

1973-2023 Wostawea Time Capsule Story

“Wostawea In the Woodlot”

Story shared by Eric Hadley

Trails at the UNB Woodlot have been groomed for just 22 years – less than half of Wostawea’s history. People skied there before the 2000s, but they broke their own trails. In 2001, a small group of skiers working at the Forestry Complex, including Rex Boldon, Toon Pronk, Leon Vietinghoff, Serge Allard, and me, regularly skied at noontime on Woodlot roads east of the New Maryland Highway. Unfortunately, our tracks were walked upon by dog-walkers or in some cases plowed. In frustration we began skiing on the western side, where the club skis now. For several years this casual skiing occurred without need for permission.

In late 2001 we borrowed an Elan, a very small snowmobile, from the Department of Natural Resources and used it to pack trails. I borrowed a track setter from Mactaquac Provincial Park that we pulled with the Elan to set a classic track. Rex obtained a key from UNB to the gates, and we transported the snowmobile, track setter and a trail drag (an old bedspring) there on our trailer. Grooming was done by Rex, me, or my sons Adam and Matthew, and skiing in the tracks was a treat. The system of trails grew and many people began skiing there.

We spoke with the Wostawea executive and asked if we could set tracks officially for the club. The answer was yes! Rex arranged with Mike Baldwin of UNB for permission, which at first was verbal, but when UNB realized how many skiers were using the trails, they prepared a written agreement, formalized in 2004. This is the 19th winter that Wostawea has officially groomed the Woodlot trails.

Over the years, grooming got more sophisticated and included the addition of snowmobiles, better track setters, rollers, and, in 2008, a Ginzu. The grooming team learned new techniques (including from George Lefevre, who had groomed at the Olympics) and often amazed us by transforming horrible conditions into excellent skiing. Sometimes, though, the challenges went beyond snow conditions. Once, Rob Hughes was grooming on an Alpine snowmobile when it died. He took his thermos of hot tea, poured it over the carburetor to thaw it out, and got going again! Norm Siebrasse and Matt Betts had the Alpine’s drive belt break and, to everyone’s amazement, found a spare one underneath the seat. Despite not being very mechanically inclined, they installed it and finished the job.

The next major advance was in 2011, when Eric Luiker spoke to Brian Johnson, the owner of Kingswood Golf Course. Brian agreed to have Wostawea groom the cart paths and provided a site to store equipment in a shipping container. UNB gave us permission to cut the “Connector Trail” joining the Woodlot to Kingswood, and later on we added Stonehenge and the Wetlands classic-only trail to the network. Windy conditions and a lack

of snow initially prevented us from grooming the golf course, so we transported the gear to the Kent Road. When enough snow fell, grooming started from Kingswood. Once, a series of north-easterly storms piled such huge drifts across the Highway Trail that Rex rolled the snowmobile over while trying to break through the drift. Skiers with shovels had to dig a route through it.

The trails have hosted a handful of events over the years. As noted in David Cameron's previous Time Capsule, we held a "Definitely Not the Loppet" in 2010 when bad weather cancelled the regular one, and in 2015 Raymond Léger organized a "ski your age" event one March weekend. Both events were fundraisers and supplied welcome treats to participants.

The Kingswood and Woodlot trails have been extremely well used for many years and are renowned in the region. On a weekend afternoon, you might see over a hundred skiers – a far cry from the handful of us who broke trail there in 2001.