



## Prime season for Snowmobiling in Muskoka

For many of our MLA members, Muskoka is known for blue skies on warm summer days in addition to some spring and fall activities. However, many members continue to spend more time in Muskoka in winter as it offers its own series of adventures.

Although Winter 2016 was off to a very slow start, the weather forecasts, in spite of the super el Niño, predict some strong segments of Winter in the region. The Winter weekend at the lake often starts off with some rather challenging driving compared to the other 3 seasons, where traffic flow is the only major issue for weekend warriors. Winter of course requires an entire new level of patience and prudence to ensure your car is outfitted with winter tires, perhaps has all-wheel drive, roads are open and cleared and that your destination has been plowed out and heated.

Our members tell us that they often just enjoy time beside the fire, with minimal activities while others look for a full plate of outside winter sports from snow shoeing, cross country skiing, ice fishing (when conditions permit) or snowmobiling. There is no question that snowmobiling is the most popular sport in Muskoka during the Winter months. With 1,530 kilometres of groomed trails in the region, connected to 38,000 kilometres of trails in Ontario, a snowmobiler can travel further by trail than on the entire 400 series of highways.

Snowmobiling is quite an organized sport with the establishment of the Ontario Federation of Snowmobiling Clubs (OFSC) which covers 17 Districts in Ontario. There are currently 9 clubs in the Muskoka Snowmobiling Region (MSR), District #7. Each club in the MSR has a regional trail design, maintenance, signage and of course land owner permission for trails. Within the MSR, all the individual snowmobile clubs work collectively to connect trail systems and integrate their trail permit systems. The MSR also helps to maintain a balance of club resources and grooming equipment.

Snowmobiling remains the largest winter tourism activity in Muskoka. It allows its rider

access to landscapes and scenery that cannot be reached in the summertime. What began as a family hobby, with parents taking children for rides on their only two-person machine, and travelling across fields and rugged trails, has become a sport enjoyed by many, on reliable and comfortable snowmobiles, along wide and meticulously groomed trails. With many local restaurants, lodgings and retailers catering to snowmobilers along the trail system, riders can easily travel 100, 200 or more kilometres each day with the comfort of knowing that around the next corner awaits a hot lunch, a comfortable bed or the shop with that perfect gift that you would have been almost impossible to have found otherwise.

Muskoka is truly a snowmobile's paradise. Visit the Muskoka Snowmobiler Region's website at [www.msrsnowtrails.com](http://www.msrsnowtrails.com) for more information.



Photo by Kelly Hart

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There is always a lot going on with things to do during Winter in Muskoka. I wish I could tell you I was looking forward to Spring/Summer, like many of you, but having just enjoyed my first snowmobile rides on the fabulous Ontario snowmobile trails with my kids, that would not be accurate when I wrote this. We are rapidly approaching Family Day, which offers all of you free access to the OFSC snowmobile trail network, at no cost for the Feb 13-15, 2016 long weekend (no trail passes required). If you have an old snowmobile you have not used much or have some interest in the backcountry through an easily accessible trail network, go for it! You can also rent a machine at several locations around the area. See the article on snowmobiling for more links to information.

As your MLA Board and committees move heavily into the winter development meetings for summer 2016, we are also building a subcommittee working on celebrating the MLA's 125th anniversary (in 2018; only 2 years away) and we'll be sharing all the history involved with that milestone along with some special events. If anyone would like to be involved in 125th celebration committee, please contact Lisa in our office ([lisa@mla.on.ca](mailto:lisa@mla.on.ca)).

By now I hope you have all read our special edition of Shorelines, published in early January, highlighting many of our achievements and activities from the past few years.

Our annual membership renewal process is well underway and I hope you have already paid your 2016 renewal and for those who have not, please complete that process. If you have any questions about your membership please don't hesitate to contact us. You can reach the Board of Directors via [directors@mla.on.ca](mailto:directors@mla.on.ca).

We have included quite a broad mix of articles in this Winter Shorelines edition, including a summary of our food drive from fall of 2015, reminders on our popular

Spring Seedling Day and our increasingly successful Advantage Card Program. Also included are the summary of some of the winter Muskoka activities from skating on a new skate trail to Muskoka snowmobiling. The 2015 Photo contest winners are announced from the over 60 amazing photos we received in addition to the announcement of the 2016 photo contest...start early on your submissions.

You can also read about the Wee Skiff. The creation of one of our members John Duncan to promote rowing with a much younger generations. The Wee Skiff events are always well attended at our Aquatic Regatta each summer, even so we would love to see more of them out and racing for 9 year olds or under. It's also quite a sight to see the racing done in those same Wee Skiffs by Ladies over 30 years!

Have a great rest of the winter and on Behalf of your Board of Directors, we look forward to connecting with many of you over the coming months.

Michael Hart - President



Photo by Kelly Hart

## Seedling Day Reminder

The annual MLA Seedling Day will be held on Saturday, May 21 at the Port Carling Community Centre from 9 am until noon. The emphasis this year is on trees and shrubs native to Muskoka, including shoreline species.

