

# Trail Grooming Secrets and Stories

This was the first full season that the Sugarbush Trail Association was responsible for the trail grooming on our 65k system. One of the most important tasks is to roll the snow, early in the season to provide a good base for the following snowfalls. This is accomplished with the snowmobile and roller attachment. Classic tracks can be set when there is about 6-8" of rolled, packed base. Classic tracks this season were set in early December.

January of this winter proved to be a challenge for the groomers. Steady, persistent snowfalls made grooming a continuous operation for a few weeks in the middle of January. High winds also complicated things and created drifts as high as 10ft. on the upper Picnic Loop.

Grooming duties this season were accomplished by chief groomer Jeff Lynch, new groomer Lance Green and veteran groomers Bill Hansen and Charlie Nelson.

Due to the high demand of grooming in January, our chief groomer, Jeff Lynch recommended that we purchase an additional Skandic snowmobile, so that two groomers can

operate at the same time. A used Skandic was found and purchased by the Sugarbush Trail Association.

We want to thank Dennis Rysdahl and Bluefin Bay Resort for providing us with a storage area for the large Pisten Bully groomer. The Pisten Bully was used this year for the first time in three years, due to the very nice, deep snowfall this season. The Pisten Bully is a large tracked vehicle with an enclosed cab, which makes it much more comfortable for the operator to use, compared to the snowmobiles.

Both snowmobiles and the Pisten Bully are necessary to provide a quality grooming job on the entire trail system. 😊



Beautiful Grooming on the Onion River Road

## Skiers' Trail Comments

- Information from actual skier surveys and from trail reports on [www.skinnyski.com](http://www.skinnyski.com) -

*"I thought it was great! - better grooming than a lot of Twin Cities trails. We'll be back.".....Tim, St. Paul, Oberg Trailhead*

*"I was very impressed. The Oberg Loop was wonderful!".....A.C.S, St. Paul, Oberg Trailhead*

*"It was beautiful! Grooming was perfect. I wouldn't change a thing!"....Mark, St. Paul, Oberg Trailhead*

*"Please set classic tracks with slightly more room on the outside.".....Julie, Mpls., Moose Fence Trailhead (Editor: After reading comments, we moved tracks more towards center of the trail)*

*"Tahoe-esque!!! These old mountains are really something. These trails finally have the grooming that they deserve. The Picnic Loop is off the scale for smoothness, coverage and challenges.".....Art Miller, Mpls., Britton Peak*

*"The remote location of this loop created a mystical solitude that left an indelible impression that I will carry with me for a long, long time! The quality of the grooming was superb!".....Barry Pultz, Mpls, Moose Fence Trailhead*

# Money Matters

by Joe Stasney



Joe Stasney, Sugarbush Treasurer

As is the case with any new organization, soliciting first time memberships and initiating fundraising efforts is always a challenge. The first six months of existence for the Sugarbush Trail Association (STA) was not an exception to this fundraising norm. Convincing organizations and individuals to donate money before any results can be achieved on the trail system is difficult to say the least. However, for our first six months and year ending December 31, 2003, The STA experienced modest success in all areas of fundraising. Total revenue for this period was \$3,175. This total included membership fees from our first 25 members and seven corporate sponsors. Our largest contributions came from donations from both individuals and organizations. Total expenses for this period, which included a number of one-time start-up costs was \$1,573. In order to minimize expenses, board members absorbed the majority of start-up labor costs. The year ended up with a net fund balance of \$1,601.

On behalf of the STA, thank you to everyone who has contributed financially to our organization. Because of your generosity, we were able to get a good start towards achieving our goals. We look forward to your continuing support and participation during the upcoming year. ☺

Sugarbush Trail Association Income Statement for Period Ended 12/31/03	
Revenue:	
Membership dues.....	\$380
Corporate Sponsorships.....	700
Donations.....	1,829
Special events/raffle.....	265
Total.....	\$3,174
Expenses:	
Administration.....	\$281
Marketing.....	675
Trail Signs.....	617
Total.....	\$1,573
<b>Net Fund Balance</b>	<b>\$1,601</b>

*For the season of 2003/2004, the Lutsen Tofte Tourism Association managed and dispersed the funds for 400+ hours of ski trail grooming.*

**Trail Fact**  
Trail maintenance and grooming costs  
\$384+ per km each year

## Trail Maintenance/Grooming

### How much does trail brushing cost?

Tracked vehicle with power brush cutter  
\$6000/season for 65km system

### How much does grooming cost?

Snowmobile with Tidd Tech - \$35/hour  
Pisten Bully - \$60/hour  
*(Includes fuel, operator wages, equipment depreciation and maintenance costs.)*

