



WITH BOUNTIFUL BEERS ON BOARD AND STEEP, POWDER-COVERED SLOPES TO STUNNING FJORDS ON SHORE, COLIN NICHOLSON GETS TO GRIPS WITH SKI-TOURING BY BOAT

# Ahoy there!



**Above: Full steam ahead on board the Polargirl!**  
**Main picture: Untracked slopes drop into the ocean**

Slumming it in mountain huts and carting my worldly goods on my back had always deterred me from ski-touring, despite wanting to give it a go for the upsides: fresh tracks and tranquility. Then I heard that in the Lyngen Alps, deep in the Arctic Circle in Norway, they have come up with the perfect pampered solution – ski-touring by boat.

Simply leave your stuff in the cabin in the morning, skin up the side of a fjord through forests of silver birch, eat your packed lunch at the summit while admiring views of beaches and crystal-clear water, then ski down the other side of the fjord, where your boat has sailed round to meet you, your bunk awaits and the crew is preparing dinner.

But I was soon to find out that there was a price to be paid for such divine skiing when I tagged along with a group of French mountain folk for the May Day weekend. French and Italian skiers were the first to ➤



give commercial fjord-touring a go in the mid-nineties, bringing their own guides, as Norway has just a handful of qualified mountain guides and the Lyngen Alps are a sea of glaciers, crevasses, cornices and avalanche risks.

On the first day our phalanx advanced looking something like a millipede, our poles moving in a wave-like rhythm as we zigzagged up the incredibly steep mountainside – somehow everyone fell into step quite naturally. After just half an hour's climb the boat seemed like a toy as it steamed off to our rendezvous. And after three hours we had conquered a summit of 1,142m, which from sea level is no mean feat, I can tell you. What happened to my idea of being pampered?

Then...bliss. We carved S-shapes down to the sea on wide-open slopes that perhaps had never been skied before in their million-year history. The only other people we had seen during the day were some locals, who waved at us cheerily even as we tramped across their front gardens and fields



**The millipede approach to ski-touring**



**Left: Better than queuing for the cable car at the start of the day Below: The sweetest turns**



before putting our skis on.

Day two and the back legs fell off the millipede as I struggled to keep up. The group had decided to tackle four 1,100m summits on a peninsula stretching way out into the Arctic Ocean. When ski-touring, an absolute essential is anti-blister plasters to put on at the first sign of discomfort, which I did. Well, I needed the excuse for a rest.

With three guides for the 24 of us staying on the boat we had split into groups – which allowed for a gang of five or more boarders, most of the blokes opting for the super-fast group, and me with the girls "taking it easy".

Two of the fastest members of our group were already off like a shot. "Oh, that's Coco and Carole," our guide Fred Augé told me. "They climb 600m every morning before 7am to open

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Carole's restaurant in Avoriaz."

High up I could see the pair stopping. They obviously needed a breather. But, no, what was this? They were skiing down towards us only to restart their ascent. Struggling to do more than 20 paces at a time by this stage – and I consider myself fit – I was suddenly seized by an incomprehension that bordered on blind fury at bloody Coco and Carole. What were they thinking, showing the rest of us up like that?

Meanwhile the blokes, who were way ahead of us and always attempting the steepest descents, would add insult to injury by stopping briefly for cigarettes on the way up.

What kept me going was the knowledge that we were in for another descent down magnificent slopes of guaranteed fresh powder that appeared to drop straight into the



**Clockwise from above: "Come back, you swine"; The other boat, the Caroline; "I'm not out of breath, honest"**

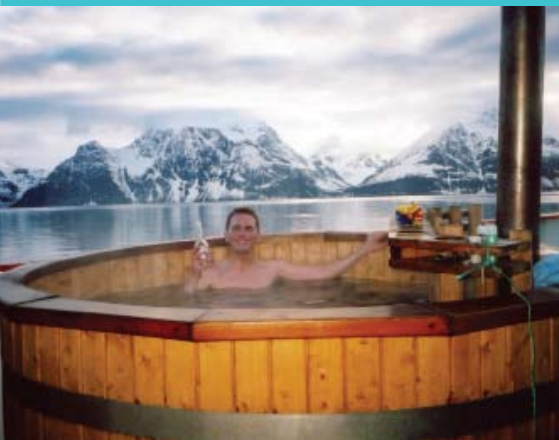


ocean. You don't have to be a pro to get down them either. I'm glad to report I wasn't the laggard when it came to 45 degree slopes of deep stuff, although, OK, some of that was face first.

The other thing that was motivating me on the climbs was the knowledge that our boat, the Polargirl, had a sauna and hot tub on deck for my ➤



**Below: Colin hogged the hot tub while the others did another ascent, just for fun**



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## DETAILS...

Colin travelled with [www.polarcharter.no](http://www.polarcharter.no) on a trip organised by [www.transalp-cham.com](http://www.transalp-cham.com). A week costs €2,390 (£2,000) with flights or €1,790 (£1,500) without flights, for an all-inclusive week, except equipment hire. So far one trip is planned from 11 to 18 April. And [www.zubaski.com](http://www.zubaski.com) organises weeks from 22 March to 3 April for £1,599 full board, not including flights and equipment hire.

Alternatively British firm [www.pistetopowder.com](http://www.pistetopowder.com) organises trips staying in the Lyngen Lodge and travelling to the slopes by boat from mid-February to the end of May from NOK19,200 (£1,815), again full board, but no flights or equipment hire.

SAS flies to Tromsø via Oslo ([www.flysas.com](http://www.flysas.com); 0870 60 727 727). For more information on skiing in Norway go to [www.visitnorway.com/uk](http://www.visitnorway.com/uk)

aching limbs. If there had been more of us, we could have spilt over to the Caroline, a beautiful, wooden classic yacht that slept 10, while the Polargirl was a tug that slept 28 with enough space for dinner on deck – particularly charming as by May it scarcely got dark at night.

On the final day I was spared by the weather. With heavy snow, the guides decided a 650m summit was enough, and I loved the cat and mouse search for our boat back through the woods. And what better way to finish the season than cruising at 20mph through a blizzard with snow in your hair...when it's sitting on the back of a boat in a hot tub with a beer in your hand?

