ran further than the length of current F1. One back wheel hub of a green Fordson Tractor was set in the middle of the run, with 2 turns of the rope round the wheel. It ran in the main **gully, west of where Gilbert's Bridge now stands**. The anchor post (above and east to the Lodge) still remains today.

The tow was ambitious in terms of length and often snapped or dragged on the ground. The downhill rope had to be kept off the snow so many poles and pulleys were put down the entire length of the 'run'.



There was a quite famous incident within the club when one of our members, the County Engineer, found the road up blocked with snow (as was virtually everything west, north and south of Westgate). Very soon a snow clearer appeared and the road was opened up. This service has continued up to the present day – performed now, admirably, by John Carrick and his merry men.



This is the best we can do for picture of 1st shelter!
1964

The First Shelter was located well below where F1 Engine Hut now stands. It was simply a peat turf wall with corrugated sheets placed across it and was no more than a wind shelter.



1964
Moved Tow to just west of area where F1 now runs.



1964
Fordson Tractor driving the Tow



Building Engine Hut



1st Tracked Vehicle - Buttercup



1965
Second Shelter (placed below where the Lodge stands today) – a Hen Hut, later called “ The Chalet” (housed approximately 25 people) set on a bed of redundant rail sleepers.



Shelter refurbished



1965
Snowtrac arrives



1969
Snow Cat made by Oliver Smith commissioned at Swinhope



Not the sort of transport you expect to see travelling across the moor, but Eric Peart managed it!



Bill Tait also did his bit on transport with his removal truck



1970
3 Rope Tows were running for a while



1971
Eric's Robin Reliant could manage snow on the road, as he proved going up to Scotland, but he decided to invest in a Snow Trike for the ski runs.



1972 First Roadside garage

1975
First big project— F1 Button Tow—Total cost £9000.
Bill Saunders - Chairman, organised a grant from the Sports Council of £2100.
Life Membership, at a cost of £100 per member, raised around £1000 – this was based on expectation of 15 years skiing!
£3000 came from loans from Club members and £3000 from Club funds.

1975
F1 construction.



Counter Weight for F1 Tow



Pylons were made by John Vickers (not Landlord) - see photograph p.5, which saved considerable money.

The wire was supplied by British Ropes (Wallsend), by the brother of Bill Nichols. Snow Fencing was erected which still stands today.

Due to the ability to move more people up the slopes, membership was increased by approximately 400, equating to 700 adults

1975

F1 pylons erected.

Put into place by Army Air Corps from Topcliffe by Helicopter.



Peter Vasey, Bill Tait, Idris Waller



1975

NE Ski Association formed with WSC as founding members.

The Daily Telegraph used to report the snow conditions at Swinhope each Friday this gave the Club publicity and 'street cred'.



Sorry can't put names to everyone –

1, John Vickers, 3,4, Oliver Smith, Peter Vasey, 7,8, Bill Tait, Brian Pattie, Steve Taylor, 12,13, Eric Peart, Ewan Squires, 16, 17, 18, Bill Hall, 20.

1976

"We now have 400 yards of cable with phones to make communication even easier - on the slopes that is!"

No mobiles— No walkie talkies.

1977

Gearbox F1 replaced - a gantry erected to winch it up failed, so 15 men standing on roof of tractor, wagons, etc. lifted it into place! No pictures.

1978

Suspension of new membership— FULL.

Eric Peart insisted on perfection. When nails were put in on fences they had to be bent over facing down hill so as **not to damage people's anoraks!**

A skier suffered a broken leg— one of the few serious injuries recorded in the history of the club? As usual everyone rallied round and great assistance was given by ambulance crew, Ian Dent and skiers present.

Only injury recalled by John Stephenson was on a Sunday when a Clergyman injured his ankle but more concerned about making it for his service at 6pm!

1979

Membership stayed stable despite introduction of Yad Moss snow slope.

One of the best seasons ever.

F2 erected. This time no helicopters were used to place the pylons but a clever array of blocks and tackles.

Helicopters were talked about, but by the time anything could be organized, Gilbert Graham had already got the pylons up the moor!



Built highest reservoir in England at the top of F2 to mix water with concrete for the foundations for F2.

Created highest 'caravan park' in the country with a caravan that was brought in from the Teesdale road and pulled by the old tracked vehicle along the top to F2.