### How long does it take to groom the entire 65km system?

Snowmobile with Tidd Tech - 40 hours  
Pisten Bully - 20 hours

### How is trail maintenance and grooming funded?

MN Ski Pass  
Individual and Business Doantions  
U.S. Forest Service

### Source of funds for ski trail brushing & grooming at Sugarbush 2003/2004 Budget - \$23,367



# Trail Notes



Jeff Lynch, Sugarbush Trail Manager

## Jeff Lynch Interview

We were able to accomplish much in the first year. From a grooming standpoint, the addition of a snowmobile and tilling drag enabled us to provide decent skiing even with low snow conditions. This also helped to prepare the trail for the heavier equipment. With the help of Mother Nature we ended up having a really good grooming season. Although it was very challenging at times, due to the abnormally heavy snow and high winds in January. Plowing through monster drifts with the Pisten Bully was exhilarating.

### How did you get interested in taking care of this trail system and also in doing the ski trail grooming?

I started making the trek north from Minneapolis in the mid to late eighties to ski the North shore and Gunflint trail systems. Then one mid spring weekend, a friend introduced me to the Picnic loop on the Sugarbush system. I was amazed at how much snow was still there.

I had a great time skiing in a tee shirt and getting a tan. Ever since then, my friends and I would make at least one annual trip up to ski our favorite loop. When my fiancée Sarah and I first bought our business in Tofte two years ago, I was already thinking about how I could get involved with grooming and maintenance on this

unique system. I knew that certain parts of the trail had been neglected over the previous few years mainly due to the lack of snow. So I began my focus on the Tofte trail behind our outfitting business in town. With the use of an excavator from Bluefinbay resort, and gas powered brushing equipment, we were able to do a good job of repairing culverts, creating water bars, and widening the trail. Realizing the scope of what it would take to make these types of improvements on the system, I knew we would have to get more people involved. Individuals that were not only passionate about XC skiing but had a positive vision for the future of the trail. This group did come together, a little smaller then envisioned, but enthusiastic for positive change nonetheless.

### What were some of the accomplishments this year, in improving the Sugarbush Trail system?

“Trails were FANTASTIC! Jeff Lynch did a great job of grooming. I did the picnic loop counterclockwise. Via the Onion River Road. I am staying over and going again in the morning.”  
...Ron Kutsi, Virginia, MN

### What are your visions and/or plans for the future for the Sugarbush Trail system?

With our current momentum, I'd like see this area not only become a Nordic skiing destination but a great mountain biking destination as well. There are thousands of acres with great terrain for both.

### How has it been working with the landowner, the U.S. Forest Service and the local community, including resorts, businesses and individuals?

Working closely with the forest service will be key to meeting these goals and is integral to creating new trails as well as maintaining the existing ones. The other big part to the equation is bringing the community, the resorts, and the members together in building and preserving something that will ultimately help benefit the kind of lifestyle that many of us enjoy up here on the beautiful North Shore.

### Do you also ski? If so, how long have you skied and to what extent?

I have been seriously xc skiing for about 20 years. I started when most people were classic skiing. Then became more interested in skate skiing because it was new and fast. Skated almost exclusively for 10 years. Now I am getting back into classic skiing more because I really enjoy the challenge of learning the proper technique and going fast in the tracks. 😊



# Rapport

We have really appreciated the improved trail conditions this year. Pre-season brushing was done much better than in past years, which lessened the amount of brush in the trails early in the season, and also diminished the amount of branches hanging over the classic trail throughout. The grooming was a nice step up as well, especially after the Piston Bully tiller hydraulic system was repaired and became fully operational. The skate lanes were the best ever by far. The early season work with the snowmobile pulled groomer also helped quite a lot, as the base was flat and consistent earlier and with less snow than was possible in the past.

We saw a surge of renewed interest in the trails this winter, after two really "off" years. We are still not back up to the amount of weekend use that we were seeing a few years ago before the two bad winters, and I expect it may take one or two more real winters for people to once again feel confident that there really is good snow here for most of the winter. One of our challenges will be to keep LTTA's commitment to grooming and trail maintenance in place until cross county business again picks up and proves its value. The Sugarbush Trail Association

**"We saw a surge of renewed interest in the trails this winter, after two really "off" years."**

has helped quite a bit in this I believe, as key LTTA members, particularly Scott Harrison, seem to have a higher comfort level in their commitment to cross country due to the added focus provided by the STA.

Thanks again for all of your energy and effort.

