

# Shabomeka LEGPOWER Pathfinders

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(Formerly Shabomeka Hike, Bike & Ski Pathfinders – 89 02 07)

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DEDICATED TO THE SPIRIT OF JACKRABBIT JOHANSEN

**MOTTO:** We hike, bike, and ski on the edge.

## AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- To encourage, develop and foster non-motorized access to the wilderness of the Madawaska Highlands.
- To explore, establish, clear and maintain a network of access paths.
- To limit path widths to one metre; positioned, cleared and high-pruned so as to preserve the high quality natural ecosystem.
  - To position and use the paths to minimize the possibility of discovery and hijacking by motorized users.
- To foster the concept of sharing the wilderness with other users; with particular emphasis on strict adherence to the technique of hiking, biking, and skiing along the very edge of any trail or road wide enough to accommodate both skiers and motorized vehicles.
- To recognize and utilize four distinct forms of wilderness access:
  - Bushwhacking – no significant clearing of undergrowth.
  - Paths – clearing of undergrowth and immature growth to a width of 1 m. (single file use)
  - Trails – clearing of all growth to a width of 2 to 4 m, with no grading. (side by side use)
  - Roads- clearing of all growth to a width of 4+ m, with minimal to complete grading.

## A MINIMAL IMPACT ORGANIZATION

### THE RESULT

A 65 km network of beautifully scenic paths meandering through a wide variety of habitats in the forest heartland surrounding Shabomeka Lake in the Madawaska Highlands of the Land O' Lakes region of Eastern Ontario. Walking, hiking on a bike, and ski touring in the winter.

Under the Occupiers' Liability Act, path users are deemed to willingly assume the risks of injury. Exemplary consideration for the paths and for others is expected of all users. Those with motorized vehicles are of course asked to refrain from using or altering the paths.

Use of the Shabomeka LEGPOWER Pathfinders paths implies a responsibility on the part of the user to regard their use, whether on private property or Crown Land, to be a privilege, not a right. You are expected to conduct yourself as a guest, not an intruder.

# Shabomeka LEGPOWER Pathfinders

## A History

Shabomeka LEGPOWER Pathfinders actually began in 1984 when Glen Pearce moved to Shabomeka Lake. He had been bushwhacking on skis for a number of winters through the bush around the lake. He found snowmobilers would not share the cottage road or abandoned logging roads with skiers, consistently running over and destroying his ski tracks.

He wrote the local snowmobile clubs and the Snowmobile Federation, asking them to observe a sharing concept; that they respect and not run over any ski track they encountered on the very edge of any road or trail wide enough to accommodate both. He repeated this request in the community newspaper a couple of times.

This approach got nowhere. In fact, there appeared to be a backlash escalation, and he was told by the president of the Northern Lights Snowriders Club that skiers had no right to use the cottage road; that snowmobiles had exclusive rights to the road in the winter. MNR (Ministry of Natural Resources) press statements confirmed this.

So he decided that if he couldn't join them, he would avoid them. Using topographical maps and a compass, he scouted, on touring skis, a number of possible routes to interesting looking places on the map. He then went back in the spring and fall to clear them, having gotten an OK from the MNR. He used a bow-saw, hand pruning shears, and a pair of modified lopping shears, and was able to build about fifty metres of path per day. After a few years he substituted a pruning saw (with a 4 m pole) for the lopping shears, and added a trenching tool, tire iron, and 1.2 m crowbar to the path building kit. He developed 'high-pruning, root ramping, grouting corduroy, and rootmass sifting' techniques so a lot of hard work would produce a 'natural' path that did not appear to have been worked on. This unfortunately led some city people, motorized users, and the MNR to conclude he merely 'found' or 'blazed' the paths, and thus had no right to restrict them to minimal impact use. He also discovered how enjoyable it was to ride his ATB (All-Terrain Bicycle or mountain bike) on them.