It was intended to be used as shelter during the build but snapped in half when it arrived! So it had to be burned and you may still find traces of molten aluminium up there from the chassis.

F2 originally had a vertical section. This was filled by using corrugated sheets as a chute for funneling peat down to pack the gap.

Ian MacIntosh provided the small counter balance weights for F2. These were test pieces of concrete from Sunderland Poly and were carried up in his rucksack!



Eric Peart, being the stickler he was, decided the line pegged out was not straight, and insisted on having it redone!

Concrete was laid in two stages – using steel links in between castings. One concrete hole (3 pylons up) had to be dug into rock.

Brian Pattie and Michael Daws used a battery operated pneumatic drill and spent a whole day trying to drill through the rock. They hardly made a dent in it! Eventually they managed to get the job done. Cost of F2 - £14000, grant £6000.





1983/4
Great snowfall!
Brain Pattie recalls people practicing all sorts of tricks.

1983
First KB was bought from the Cairngorms £9615.



1985
First Snow Blower twin engine bought.
People had to take test to get a licence to drive it on the road.



1983/4

In December 1984 a copse of trees were planted and a plaque placed on a cairn of local stone in memory of our late landlord, Mr John Vickers.

Mrs Vickers, in attendance with her two daughters, unveiled the plaque.

The trees and plaque are located about 40 metres above the turning point on the right hand side.

We are ever in debt to John for allowing us to set up our club on his land, and that this arrangement has been maintained by Harry since that time.



1986

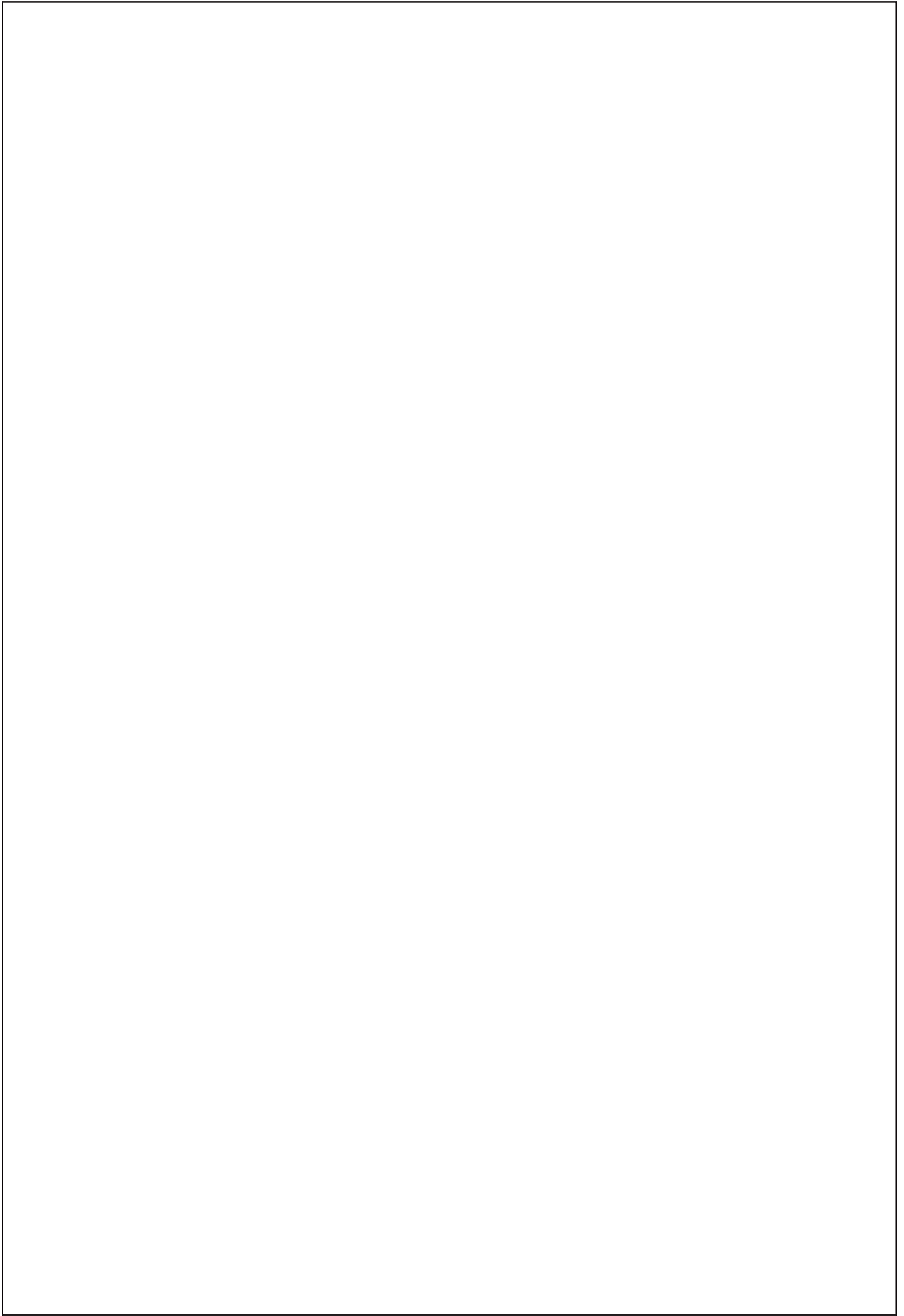
There was Arctic Blizzard. 100 people had to be evacuated; visibility was less than 10 ft. It took 6 hrs to get everyone off the Fell. People were taken down to the stream then across to the road.