*Dennis Rysdahl*  
General Manager, Bluefin Bay Resort

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"We headed onto the Sugarbush system from the Britton Peak trailhead, marveling at the beauty of the new snow, draped so picturesquely on bough and bush. But under the new fluff lay the old lumps and ice, making skiing and even keeping our balance a frustrating task. So after skiing the Piece of Cake loop, we drove farther up the Sawbill Trail to the Moose Fence trailhead, which Fenstad had recommended along with Onion River Road on the eastern side of the system.

The Maple Loop was in much better shape, though untracked and slow, and we were able to turn our attention to the lovely tableaux in the forest and to the trees ahead, from which clumps of snow occasionally exploded over the trail.

**"This loop was named not because it was a picnic to ski but for the fact that most skiers better pack a lunch"**

Gliding along on snowy lanes crowded by spruce and fir, we didn't even notice we were working."...Jan. 25, 2004

*Beth Gauper*  
Columnist, St. Paul Pioneer Press

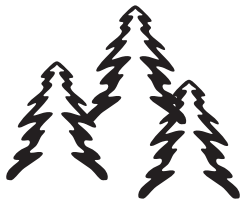
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"Enter into the picture a small resort near Tofte, on the north shore of Lake Superior, Cobblestone Cabins and its proprietor, Nordic ski fanatic Jan Horak. Through Horak's direction I found what I had lacked in Midwestern skiing. On

the Sugarbush Trail System I found one of my favorite tours ever, the Picnic Loop.

Back in those days the adventure began at Lake Superior. We turned our tails to the lake and pointed our tips toward the Sawtooth Range, climbing the relentless grade up, up, up the snowmobile groomed path into the hills. Still we continued climbing until we topped out on a ridge high above the lake. Calling forth all of our skiing skills, we negotiated the long climbs and screaming descents of the Picnic Loop. This loop was named not because it was a picnic to ski but for the fact that most skiers better pack a lunch."...Jan. 2004

*Jim Smith*  
Writer, Silent Sports Magazine



# Tid Bits

by Greg Fangel

Well, we are barely one year old. I'm referring to the Sugarbush Trail Association, which was incorporated as a non-profit corporation on May 23, 2003. Three of us, the three amigos as we sometimes call each other, had a vision. A vision for the community and a vision for the trail system. This vision was also shared by other influential people on the shore who just didn't have the time and energy to commit to this trail system. We thought that this trail system deserved a focus, some attention and improvements. Our vision has been working.

The first area of focus for us, was to improve the trail signage and markers. Over the years there have been many complaints from people getting lost and not knowing where they are. With the cooperation of the U.S. Forest Service, especially Terry Olson, all of the sign posts and back boards were replaced last fall. We requested a grant from the trail fund of the North Star Ski Touring Club from the Twin Cities and received it for total map and trail marker replacement. New maps were screen printed on a plastic, weatherproof-type material. They are very durable and should last for many years, except "where the moose chew on them", according to Terry Olson.

After trail brushing this fall, mountain biking and trail running were very

enjoyable, especially on the trails near the Britton Peak trailhead on the west side of the trail system.

In order to keep the trails brushed year 'round, power brushing is needed. In past years, a private contractor was hired to brush problem areas of the trail. The funding was not there to have the whole system done each year. The Sugarbush Trail Association would like



Greg Fangel, Sugarbush Trail Assn. President

to purchase its own power brushing equipment, so that the trails can be kept clear all year. This will enable mountain biking and hiking to occur during the summer and fall months, where the trails are dry enough. A used, tracked vehicle and power brushing head costs approximately \$20,000. Our goal is to raise enough money so that we can purchase our own power brusher.

Speaking of equipment, we

purchased our first implement this season. We had the opportunity to buy a used Skandic snowmobile and decided that it would be a very beneficial addition to the trail system fleet. We now use two snowmobiles and one Pisten Bully for trail grooming.

Our plans for the future include installing donation boxes at each of the three trailheads this summer. We also plan to offer ski lessons, clinics and other educational opportunities for the community.

The children at the Birch Grove School were thrilled this past winter when they saw Jeff Lynch grooming a ski trail around their school. Children used the trail for their outdoor physical education, just like some of their relatives still do today in Norway.

I would like to thank Andrew Slade and the Superior Hiking Trail Association for donating to us, two cases of books titled, "White Woods, Quiet Trails: Exploring Minnesota's North Shore in Winter" We used these books in our membership drive promotion this past winter, with good results.

If you would like to help us achieve our goals and make this trail system one of the finest in the state of Minnesota, please consider contributing to the cause. Thanks much and I hope to see you on the trails. ☺



## 4th of July Fundraiser

Join us at the annual 4th of July Celebration in Tofte this summer. We will be stationed there, answering questions, recruiting new members and donations. We will be selling raffle tickets to win a mountain bike, donated by Sawtooth Outfitters in Tofte. ☺

## Mountain Biking at Sugarbush

Currently, local mountain bike maps indicate that there are about 17 miles of mountain biking available at the Sugarbush Trails.