By four years later, a number of complete loops were built and more scouted. A few kilometres of cleared paths had been in the way of MNR timber operations, and were totally wiped out by the logging. It was obvious that as a philanthropic individual he was paid virtually no attention

by the MNR or other authorities. So, in April 1988, the Shabomeka Hike, Bike and Ski Pathfinders was

born, with Greg Alexander as Vice-President, and Gordon Price as Treasurer, making it officially a special interest group, and in the game.

In May 1988 he submitted the first path network map and an outline of the aims and objectives to the MNR. He applied for a Land Use Permit in December 1989, and received LUP 0080 after a 23

month process. Repeated requests to the MNR for a copy of their policy for non-motorized minimal impact Crown Land use were ignored, so it was assumed they didn't have one.

In July 1988, the OFAH (Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters) attacked the Madawaska Highlands Regional Trust discussion paper using the theme that the introduction of organized ski touring to the area would mean the end of all hunting, fishing, motorboating, and snowmobiling in the Lake O' Lakes. Glen was identified as a supporter of the paper, and after the resulting death threats and arson threats (reiterated in March 1991), he decided the lowest possible profile was in order.

In May 1990, he changed the name to the less ungainly 'Shabomeka LEGPOWER Pathfinders', with the emphasis where it belonged. 'Pathfinders' came from James Fenimore Cooper, not the Girl Guides.

It wasn't until spring of 1991 that he had finally handmade all the signs and put them up around the network using logger-friendly aluminum nails over MNR objections. Path junctions were deliberately left unmarked until he had a chance to gauge the level of hostility in the reaction of the OFAH supporters. The counteraction was far meaner than he had ever anticipated. During the '91 deer season, over 100 path signs were ripped off the trees. Path 1D alone lost 32 signs, some after being replaced 4 times. Path 1D remains signless. During the winter, the ski track was invariably groomed over on Paths 1 and 1A – shared with the Mazinaw Powerline Snowmobile Club. Snowmobilers violated signed paths, hijacking many that had been left alone before. In the fall of '92, deer hunters on ATQs (All-Terrain Quadricycles or 'recreational rototillers') chainsawed their way through several paths, transforming some low areas into wallows of black muck 30 cm deep. Motorized incursions still occur every year, from ATQs and dirt bikes (which we call 'recreational rototillers' or RRs, - because of what they are and what they do - 'rip and rut'), to front-end loaders.

Throughout 1992, several conciliatory efforts were made to find some means of reaching an accord with any or all of the parties involved. Instead, in April 1993, after taking no action on two years of consistent violation of Land Use Permit 0080 by motorized groups, MNR Area Supervisor Bill Hagborg and District Manager Adair Ireland-Smith (since the head of Ontario Parks and deputy minister) resolved the problem by cancelling LUP 0080. All of his attempts to present documentation to show the MNR 'reasons' were false and malicious have been parried by the MNR, and even by the Ontario Ombudsman, Roberta Jamieson. Support from other hiking, cycling, skiing and nature organizations evaporated almost as soon as it was proffered, as if the MNR has a very effective chill tactic along the lines of: "Shabomeka LEGPOWER Pathfinders are on our shit list. If you want to join them on our shit list, just keep supporting them."

In '07 we asked Premier Dalton McGuinty and then-MNR Minister Donna Cansfield a simple question:

*Whereas minimal-impact non-motorized users have a right to use and preserve paths/trails built on Crown Land solely by their own efforts, and  
whereas maximum-impact motorized users have a right to use, alter, and destroy said paths/trails as they see fit because they are on Crown Land, and  
whereas neither right can be exercised except at the expense of the other,  
who has the greater right?*

*The minimal-impact non-motorized users to preserve the paths/trails in their most natural state? or The maximum-impact motorized users to destroy the intrinsic natural character of the paths/trails?*

We did not get an answer, and thirty-nine followup letters, including to present MNR Minister Michael Gravelle, have elicited no answer to the question. The only reaction from the MNR has been unbridled hostility and a concerted effort to destroy sLp and our 65 km, 30 000 h, \$500 000 path network.