Ian Dent and his father helped pulling people out of ditches. Road was sheet ice - 4x 4's sliding in to ditches (summer tyres!).



1988
Rolba bought for £4750





1989

Fendrith Lodge built Cost £26107. Eventually, the shed became too crowded prompting the drive for a new shelter. A long battle ensued with the Bishop Auckland planning authorities to build the Lodge. Luckily, Brian Pattie, a civil engineer, was in the planning offices one day and, by having a word with the Chief Planning Officer, managed to break the impasse. Originally the new lodge was going to be built below the engine hut of F1. Unfortunately, before they changed their minds they had dug out a large rectangular area – which can still be seen today.

Eric Peart resigned because the design was too boring; he had proposed a triangular design. He soon came back.



1989

25th Anniversary Dinner at the Redhills Hotel, Durham.

1990

One of the best seasons on record F1—165 hrs, F2—148 hrs.

Top Car Park widened, Diesel Tank at F1, Ditch Digger purchased.

Flood lighting investigated— cost £7000—discounted.

1991

Briton Portable Tow acquired to get to Ghyll Heights.

1994

Lynx Snow Trike purchased £4605.

1995

First Snowboarding at Weardale.



Building Inspector & Bob Hutchinson.

Final inspection of the Lodge

Anyone who has worked with building inspectors knows that it is good to keep them happy!

This just typifies Swinhope – you can never predict the weather
It often comes when you don't want it and doesn't when you do!



Road clearing in action as mentioned at the top of Page 2, DCC have always tried to help us clear the road. We are indebted to Carrick's Contractors who now do the road clearing for the Council. Sometimes even they can't get through!

Other equipment acquired over these years

'69 New Lister Engine to replace tractor,

'70 New tow drive system built,

'72 2nd Snow Trac,

'74 3rd Snow Trac (spares),

'85 Summer tracks for KB,

'86 Repaired F1 gearbox at cost of £2300.

1998 to 2008

The lean years. Poor snowfalls resulted in dropping membership and finances. Membership fees were reduced to help keep membership. However, WSC survived mainly due to the philosophy of the Club and the hard core of members who stayed loyal. During these years excellent social gatherings were held and Club ski trips to France were enjoyed by many.



2002

Remembrance gathering in memory of Eric Peart

Please pause for a moment to remember him and all those others who are no longer with us.



2003

Gilbert's Bridge which he built single handed!



2004

2 large projects with grant funding. Both Tow cables were replaced cost £5000. We received a grant of £4000 from Weardale Community Fund. The Lodge electrification project to provide 240v cost £5000 less a grant of £4000 from Wear Valley Council. This project provided the PV panel and wind turbine. A real renewable project.



2005

New hut installed at top of F2 at cost of £1000, courtesy of a donation from the estate of Eric Peart. Pictures show why it was needed !

2011

'New' KB bought from Yad Moss, a garage to house it for £25000, together with an extension to the car park for £1500. £15000 grant was received from the North Pennines Leader fund and £1000 from DCC Area Action Partnership. Due to the size of this garage and earth-works, contractors were brought in to carry out the construction. At the same time the route up to the top of F2 was made easier, to enable both Ski Club and the farmer's vehicles to go up - and skiers to come down. As this was so successful, it was subsequently named the M1.



