

## THE DRIVING FORCE MOTORIZED REC SCOOP

# Early season trail conditions near the end of February

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I spent the entire weekend riding my sled, and I tell you, it felt just wonderful to be back out on the trail! My weekend started on Thursday, with a ride-to-lunch with the Relic Riders. During a normal winter, the Relics get together every Thursday for lunch at various club sponsors. Two poor winters had squashed this routine until now, and we were all so excited to pick it up again! The club planned their first ride of the year up to the Evergreen Bar in Bayfield County, then back down to the Sawmill Saloon for lunch, before finishing their day on Nelson Lake.

As it turned out, I couldn't meet the group until lunchtime, as I spent the morning getting information for a few of my real estate buyers. Finally, I was able to slam my computer shut, and I hurried to get my gear on while my sled warmed up. A sweet rush of freedom came over me as I dipped down onto Nelson Lake from my frozen yard and throttled across the lake.

Nelson Lake, like every other lake I've been to this winter, is covered with ripples of drifted snow from a windy snow storm a few weeks ago. Many drifts froze in place, creating a roller coaster ride. These natural speed bumps limited my desire to rip across the lake wide open this year. Oh, you can still hit it hard, especially if you don't mind losing a few teeth or an organ here or there, but I'm getting short on teeth and organs to lose, so I keep it down a notch.

Lake trails are not normally groomed—as it's too risky to take a heavy, expensive groomer out on frozen water, but Nelson Lake is lucky to have a great lake trail steward in Kevin Harvey. Kevin, from Revelle's Resort, spends his own time and uses his own equipment to groom our trail going across Nelson Lake, and snowmobilers sure appreciate the smooth path! His efforts lessen the speed bumps but can't get rid of them completely.

Gravel is my nemesis this year. We just don't have enough of a base to thickly cover our gravel trails— and what we've gotten so far is fluffy snow. Despite all the grooming efforts, the dry snow just doesn't pack well onto the gravel surfaces. Several of our trails got a fresh coating of gravel late last fall, and I think I found every larger rock that came along with the gravel.

I drove down Tagalder Trail to Trail 63 and arrived at the Sawmill Saloon before the Relics. The parking lot was already filled with a huge group of snowmobiles, and I wondered if there was even space inside for the group. The Relics finally piled in for lunch and surprisingly, we all fit.

The variety of personalities is always



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A scene on Trail 18 between the Chippewa Flowage and Tiger Cat Flowage.

interesting. One older riding friend, well, you could pull him right out of a 'Grumpy Old Men' movie. He orders hot chocolate everywhere we go and always grumbles that it's not to his liking. I had no idea there could be so many critical flaws with hot chocolate until I met him. The other extreme is my friend who will blast through mud, slush, and gravel, all day, and come out soaking wet, frozen, yet beam 'how great it is to be riding'. The remarkable characters you can meet while riding keep it exciting as you never know what's coming next.

The snow over the weekend brought out many of my sled friends from hibernation, and I should have just tried organizing all of them so we could group up and ride. I like to keep things kind of loose though— so I just went out and randomly met up and rode with different friends throughout the weekend.

We kept to the Sawyer County trails because I didn't want to push my luck on a longer ride with a shoulder injury I'm still working through. The trails I rode were still thin from the lack of snow, not from the lack of effort from our dedicated volunteer groomers who have been at it relentlessly! Trails through the woods were better than those along roadways or out in the open, and lake riding was, for the most part, great.

Saturday's fresh blast of snow did wonders for our area and I saw many sledders out taking advantage of it. Just after the sun rose across Nelson Lake, I saw a few large

groups entering the lake from Trails 4 and 8— I counted 20-30 sleds in every group!

The evidence of heavy snowmobile traffic was showing as I hit Seeley Hills on that chilly Sunday morning. The new snow was packed down or wore away, some corners were icy, and the weekend moguls were plentiful. Did I care? Not at all— the groomers would soon show some love to these hard-used trails! It was simply wonderful to be out riding again.

Sometime during Sunday, a rider pulled up next week's forecast on his phone, and the group of us cringed with dismay — beginning February 23, a week from today, temps are expected to hit the 40s for several days. We all came to the realization that this might be the last week to ride and several of us quickly worked on rearranging work schedules to make that happen.

If the forecast holds true, next week's story might be the last opportunity I have to write about snowmobile riding this season. I hope the forecast is wrong. Perhaps I should have chosen earlier guess dates for the Little Round Hank ice-out contest on Little Round Lake— apparently it may happen sooner than I thought. Stop at the Dock on Round Lake to get your guesses in soon— I'm sure some early dates are still available!

What a strange winter— late February and our trails are in early season condition, and yet, the end of the season is already looming. Add a cold-temperature dance to your snow dancing folks.