We are often asked why we don't promote sLp through tourist information facilities. This '10 letter to MNR Minister Linda Jeffery should explain why:

*This summer we had a mountain biker from BC ride the Shabomeka LEGPOWER Pathfinders path network. His comment after was: "You have a goldmine here. German mountain bikers are streaming into the Vancouver area to ride, and spending a fortune. But there's nothing out west like what you've got here. The Germans would go crazy if they could see this. Your tourist guys should be promoting the hell out of this. Are they a bunch of dolts, or what?"*

*Our answer was: "The Land O'Lakes Tourist Association is hamstrung by the MNR. The MNR won't allow them to even mention Shabomeka LEGPOWER Pathfinders in their promotional material because the MNR has a policy that any facility on Ontario Crown Land has to include motorized use. The recreational rototiller industry is a partner of the MNR – we minimal-impact guys are not. Guess who gets the mine and who gets the shaft. They appear to be the tail that wags the MNR dog. The MNR can't even show the sLp path network on the MNR Value Maps. If you have a non-motorized facility on Crown Land in Ontario, the MNR gives you two options – you can either turn it over lock, stock & barrel to the motorized thug partners, or have it destroyed by the MNR by whatever means they can think of at the moment. The preferred method is clear cut logging, which the maximum-impact partners love because it makes a present to them of lots of new ready-made routes to ravage the wilderness."*

*Propriety prevents us from repeating the language of his final comment, but it was not complimentary to MNR intellectual, ethical or moral status.*

## **MAPS & SIGNS**

The path network map is an 'in progress' item. It is foreseeable that it may never be finalized, that new paths will always be added as the network expands to give access to different areas. As sections of the network attain some permanence, maps and path descriptions and notes may be incorporated into a planned guidebook.

His inspiration for the paths was Jackrabbit Johannsen, whose message was to "Make your own trail through the bush." – or 'bushwhack'. But Jackrabbit recognized the reasonable limitations of urban-bred people to accomplish this, and so he cleared his favourite trails to encourage interest in the wilderness by a greater number of responsible people.

Signs on the sLp paths have been spaced at 100 m intervals, staggered in each direction. The intent is to encourage each user to develop some 'bush sense' by observing his/her surroundings and the natural form of the path, in order to find the way. Following any series of paths by selecting the lower-numbered path at all intersections will always bring the user back to the cottage road/lane – Path 1. Unfortunately, over the years most of the signs have been torn down by hunters, fishermen and motorized intruders. The MNR and OPP want ALL the signs removed; an action we would view as constituting willful endangerment. Some hunters and hikers break off the carefully pruned small trees on the path edges, in a redundant attempt to 'blaze' their route? or just plain vandalism? Please do not do this! Always carry a pocket compass.

One difficulty in using the sLp paths is deciding which ones to use on a given day. Like a restaurant menu where 'everything looks good', there are always paths you'll have to leave for another day.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

Clearing and maintaining the path network is an enjoyable avocation, and expenses, while not negligible, are so minor that a user fee or membership fee is not warranted, again complying with the philosophy of Jackrabbit Johannsen.

There is thus no membership in the usual sense. Instead, sLp supporters are listed as 'user-members', for the record. They could also be called 'path'gens'. Love those bilingual puns.

In lieu of membership fees or path user fees, small donations are welcome. The most desirable form of donation would be refundable beer cans and bottles, preferably those picked up along with other litter.

## **HIKING**

Comfort, not fashion, is the key. Wear clothes and shoes/boots you feel most comfortable in. Always carry a pocket compass.

You don't have to be a passive user of the paths. You can help in small, pleasant ways. Get into the habit of tucking one or two folded plastic grocery bags into the pockets of the clothes you normally wear hiking, cycling, or skiing. If you encounter litter (and you will; there are hunters, anglers, motorized people, campers, and smokers out there too), just stomp the cans etc flat and carry the lot home. Don't think of it as picking up someone else's garbage. Think of it as nice people offsetting the effect of the cruds.