New KB alongside old for comparison



What a lot of earth to move!



Garage finished



Preparing the Car Park extension

2012

Toilets "upgraded" to a composting system. What a relief say the ladies!



The business end

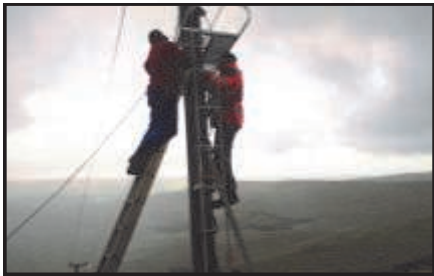


What an improvement!



2nd Quad Bike (4x 4) and Flail Mower bought. Shown on a typical work party day!

2013



New safety ladders and platforms were fitted to F2.



Training carried out on fitting harnesses



F1 Gearbox changed—failed on last day 2013



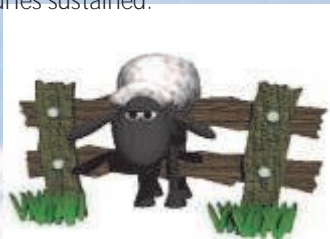
New Polaris Skidoo

SOME ANECDOTES FROM OVER THE YEARS

When the road was blocked with snow, the KB was used to ferry people down. On one occasion it slid off a snow drift in to a field.



Many ideas have been suggested and not implemented. One persistent idea proposed was a chair lift from Westgate to remove the issue of the road. Needless to say this could not be achieved for many reasons—see front and back page “thrif”, and anyway, the walk across is undoubtedly a good warm up. Must have a strong bearing on the small number of injuries sustained.



Sheep sometimes got stuck in fences. The Ski Club always reimbursed Ray Dent for them, and he always said “That was my prize ewe”.

Ray Dent won Shepherd of the year twice, and, together with Ian, have been fantastic over the years supporting the club and pulling people out of ditches.

Ray Dent always said “Dinna fuss, weather always has a way of evening itself out”.

20 years ago, on 26th April, together with Ian Dent, Ian Mac pulled about 10 sheep out of the snow drift in the Cornice at the corner of Black Scar.

One season, the snow was so deep that people had to crawl on tummies to get across the plateau to F1.

Screen plates(1968) - massive steel plates with holes used for screening coal were acquired and used around the Fell to bridge ditches, etc.

A blind skier, Frank Gillan, was helped to ski down F1 by people at points on the route shouting instructions.

Thursday Night Club – Bill Tait, Eric Peart and Oliver Smith, all bachelors at the time, would discuss work and people for the work parties – only picked people who grafted.

Trips to the Cairngorms were features of the early years.



Bill Nattrass achieved fame when his father's Armstrong Siddeley Sapphire decided to part company with a connecting rod via the engine casting on the way north.



Travelling with Eric was one of life's most uncomfortable experiences - in his Reliant Robin, the front wheel of which was singularly ill-suited for driving over snow-rutted roads (but what great traction otherwise). It was on those trips when the plan for WSC was hatched.



Bill Tait was doing a work party one Wednesday and noticed a person who appeared to be ghostly white, moving down the slope. On closer inspection it turned out to be someone naked wearing only willies, cutting the grass with a scythe.....Who?

*“Swinhope skiers are the best
With parallels so classy,
In rain & mist & howling winds
On pistes that are so grassy”.*
Derrick Littlewood, (1995).



Bill Hall drove the Cat into the shake hole by the old garage, by mistake, when it was dark. When they came back the next day it had disappeared due to overnight snow!



Defying Gravity. Paul Myerscough has been seen skiing up F1 and then F2 and round the top of Dora's Seat. Of course, this was with the aid of a parachute, but no mean feat!



Sean Gallagher came up in 2009 with a fan contraption on his back skiing round in circles in front of the lodge!



'Black Scar '2013— maybe should be renamed 'White Scar'



Looking down the Main Gully in 2010



Perfect parking— how did that happen?



The China Run— could be in the Alps



Jumping the hut



That's the style



Top of F2— not the Arctic!



The easy way.....



Wow...!!



Bill Tait holding court



Happy skiers



Yes, men do clean the tables!



