

# SNOWMOBILING with Leeds and Grenville Snowmobile Association

A Huge Jump on Winter Fun *By Lorraine Payette*



As the sky contemplated releasing the first flakes of snow, engines were already starting to thrum in garages and sheds throughout Leeds and Grenville. It doesn't take long for snowmobile enthusiasts, throughout the region, to get into gear and start enjoying their sport.

"The Leeds and Grenville Snowmobile Association (LGSA) consists of four clubs - Grenville Snowmobile Club (SC), Elizabethtown SC, Athens SC, and the Rideau Ridge Riders (RRR) SC," says Al Costello president of RRR.

The organization is proud of the trails used by the clubs. Properly groomed and kept in proper functioning order, they are truly works of art.

"The trail network is maintained by volunteers throughout the year," says Costello. "They perform tree removal, culvert maintenance, trail sign installation or removal, and dealing with all the landowners who make it possible for us to snowmobile in Leeds and Grenville. Communication and organization are key to the network. Club executives and volunteers make it possible to provide a trail system that is up to the highest provincial standards."

In the 1920's, Carl Eliason of Sayner, Wisconsin, started his 31-year venture into inventing and perfecting the "Motor Toboggan". It was a simple device that had a wooden toboggan with steerable skis

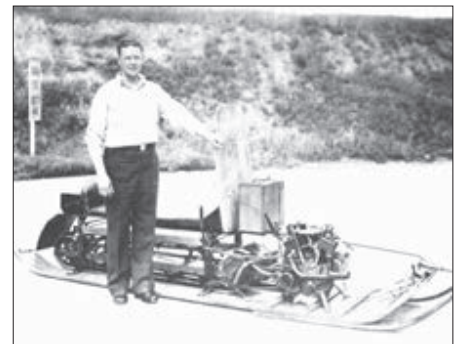
attached at the front, an elevated seat, an engine, windshield and even a place to strap a suitcase. Eliason was an avid outdoorsman who suffered with a bad foot. His invention allowed him to pursue his favourite activities of hunting, fishing, and trapping with his friends.

Producing eight machines by hand per year, he couldn't keep up with the orders. A blacksmith by trade and dealer in outboard motors for boats, he modified a 2.5 horsepower outboard for his power plant, then heated metal for the frame over a coal burning stove. Ever resourceful, he used the family bathtub as a boiler to produce the steam needed to form the skis. Each new machine was refined and improved upon. In 1932 he brought out a model, powered by a motorcycle engine that could run at speeds exceeding 40 mph (64 Kph).

As time passed, snowmobiles increased in popularity, especially in the colder northern climates. With the machines came the clubs and the need for regular trails and people to look after them.

In Leeds-Grenville, five small clubs decided to band together in 1996 to become the LGSA. Kemptville eventually dropped out but the others remain to this day. Each keeping its own identity inside the larger organization, they continue to be administered independently and do their own fundraising activities.

"The LGSA invests tens of thousands of



About 600 kms of trails await snowmobilers in Leeds-Grenville (photo submitted by Al Costello, LGSA)

Carl Eliason with an early version of the "Motor Toboggan" (photo courtesy of Eliason Snowmobiles)

dollars every year," says Costello. "Trail preparation equipment - either rented or owned by the association - costs huge money in order to give us the trail system we provide. There is money spent on all aspects of our operation - signage, insurance, fuel, repairs, etc."

By 1999, the clubs had discovered that keeping the trails up to par was something that couldn't be left up to a hit/miss system. They needed to get organized, so they joined with the Nation River SC and formed a special grooming co-op.

Electing a chair from amongst themselves, the entire committee takes on the



responsibility of hiring groomer operators, scheduling shifts, looking after repair and maintenance of the machines, and making recommendations to the LGSA Board of Directors for purchases of new and/or replacement equipment.

"This grooming CO-OP has improved the continuity of trail grooming throughout the Leeds & Grenville Counties, giving us some of the best kept trails in Eastern Ontario's District 1," says Costello.

To provide funding, the LGSA became a master of creating events and selling memberships. Every penny raised by the clubs, goes toward the expense of maintaining trails, keeping the clubhouses going, and other necessary costs.

"Each club gets a portion from all permits sold," says Costello. "This money always goes back onto the trails. Trail preparation and grooming are our biggest expenses. It is very important for people to buy permits, and not ride the trails without one. Each club has different events throughout the year. There are breakfast events, wing nights, poker runs, dances, etc. This brings a social aspect into the sport."

People of all ages are encouraged to participate. There are courses available to teach safe snowmobiling to all, and joining the group for a day of

snowmobiling can be a fantastic way to beat the winter time blues.

The trail system passes through many scenic areas throughout the counties. There are two TOP (Trans Ontario Provincial) trails running in the area, covering a 253 Km loop encompassing all four of the member club territories.

"TOPS E trail starts at Napanee, runs through Smiths Falls, connecting with the BEAST and K&P Club to the north, the Lennox & Addington Ridge Runners to the south. E105 intersects the TOPS E trail at Forfar, connecting with the Athens Club and the Seaway Valley to the east," says the LGSA.

Trails meander through fields, wooded areas, along streams, and into various villages along the way. Riders can stop for a meal at a local restaurant, refuel their vehicles, shop at the unique businesses to be found there, or even stay the night in a local hotel or bed and breakfast establishment.

With about 600 members in the LGSA, there is always room for more. Ontario law requires that a proper permit be purchased if a rider intends to use trails maintained by the OFSC. However, for those new to the sport, there is a free Family Day Weekend pass available for February 15-17. **LH**

## ... CARL'S STORY ...

*in his own words*

"I was raised in the north woods and liked to hunt, fish and trap as much as any young outdoorsman. Because of my crippled foot, I couldn't keep up with my pals on treks through the snow. I fooled around with a Model T Ford and adapted it to skis, but it was too cumbersome for the woods and unworkable in our deep snows or unplowed roads. In those days, a lot of would-be inventors were trying to devise a powered snow vehicle. My brother-in-law worked on a machine he thought could get its locomotion from a wind propeller. In the winter of 1924 I began work on my "Motor Toboggan." In my mind this would be the most practical means of travel over the snow. The endless cleated track, slide rails and liquid cooled power unit would prove to set a standard for the future.

My machine would be granted a patent in 1927. With this machine, I was able to turn the tables on my hunting comrades – as long as there was snow on the ground. While they hoofed it on foot, I would ride and get to our destination in the woods an hour ahead of them!"

*- Carl Eliason (quote courtesy of Eliason Snowmobiles)*

For more information on purchasing permits, go to [www.ofsc.on.ca](http://www.ofsc.on.ca). For a chance to become part of LGSA or to learn more about them, please go to [www.lgsnowmobile.ca/index.htm](http://www.lgsnowmobile.ca/index.htm), contact them at [mfenlong@cogeco.ca](mailto:mfenlong@cogeco.ca) or by snail mail at Leeds and Grenville Snowmobile Association, 1458 Windsor Dr., Brockville On. K6V 6X4.