Paths by their very nature are rudimentary, for single-file clear passage through the bush. They're subject to both daily and annual changes. Fallen branches and trees are obstructions that can occur at any time, and ferns, brambles, and other plants grow up on the paths every year. Observations by users about the condition of a path will not be construed as complaints, but as a volunteering to clear debris off a path when it is encountered. The exceptions to this are downed trees requiring sawing.

We all tend to move too quickly through the bush, so stopping to clear a branch or a tree can be a pleasant, satisfying diversion. Some surprisingly large trees can be moved off a path by dragging or prying with a stout stick. They can make an interesting engineering problem, if considered calmly. A light walking stick can be used to flick smaller branches off the paths very efficiently.

## **CYCLING**

'Sylvan Cycling' is the name given to the simple, slow cycling – 'like hiking on a bicycle' - the paths have been designed for, to distinguish it from the 'go as fast as you can' extreme mountain biking you see on TV and in magazines. You probably will rarely get out of your lowest gear, so the trick is to practise riding as slowly as you can, preferably over uneven terrain, or even over pieces of scrap wood scattered around your backyard. Practise posting – standing up and pedalling – invaluable for 'hoicking' up over short, steep inclines, and negotiating roots and rocks. Try to ride 'softly'.

There are 4 things you really need on your ATB for 'sylvan cycling':

1) An ultra-low or 'granny' gear. The number of gears is immaterial in the bush, but 18, 21, or even 24 speeds are the fashion now on ATBs. To determine the gear ratio, divide the number of teeth on the small chainwheel (front) sprocket by the number of teeth on the largest freewheel (rear) sprocket. 0.80 (24/30), or 0.82 (28/34) are best, but 0.86 (24/28) is better than nothing.

2) Knobby tires at least 50 mm wide. A square shouldered profile with a V-tread is best, with the point of the V meeting the path first on the rear for traction, and last on the front for braking.

3) Pedal ground clearance of at least 150 mm.

4) A nice wide, soft seat, so your butt won't take a beating. The forest floor might be soft, but it's not smooth. A suspension fork or full suspension is now considered to be absolutely necessary, but the old Knees & Elbows suspension system will more than suffice. In fact, because suspension or 'wuss' bikes are driven rather than ridden, wuss bike drivers get none of the 'feel' or tactile pleasure enjoyed by riders of normal ATBs, simply because their bikes are doing all the work for them, and acting as an anesthetic, deadening the 'feel' of the paths. As Eric Hoffer put it – 'Every great cause begins with a movement, becomes a business, and turns into a racket.' Hence the dichotomy: the paths are still in the movement stage, while wuss bikes are in the racket stage, like windsurfers and alpine skis. In an era when an automobile's quality/status is determined by how many muscle groups are atrophied while operating it, full suspension bicycles with power seats are bound to be popular.

PS: Another big mystique in cycling is weight. Since the paths were all built and are still maintained using an '84 Canadian Tire SUB (Sports Utility Bicycle) weighing 24 kg, it follows that just about any old ATB will do fine.

Other things to consider:

- always carry a pocket compass.
- a water bottle is a good idea for rides over an hour. You might drink from
- some springs that don't originate in beaver ponds, but if you aren't sure, don't drink it! Giardia, or 'beaver fever', is a protozoan parasite that can make you miserable.
- a few band-aids or a small first-aid kit can ease the discomfort of scrapes or scratches.
- hikers and cyclists will need plenty of insect repellent between mid-May and Labour Day, should wear light-coloured clothing, and arrange to have someone with black or dark blue clothing with them to divert the bugs.

## **SKI TOURING**

Please DO NOT use skinny Nordic skis on the paths.