Committee 2000



Graham Bell presenting
Snowsport England
Recreational Club of the
Year Award 2010 to WSC



Boarders on bums,.....as usual



Sustenance—inside oroutside



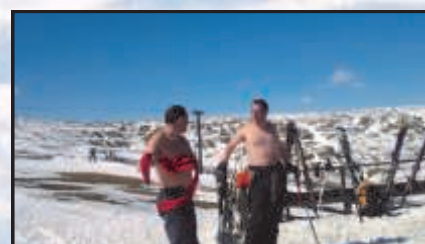
Going.....



Going.....



Gone!!!



It was really HOT !
Last day of skiing 2013.... in April!



Mike, Kimberley, Kevin, Peter and Steve



3 Steves



It's going to be a long walk, Alison!

3 REASONS WHY WSC HAS ENDURED FOR 50 YRS AND WILL GO ON FOR ANOTHER 50

- The chosen site is **second to none** in it's ability to provide skiing when all around is green grass. Credit to those who chose it cannot be emphasised enough.
- Thrift– the facility is, always has been, and always should be able to run on a small budget. Major Investments have been made, but never significantly changing running costs.
- Agreeing the Lease for the land has brought security, and, in addition, enabled grants on at least 5 occasions.

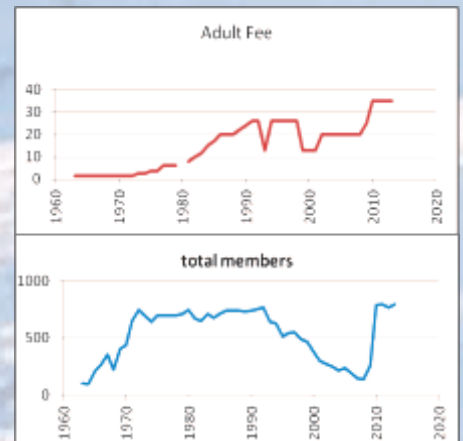
and
attention to Constitution – Mr Ghand proposed that in view of the lack of response to working party appeals the committee should be in a position to buy better equipment to try and relieve the amount of work that was falling onto a few people's shoulders. He therefore suggested that new subscription rates be Family £3/- Adult £2/2/- and Children £1/1/- . This was not very popular – but for the first time in the Club's history there was a massive airing of views as to what the Club should aim at doing. Some wanted to keep the club small, select and simple, yet with reliable facilities; others seemed to envisage quite a considerable "playground for skiers" at Swinhope. However, after many hot words ~~being~~ had been hurled backward and forward a compromise proposal was put forward (Family £2-2-0; Adults 30/-; Juniors 10/-) and the initial proposal withdrawn. The new proposal was seconded and accepted. Everybody then seemed to mellow again and became their normal

Skiing– Why we are here.
Some statistics.

The 60's to 90's experienced fantastic snowfalls and skiing.
In recent years some of that has returned.

Season	Days	F1 hrs	F2 hrs
1990-1991		165	148
2009-2010	45	241	182
2012-2013	37	219	162

In early years tows ran w/e and Wednesday only.



Taken from the Weardale Ski Club Minutes in 1965– shows how we moved from just a few skiers to a club for all.

From the Editor

This newsletter has been compiled to provide a history of the Weardale Ski Club*. We aimed to give you some insight into the many fantastic people who have made this Club what it is today. We hope that, through reading this account, you have grown to know these icons or can reminisce on times past. It is very poignant that many of the characters mentioned here are no longer with us. So, please, keep this in a safe place for the years to come.

Acknowledgements

This would not have been possible without the fantastic support of all the members, present and past, who have provided information, pictures videos and stories. Particular mention has to be made of John Stephenson, Oliver Smith and George Proud who have been able to give personal accounts of the club in the early days.

Many others have provided stories and pictures including Joyce Dryden, Gilbert Graham, Ken Hewitt, Keith Lambley, Janet Proud, Valerie Stephenson, Mary Smith, Margery Tait, and members of the Board.

We are also grateful to all those members whose photographs have provided this pictorial history. We very much regret, however, that due to the Child Protection Act, we are not able to publish images of our future generation of skiers. Sorry if we missed you, it has been quite a journey!

USEFUL INFORMATION: Snow Report: (01388) 317767 Web Site: www.skiweardale.com Snow Alert: skiweardale@gmail.com

Researcher & Editor: Steve Luard, weardalescnews@gmail.com
Assistant Researcher: Simon Palmer, Assistant Editor: Eileen Leatherland

*Weardale Ski Club is the operating name of The Weardale Ski Club Limited