

## THE DRIVING FORCE MOTORIZED REC SCOOP

# Reminiscing with the Winter Huskies Snowmobile Club

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Recently I met with Dale Beissel, Tom Steiner, and Mitch Chermack from the Winter Huskies to find out more about this snowmobile club.

I met the trio at their new groomer shed in Winter- and wow! what an impressive change from their cavernous old 1993 building, which was still standing next-door. Two of the Alliance groomers were parked inside this heated, brightly lit shop, and the guys had a table filled with a lot of club history and documents for me to browse through.

Tom Steiner, who moved here full-time around 1980, has been the club's treasurer for about 10 years now. Steiner told me he graduated from school in Mauston, but always considered the Winter cabin his family has owned since 1953, his home. Tom and his family have been members of either the Winter Huskies or the Loretta Trailblazers since the early 1970's. He has been an avid rider ever since their first Polaris snowmobile purchase in 1970.

Dale Beissel was our Alliance's long-time winter trail boss until his retirement from that position last year. Beissel moved here from the Hastings, MN area in 1999, and purchased the Trailside Tavern on Hwy 70. Dale told how he invited snowmobilers from MN over for a ride when he was new to the area and how Tom helped lead the group from Birchwood all the way to Winter. No one was familiar with the area then so the ride was long and thrilling- his friends still talk about this fun adventure.

Mitch Chermack was involved with snowmobiling in St. Paul where he worked, but bought a vacation cabin here in 2008, when he joined the Winter Huskies. He



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Groomers Dale Beissel, Tom Steiner, and Mitch Chermack.



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Patches.

purchased a permanent home in Ojibwa in 2020.

When I asked what it was like in the early days snowmobiling in the Winter area, the three of them recounted stories about how fun it used to be- there was a lot of camaraderie then and entire families just went out to ride. They didn't care if a trail was groomed or not, they rode ditches if needed. Steiner exclaimed "back in the

70's, there wasn't a lot of people around and they didn't worry about grooming- they were just happy to have a place to ride!"

Dale and Tom recalled how exciting it was to gather with other sledders- brat feeds, impromptu group rides to Trap-N-Fish for breakfast, grass drags, friends getting together to just ride anywhere.

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“Back then there weren’t as many private landowners like there is today, and people didn’t get excited by snowmobilers riding around”. We laughed at Dale’s comment “but when you broke down it was no fun. . . .you couldn’t carry enough spark plugs with you and you couldn’t smell more like gas than you did back then.”

All three talked about the popularity of Big Bear Resort, down in the remote SE corner of the county — Mitch even has a 1968 picture of his grandparents on Beissel Grade, who rode to Big Bear all the time. Steiner said that there were so many sleds there, that if you didn’t park yours by a tree or other landmark, you couldn’t find it again when you came back out.

Mitch and Doug Mrotek recently talked about how the restaurants and businesses really did all the trail work early on, not the clubs, which were more social based back then.

Steiner said that when the Winter Huskies researched their information to apply for their IRS 501 ©3 status, they found the club began in 1969. Tom showed me a WALDO Association booklet from the late 1960s or early 1970s with a rustic trail map of the Winter area, which included the Tusconia, Trail 25, and several others. The Loretta Trailblazers

and Winter Huskies were mentioned in the book, and it showed Stan Shydlowski as the club president then.

Dale explained that when he started here in 1999, the Alliance, which had originally been one, had already broken into two groups- a north group led by Gene Middlestadt, and a south group led by the Mussers. Dale joined both groups but correctly predicted that both would merge into one again as the south had little support whereas the north was more unified with its 7 clubs.

Beissel recounted there were only 5 groomers for the whole county when he started, and 2 groomers were kept in Loretta. He started by grooming for both the north and south groups; “Middlestadt told me that before I could groom, I had to change the oils and do all the maintenance and everything, after that, he took me out on Trail 5 south, came back and said I was good to go — and you had to be really qualified to groom for Musser”.

Both Dale and Tom talked about the small, but important, things clubs did back then and how they miss those now — such as if you groomed a lot, you earned a grooming jacket from your club. Your grooming coat was like a status symbol when you wore it out in public, and all the clubs’ groomers showed them off. Tom brought out pictures of the Winter Huskies club patch and how popular they were

to have on your snowmobile jacket then.

Around 2005, the Alliance expanded and purchased three new tractors and a Bombardier, and all three men noticed a change- processes became more regulated, things were run more business-like. Oh, the newer grooming equipment is nicer to drive, especially now, but the constant scrutiny, and GPS tracking has taken some of the fun out of grooming, remarked Dale. The trails they maintain are in some of the most remote areas of the county and they are all concerned about the lack of cell service in case of emergencies.

The Winter Huskies proudly hosts a few major fundraising events each year. 2025 marks the 22nd Annual Big Boyz Vintage Run in remembrance of friend David Keller. This popular 20-mile vintage sled event was started by Dale Beissel out of his Trailside Tavern for the few years until the Winter Huskies adopted it as their own. Dale, who still leads this event said of riders “they just want to finish the race!” as he comically described the cold morning as riders were trying to start their vintage machines in the parking lot of the groomer shed.

Their Winter Sno Xtravaganza Snocross event, sanctioned by the World Snowmobile Association (WSA) began in 2001. Our lack of snow has squashed plans

for this year but look for it in coming years.

The Danzman Memorial ride started in 2003, after the untimely death of a local snowmobiler who fell through the ice on the Chipewa Flowage. This fundraiser creates 2 scholarships for the Winter School District. There is also a Shandley memorial ride the club holds yearly.

Every year the club hosts close to 100 ice fishermen at its Ice Fishing contest at Trap N Fish — it should be a good year for this!

Currently, the Winter Huskies have 13-14 volunteer groomers, and they hold monthly club meetings in the winter area. Last year, they held their club Christmas party in their new groomer shed and all three marveled at how great it was- it felt like the old-time gatherings!

The Winter Huskies club has a website at [www.winterhuskies.com/](http://www.winterhuskies.com/) if you wish to learn more about this fascinating club, its history, or if you’d like to join! They are also looking for donations to help finish their new groomer shed project- consider donating to help keep this hard-working club going strong!

Another visit with snowmobile folks who have so much history, so many interesting stories to share — there is not enough room to write about it all here, but I hope I gave you a good glimpse into the Winter Huskies.