It's important to understand the vast difference between ski touring (ungroomed) and Nordic (groomed) skiing in terms of conditions, equipment, and technique. Ski touring tracks LOOK like grooves, but are really raised rails, as the only packed snow is directly under the skis. A ski travelling only a centimetre or two off the centre of the 'rail' will fall off into the soft snow on either side, effectively destroying the track for others, as well as wrecking the skier's own enjoyment. Touring skis are wide because that makes them effective in soft snow. Nordic skis are very narrow to operate most efficiently in hard grooves, or packed snow for 'skating'. There is no incentive in Nordic skiing to learn to glide the skis exactly parallel to each other because they HAVE to go parallel in the machine made tracks. Thus, Nordic skiers find it impossible to stay on touring tracks/rails with their skinny skis, and very difficult even when they use wide skis. Nordic skiers also find the 5 cm spacing between ski touring tracks awkward, as they are used to the crotch-splitting 20 cm spacing of machine-made tracks.

The essence of ski touring is tip and edge control, two factors pretty much missing in Nordic skiing. Ski paths, especially after a thaw, consist of many small to large moguls. Every time the centre of the ski goes over the apex of a mogul it will want to pivot. Only constant precise

positioning of the tip by ankle and knee will prevent the ski from pivoting off the track. Similarly, the varying texture of the snow will make the ski want to cant and slide instantly off the track. Again, only ankle and knee edge control can counter this. The paths are not groomed, and since you won't be able to count on another skier preceding you to lay a track, you'll have to assume you'll be breaking your own track. A FLAT and EVEN track, that is, as a courtesy to those who follow. This is when having learned to parallel glide becomes very important. Developing this skill will take a lot of practice, but it's worth it. Practise gliding rather than clomping around flat curves, and telemarking on all downhill curves.

Touring skis should be from 60 mm to 75 mm wide. They're light, extremely stable, and will break track all day long. Check out ski sales. Wide, unfashionable skis are generally the ones being sold off at very low prices. The only way to decide between 'wax' and 'waxless' (neither being perfect) is to try each. Waxed skis can almost eliminate 'herringboning' up hills. Poly-soled skis are good for both early or late in the season because of their abrasion resistance. The classic type of 3-pin Nordic Norm binding works best for ski touring. The standard 'armpit' pole length is fine, especially for deeper snow, but baskets should be at least 100 mm in diameter.

For ski touring, clothing 'fashion' is obviously not a big factor, as there are not a lot of people out there to impress. Wear the outdoor clothes you feel most comfortable in. Don't forget to dress in layers that you can remove when you get too warm, as in hiking and cycling. A small knapsack will hold discarded jackets, sweaters, and gloves, as well as your waxes, compass, matches, lunch, drinks, and an indispensable tool: a small hand windshield scraper to get frozen slush off the bottom of your skis, and packed snow from under your boots.

Request a more complete tutorial on ski touring from [gace@mazinaw.on.ca](mailto:gace@mazinaw.on.ca)

Please DO NOT use snowshoes on the paths. Snowshoes aren't quite as destructive as that ski touring nemesis – the cursed snowmobile, but they do ruin the ski touring experience.

## **MISCELLANEOUS**

The first two weeks of November is deer hunting season. Using the paths then is actually beneficial to the hunters as you will be moving the deer around, BUT it's imperative that you wear as much blaze orange as possible (hat, vest, coveralls or whatever) so you're not shot as a deer, or as a birdwatcher.

Repeated requests for permission to use paths on the private property north of Lake Mississagagon have so far been denied, possibly due to the influence of COFA (Conservationists of Frontenac- Addington), a local satellite angler/hunter organization that supports the OFAH opposition to the introduction of ski touring here. There may be an on-going logging operation on this private land. Do not interfere with the loggers, especially around the felling area. If you want to watch this interesting activity, stay well clear. The loggers are subject to very stringent safety rules, and your presence jeopardizes their safety as well as your own.

No matter what path you happen to be on, please stop often and just look around.