



Manchester Cross Country Ski Club

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Regular coaching sessions and equipment hire

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Lancaster SSE Roller Skiing Skills Training Weekend

6th – 7th October 2018

Course Writeup

With 34 attendees from across the country this year's Lancaster SSE Roller Skiing



Skills Training Weekend provided five tuition groups covering beginner, intermediate, advanced skiing and Level 1 & Level 2 instructor qualification.

Two of the attendees of this year's course kindly provided write-ups of their experience.

What do you do if you love cross-country skiing but don't want to spend all of your time on holiday re-learning your balance and skills? Well, the lottery winner's answer is to go and move to Finland to get an extended season, but for the normal person, your main options are to take up a 'sister' sport that you can do the rest of year (such as ice skating, roller blading) or to do roller skiing which attempts to give you skills and strength to get the most from your limited snow time (and also - it's a sport in its own right).

I tried rollerskiing 6 years ago on a similar SSE Rollerski course based in Hetton in the north east of England. It was a miserable rainy weekend (not their fault - normally I call the North East 'Blue Skies Country'), I wasn't physically fit enough for it, and none of it clicked for me because I'm just that bit too un-coordinated to pick up new activities quickly. I handed my rented equipment back early on the Sunday after failing to move more than 10 feet in skate style and pretty much vowed never to try again.



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However, since then I've started some complementary activities (ice skating, using a Nordic Track machine) and had a few more ski holidays. I'd been idly googling and started to follow Manchester Cross Country Ski Club on Facebook. Manchester Cross Country Ski Club <http://www.mccsc.org.uk> are a year-round club, offering summer roller ski tours, telemark coaching at Manchester's indoor ski slope and during autumn/winter/spring regular coaching sessions on a private cycle track. I spotted the SSE course coming up, and thought, why the hell not?

Booking on the course involved contacting the course organizer (Colin) and filling out a form detailing my skills level (I selected beginner, as my previous attempt had been such a disaster) and whether I needed to rent any equipment. Popped it in the post with my cheque, and a little while later, got an email saying my place was confirmed.

The course was a 1.5 day event. It started lunchtime on Saturday, and then all day on Sunday. It was held at Salt Ayre Leisure Centre in Lancaster, which has a private, mostly flat cycle track.

Saturday

On arrival I was greeted, and my rental equipment allocated. This was done in a really slick manner, as they had put name signs on the wall of the building, and put our allocated skis and boots, making it easy to find 'your' things. Unfortunately, they didn't have any



boots in my size, so rather than try and pad out the too large boots with socks I used my own Salomon classic boots for both days. I was using a pair of Marwe combi rollerskis.

We had a briefing meeting, introducing the coaches and the facilities and then we were off! There were 8 in the beginners' group, ranging from complete beginners who had never been cross country skiing before, some who had some downhill ski experience, some who had done roller blading etc. Our coach was Martin, who was very friendly and encouraging. He was assisted by Rosie who could top up Martin's instruction by going one on one with us.



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Saturday was mainly about classic rollerski, so we were issued with shorter poles and off to a private, mostly flat area we went to start our learning.

First we were introduced to our skis, how to put them on, how to stand on them safely and also how they had a ratchet on the front wheel to allow you to simulate the push off that you get on classic cross country skis. Using the grass to brake was covered very early on. Safety equipment is vital for rollerski - while a fall in snow is no fun, a fall on pavement can be really damaging. We all had cycle helmets, elbow and knee pads. I had an extra secret layer of padding as I had padded impact shorts on, as I had them already from taking some hip hurting tumbles ice skating.

Then there were numerous exercises to help build up to us having the correct technique. After several hours we were let loose on the main track and I managed a full loop, way more than I ever managed the last time I tried.

There was tea/coffee/vimto in the athletics clubhouse, so we could take much needed tea breaks to get our breath back.

On Saturday night there was a meal at the Cottam's Field pub, adjacent to the Premier Inn where a lot of the course attendees were staying. The meal was well organized (always a challenge for a restaurant to get 20+ plates of food out in a reasonable time) and it was so good to relax and chat to people.

Sunday

After a sturdy breakfast at the Premier Inn, a drop into a corner shop to pick up a packed lunch, I was back again at Salt Ayre.

Today was about (mainly) skate style so we were issued longer poles as this style requires them to be a bit longer. The organizers

had a table with our heights, and the calculated required pole length for us ready so it was pretty much just handed over in seconds.

Back to our square, where we learned how to push off with the inside edge by doing 'scooting' exercises. This is where I think my ice skating came in useful, as the action



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is very similar. Everyone was making great progress though, especially considering the varied backgrounds.

Every exercise put another piece of skills puzzle in place until by lunchtime we were able to skate up and down the car park. After lunch we learned how to do something I have never managed on snow, a step turn!

Then we learned some methods of getting up inclines, and some of the different skate + pole techniques.

By the end of the afternoon I was able to skate around the circuit, but I was definitely running out of steam by the end, when even Colin couldn't motivate me to do just one more lap!

Wrap Up

As you can probably tell, I had a great time at this session. The coaching definitely helped me get from zero to (not quite) hero! I was lucky in that the weather was dry (and on Saturday, sunny!) and barring a few YIKES moments, I didn't have any fear inducing moments or major tumbles.

I'm going to continue my membership of Manchester Cross Country Ski Club and I'm definitely going to drive up to Preston and do some of the autumn training sessions. Hopefully I'll run into some of the people from this course.

Melanie (Beginner)



I registered for the SSE Roller Ski Skills Course with the ambition of switching from classic to skating and being able to join the club trips around the North West.

I had an initial shock when I saw my beginner's registration had been changed to intermediate. After trying to pre-alert

the fracture clinic at the nearest casualty, I entrusted my soul to Saint Simeon, patron of crazy man, and tried to do my best.



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The group was a mix of more experienced rollerskiers, returners from injury or inactivity, and classic skiers looking for a change. It was a relaxed and enjoyable group.

Our energetic instructor put us through multiple drills, with poles, without poles, skating, on classic technique... trying to refine each movement to make us more efficient and safer. The early training in grass breaking was certainly welcomed by me and even some other more experienced skiers.

The second day was much longer, with a mix of classic style to build up on double poling and progression techniques uphill on V1. In the morning, the sides of my ankles were still sore from the previous afternoon session, but at least I had not gone running in the morning "just in case we were too static during the sessions".

The course was physically demanding although allowed for rest time between exercises. There was some helpful video recording, including myself trying to practice diagonal strides, which I hadn't practised since February, and that to the trainee instructors likely looked like Charlie Chaplin in skates. The group finally split to give more specific attention to the different abilities of the participants.

The circuit in Lancaster was in good condition and it was really good to see other groups doing drills according to their level, from very beginners to the more experienced trying to complete their level 2 instructor training. I saw a few skiers "flying" on the circuit with what looked to me amazing technique.

The best part of the course was the personalised suggestions we received from the instructors, targeting our areas of improvement. Now we all have a long list of drills to work on our own time and, as our instructor told us the first day, we had felt at least for a second how proper roller skiing feels like.

Finally, dinner was really five stars, with good food and excellent company with whom we chatted about skiing, trips, environment, literature... It did highlight how good it would be to share a few days with them in a little hut in the Alps or Norway.



Jose (Intermediate)



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