

Rolling out the

White Carpet

*6,900 miles
of snowmobile trails
are yours to explore —
safely*

BY MAJOR TIMOTHY ACERNO

Snowmobiling in New Hampshire has become one of the most popular forms of winter recreation in the state. What a great opportunity to enjoy the wonders of winter! New Hampshire has some 6,900 miles of snowmobile trails throughout the state — more trails than you would need to get to Vancouver and back. Those who are ambitious enough can travel by snowmobile from Manchester to Pittsburg and from the Connecticut River to the seacoast.

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Three Generations Hit the Trails Together

Snowmobiling is a family affair for Lois and Darrel Palmer of Sutton. They've enjoyed the sport since 1971, when they first chugged out over the trails on "motor skis." That year the Palmers helped organize the Sutton Ridge Runners, a local snowmobile club still going strong today with about 85 members. Over the years, snowmobiling together has been great family fun – and a source of community pride – for the Palmers and their four children, who are now grown up with kids of their own.

"The kids have always ridden with us over the years, just like the grandchildren do now," says Lois Palmer. The Palmer grandchildren, ranging in age from 4 to 18, all love to snowmobile. "It's supposed to be a family sport, and it sure is for us!" says Lois.

Participating with the Ridge Runners keeps the Palmers busy year round. From April to September the club keeps a stretch of local

highway free of litter. In August, they sell ice cream at the Musterfield Farm Day to raise money for Easter Seals. Every October, the club puts on a turkey dinner and invites local landowners; last fall they fed close to 300 people at this annual event that builds bridges with the local folks that host trails on their land. Club members put together food baskets at Thanksgiving, help out with disaster assistance and pitch in to decorate the town gazebo for Christmas.

In the fall, the serious work begins. The group gets together to spruce up the trails: trimming brush, cutting out trees and repairing bridges. Late fall and early winter bring snowmobile education classes to teach; the Palmers have served as volunteer instructors for many years.

Then – in a good year – comes the glorious snow. In January or February the group heads out on a Sunday for a six-hour ride from Sutton to Orange and back. On another traditional outing, the group rides together to Andover's spaghetti supper, then cruises back through the woods in the moonlight. "If the snow is good, they're beautiful rides," Lois reminisces with a smile.

This winter, the Palmer family is once again out enjoying the fresh air and open trails together. No couch potatoes in this clan! Their four-year old grandson proudly rides along on his Christmas gift from granny – the next size up from his old Kiddie Cat.

—Jane Vachon



A few of the Sutton Ridge Runners pause for a photograph in Danbury. Winter is their favorite season, but club activities keep members busy throughout the year.

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Maj. Timothy Acerno is coordinator of New Hampshire's Off-Highway Recreational Vehicle Program.

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At Fish and Game, we talk about snowmobiling's continued success and safety in terms of what we call the "3 E's": Engineering, Education and Enforcement.

Engineering: Trailblazers at Work

All those trails didn't magically appear in the woods; they were engineered by trailwrights and are maintained by volunteers. The work of gaining permission to develop trails on private property, and the trails' upkeep, is accomplished by volunteer help from clubs belonging to the New Hampshire Snowmobile Association (*see sidebar*). More than 5,000 landowners host sections of the snowmobile trail system. Not surprisingly, the trails that are developed and maintained through-

out the season by dedicated volunteers are some of the best and safest trails in the state.

Enforcement: On Snow Patrol

During the "good times," no one realizes the importance of an enforcement officer. But when one is needed, a CO cannot get there fast enough! Conservation Officers from the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department are the primary enforcement officers on snowmobile trails. Other police officers have the *authority* to enforce the different rules and regulations, but the *responsibility* falls to Fish and Game. COs are issued snowmobiles to allow them to patrol the trails in their areas. The officers also are assigned to high-activity areas to control illegal or irresponsible riding. For most riders, seeing a CO on the trail is a welcome sight; for others, they soon learn the consequences.

Education: Safe Riding Starts Here


The safety of the sport has sometimes been taken for granted, because the dedication of many volunteers, doing countless hours of behind-the-scenes work, have made the Granite State's snowmobiling program a real success.

New Hampshire's strong education program teaches snowmobilers the basics of safe riding and trail etiquette. A key component of the Safety Education Program is the *Snowmobile Safety and You* class for children over the age of twelve. This certification program reaches over 2,500 children each year, introducing them to safe and responsible riding. Other safety education campaigns developed and put into action by the state's Snowmobile Safety Awareness Committee have earned international recognition. The objective of the committee is simple: to control the irresponsible rider.

New Hampshire started conducting Sobriety Checkpoints in the winter of 1997-1998. What was originally planned as an enforcement initiative ended up as a combination of enforcement and education. The purpose of the checkpoints was to detect and apprehend impaired operators. One of the requirements of receiving authorization to conduct the checkpoint was to advertise the county where it would be conducted; the checkpoints quickly became front-page news, and the consequences of operating a snowmobile under the influence of alcohol or drugs well-known to riders.

While participating in the checkpoints, COs had the opportunity to speak with many snowmobilers. The most common comment they heard was that they (riders) would not dare to operate while impaired, because they knew the officers would be out there on the trail. They didn't know exactly where — but they knew they were there. Therefore, the checkpoints became more of a deterrent program through education than an example of the "heavy hand of the law."

Sharing the Trail

Snowmobilers welcome other winter recreational users on their trails. Hikers, cross-country skiers, and those on snowshoes and dog sleds all use the trails, taking advantage of where the trails go and how well they are maintained. New Hampshire strongly encourages multiple uses when planned for properly. If you do have the opportunity to get out on one of the trails, always remember that the trails were developed by and for snowmobilers. Through the 3 E's, the trails can be a safe and fun way to enjoy the beauty of the winter season for all who venture outdoors. 



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Mixed company: Trails developed by snowmobilers are enjoyed by a range of outdoor enthusiasts.

You'll Never Ride Alone

The New Hampshire Snowmobile Association (NHSA) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to safe and responsible riding and access to riding opportunities. There are 115 member clubs located throughout the state that participate in all aspects of the program. Club members actively participate in the 3 E's: they volunteer their time to develop and maintain the snowmobile trail system; teach safety education classes; and conduct Trail Safety Patrols. Club members also get a break on sled registration fees. NHSA works with Fish and Game and the N.H. Bureau of Trails on legislative matters to develop model safety initiatives that have been used across North America. To join a club or the association, visit the NHSA website at www.nhsa.com or call (603) 224-8906. As the folks at the Bureau of Trails say — "Join a club and never ride alone!"



*This year's
International
Snowmobile Safety
Week is
January 11-17.
Why not sign up for
a snowmobile
education class?
For information, visit
www.wildlife.state.nh.us.*