Ski trails that receive little summer season use make up the Sugarbush loop. Bikers will find some wet drainages along the route. Sugar maple, birch/aspen forests, along with several open vistas add to the beauty of the ride. All trails are grass covered and vary from level to hilly. The riding surface is quite firm and acceptable on the trails signed for biking during dry conditions. Some areas become soft and wet after heavy rains, demanding much more effort to bike.

The best trailhead to use for your mountain biking experience is the Britton Peak trailhead. The trails in this area are in the best shape and have better water drainage. Most intersections are signed with "You are Here" maps. Note: These loops intersect with the Superior Hiking Trail which

## Candlelight Ski

We held our first candlelight ski this past winter on Valentine's Day. This event was organized to bring more attention to the trail system and to provide a fun activity for local residents and guests of our sponsors.

Members of the North Star Ski Touring Club placed the candles onto a 1.5km course, from the Oberg Trailhead. High winds and near zero temperatures threatened the cancellation of the candlelight ski. In spite of the cold weather, we had a nice first-year turn out of about 50 people, who enjoyed the beautifully lit trail, bonfire and hot chocolate.

Bluefin Bay Resort provided us with firewood and smore fixings and Lutsen Resort and Sea Villas provided us with hot chocolate. ☺



is closed to mountain bike use.

The Sugarbush Trail Association would like to improve these mountain bike trails, including mowing and brushing at least twice during the summer and fall season. We also have a long-term goal of establishing a single-track system, winding its way through the extensive Superior National Forest. If you would like to help us reach our goals, please contact Jeff Lynch at Sawtooth Outfitters. ☺

Stamp  
goes  
here



**Sugarbush Trail Association - Membership/Donation Form**

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City/State/Zipcode \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_  
 E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Checks Payable to:  
**Sugarbush Trail Association**

Mail To:  
**Sugarbush Trail Association**  
**P.O. Box 2112**  
**Tofte, MN 55615**

Would you like to receive Sugarbush trail updates via email? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

New Re-new

- Individual Member - \$15.00/year  Additional Trail Fund Donation \_\_\_\_\_ Thank You!  
  Household Member - \$25.00/year  
  Business/Corporate Member - \$100.00/year **Total Enclosed** \_\_\_\_\_



# Trailside News

2003/2004 Annual Newsletter

The Sugarbush Trail is a 65km, non-motorized trail system near Tofte.

Cross-country skiing, hiking, snowshoeing and mountain biking are the principal activities enjoyed by scores of outdoor enthusiasts.

Sugarbush Trail Association  
P.O. Box 2112  
Tofte, MN 55615  
www.sugarbushtrail.org

#### Board of Directors

Greg Fangel, President  
Jeff Lynch, Vice-President  
Joe Stasney, Treasurer  
John Markwell, Secretary

#### Sponsors

Bluefin Bay Resort  
Cook County News Herald  
Grand Marais State Bank  
Lutsen Resort & Sea Villas  
Lutsen/Tofte Tourism Assn.  
Sawtooth Outfitters  
Sawbill Canoe Outfitters

#### Collaborating Partners

U.S. Forest Service,  
Tofte Branch  
North Star Ski Touring Club  
Superior Hiking Trail Assn.

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Association

## Trail Improvements a Success

Since the Sugarbush Trail Association (STA) was formed in April of 2003, one of the priority projects for us was to replace all of the maps at the trail intersections and to install additional signage to help skiers and hikers find their way through the system. A financial grant from the North Star Ski Touring Club, enabled us to start this project in earnest, finishing it before the ski season arrived.

Over two dozen new maps, printed on a weatherproof plastic-type material were installed on new backer boards and sign posts provided by the U.S. Forest Service, Tofte Branch. Terry Olson from the Forest Service was very instrumental in facilitating this project in cooperation with us.

Other trail improvements in 2003 included the complete brushing of the connector trail from the Moose Fence system to the Picnic Loop. This section of trail had not been brushed in at least 3 years. Members of the North Star Ski Touring Club and Sugarbush Trail Association used hand and power equipment to completely open this section of trail again.

The connector trail from the Oberg Loop down to the Lutsen Sea Villas was also opened up and brushed again, after being left



*Liz Wagner installs one of the dozens of new trail maps.*

dormant for a number of years.

Many skiers noticed the new signs and maps this winter, making their navigation through the system much easier than in the past. ☺

**“Maps are excellent! This is one of the best trail systems in Minnesota”**

*Pete Hawkins - Mounds View, MN*