

The Muskoka Lakes Snow Trail Association (MLSTA) has an intriguing past. Our current organizational and trail system has been the result of hard work, dedication, and vision. We thought our members would appreciate where we came from.

Starting in the mid to late 1960's snowmobiling was becoming a popular winter pastime and especially so here in Muskoka. Around the same time the Bass Lake Stump Thumpers, the Bala Snowmobile Club, and the Port Carling Sno Drifters came into being as three local clubs. These were the days of one lane trails following a path of least resistance through the bush towing a "skip drag" behind. No bulldozed trails back then! Bala actually groomed the trail north across the frozen Moon River and up well past MacTier. Parry Sound groomed south to meet up with the Bala Club...somewhere around Healy Lake we understand.

By the late 1980's early 1990's the snowmobiling experience was changing fast in that the sleds were getting (more) reliable, creature comforts were becoming important, and trail traffic was increasing. And most importantly, the rider daily mileage was increasing.

Our forefathers recognized a need for change and better and wider trails were needed. To take advantage of a snowmobile funding program called "Snow Trac", the above three clubs merged and incorporated to form The Muskoka Lakes Snow Trails Association (MLSTA) on January 26th, 1993.

This merger resulted in a streamlined network of trails, reduced trail maintenance costs, a favorable funding formula from permit sales and our first piece of industrial grooming equipment a "Track Truck". In time, a surrounding club, the Moon Bridge Snow Riders saw the benefits of being part of a bigger region and joined the MLSTA. This amalgamation of clubs took place at a time when the Muskoka area needed to compete with other Ontario areas in need of money and resources. The MSR came into the picture sometime after that to amalgamate all the clubs in Muskoka District 7.

A few names from the past include:

Olive Lawrence, who owned the Red and White grocery store where Don's Bakery is now, was Bala's first club president.

Alf Ingram was Bala president in 1992/93 and along with...

Warren Brent, president of Port Carling and...

Bert Grant, president of Bass Lake...were the ones who guaranteed the purchase of the Track Truck and the incorporation of the MLSTA.

Other significant names from the past who opened, groomed trails and otherwise volunteered were:

Pete Kelly, Dianne and Barry Jones, Mike Webb, Bob and Margaret Kenwright, Gary Quaif and of course "Santa Claus" Bob McTavish from the Bala Club.

Rene Leenaars from Port Carling, held this club together for years as president and was also responsible for **all** trail activities of the MSR member clubs.

Earl Linn from Bass Lake groomed trails with his own sled in the 80's and 90's and became our main groomer operator until Rainer Hacker from Moon Bridge Club took over.

A few other pieces of trivia follow:

- When touring the MLSTA trails, one may notice old orange triangle markers on trees and posts. They are from the 1970's.
- The MSA was the forerunner to the MSR and included all the clubs around Muskoka Lake. You can still see "circle" blazes which were a common trail marker. They were donated by Oliver McLeod, a chimney manufacturer in Gravenhurst. They were painted orange and stencilled with MSA.
- The first "dedicated" "professional" piece of grooming equipment Bala purchased was a Skidoo Alpine with a single lane electrically controlled drag. That would have been in late 80s. To quote a local historian: "Boy that was a pig to get out by hand when it got stuck or slipped off the trail!"
- Our first Moon River bridge was an old flat bed transport trailer and was too short and flooded over almost immediately. The MNR were not pleased and it had to be removed before the end of season. Imagine the disappointment.

It took many, too many to list here who worked towards our common goal of making snowmobiling a better experience for our riders.

And perhaps most importantly, our landowners who strongly support the MLSTA. Without access through your property our trails would be severely limited to roads and Ontario public lands. Thank you for your consideration and urge all riders to respect your contribution to our sport.

There is history in the development of our trails and stories like these will continue to be collected and posted when and where possible. We hope you enjoyed this short piece of Muskoka snowmobile history and stay tuned for other stories to come!