Seedling order forms are included with this ShoreLines and are also available for download at [www.mla.on.ca](http://www.mla.on.ca).

Please submit your order to the MLA office early to ensure the

best possible selection. The final order deadline is May 6, 2016.

If you have any questions about the seedlings, or if you would like to place your order by phone, please call the office at 705-765-5723. Please note that payment must be made at the time of order.

If you are interested in volunteering on Seedling Day, please contact our office. Your help would be appreciated.

## Successful Food Drive

Thank you to the public and all of our members who donated their non-perishable food items from the summer rather than carting it all back home. The West Muskoka Bank was grateful and thrilled with our collective contribution of over 1,000 pounds of food and is inspired by the MLA.



## 2015 Water Quality wrap up and report available on our website

Last fall the Muskoka Lakes Association completed its Water Quality monitoring program including a Second Stage Water Quality Monitoring (SSWQM) study of Wallace Bay on Lake Rosseau, near the village of Minett, for the summer of 2015. As reported in a June 2, 2015 press release, the MLA and Ken Fowler Enterprises (KFE) conducted parallel and complementary scientific studies to better understand water quality readings in Wallace Bay as a result of elevated *E.coli* readings in 2013 and 2014.

The MLA's objective with the SSWQM study of Wallace Bay was to confirm the extent and/or continued presence of the elevated *E.coli* levels observed in previous years so that appropriate actions could be planned for as necessary. The MLA's results are contained within the annual 2015 Water Quality Initiative Report which can be found on our website at [www.mla.on.ca](http://www.mla.on.ca) under the Water Quality tab.

The MLA SSWQM study results confirm that water quality has improved from previous years and show a marked decrease in *E.coli*. However, there is one location that requires further examination at a site at the mouth of the creek between the Cleavelands House property and Wallace Marina. The *E.coli* count at this station was recorded just over the Provincial Water Quality Objective (PWQO) of 100 counts. The MLA has determined that it is important to further investigate why this location has elevated levels of *E.coli*. Elevated *E.coli* counts could be the result of proximity to upstream wetlands, heavy rainfall during testing periods, increased population of waterfowl, human impacts or a combination of various factors. We will continue to closely monitor this site during our 2016 program including additional testing above and beyond our normal testing protocols.

The objective of the KFE study was to further investigate any onshore stressors that may be impacting Wallace Bay. Building on the MLA findings from previous years and the current MLA SSWQM

study KFE is in the process of finalizing its study which we hope will be released shortly.

"Consistent with the MLA's long-standing Water Quality Initiative, the association will continue surface water sampling in Wallace Bay in 2016 and will closely monitor results," said Michael Hart, President, Muskoka Lakes Association. "We look forward to reviewing KFE's report alongside our own to better understand the elevated *E.coli* readings in Wallace Bay."

If you are interested in helping our either as a water sampler or a member of the Water Quality and Environment Committee of the MLA, please contact Lisa Noonan at [lisa@mmla.on.ca](mailto:lisa@mmla.on.ca)

### Don't Throw Away Your Advantage Card!



In 2014 we introduced a new Advantage Card and key fobs and then provided members with renewal stickers in 2015. We will be issuing 2016 stickers for your card with the annual yearbook beginning in June, but your card remains valid until then.

There are several shops and restaurants that continue to provide discounts to members throughout the winter season so keep your Advantage Card with you when you are in Muskoka!

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MLA 2016 PHOTO CONTEST

MY MUSKOKA

ACTIVE MUSKOKA

RELAXING MUSKOKA

**My Muskoka**  
Your most amazing Muskoka photo.

**Active Muskoka**  
Your favourite Muskoka activity.

**Relaxing Muskoka**  
Your reason for coming to Muskoka.

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## Looking for a Cool Adventure? Hit the Snowy Trails in Muskoka!

There were cross country skis under the Christmas tree this year. Two sets of backcountry skis, poles and boots. Santa Claus must have felt I needed to get out and get a little more exercise. Well, not just me, my darling wife too. Okay - he felt that I should, and he was kind enough to give me company.

I have not tried cross country skiing for a good many years, not since my teenage years when the skis had just recently advanced past being wooden boards with leather straps. Way back then you had those plastic low-cut



boots that helped to deep freeze your toes into a painful state of numbness. You felt that if you whacked your foot with a ski pole, both boot and foot would crack in half. The equipment certainly has advanced. This new variety of boot is high cut, leather, well-cushioned and comfortably insulated. They look good too, racy and sleek. I had considered some spandex tights to complete the ensemble, but my wife, sensibly, had given a thumb down to that potential look.

The long skis are a little wider than I remember, for ploughing down snowy trails. They are scaled on the bottom, so you no longer have to rub wax on them for hours on end before departure,

pretending that you know what you are doing. Even the bindings seem much more sensible than the old "squeeze-the-toe" type that always seemed to pop loose as you were gaining speed down some steep pitch.

Cottage Country is a beautiful place in winter, with many opportunities for winter fun. On a sunny Muskoka winter afternoon, my wife and I head to Arrowhead Provincial Park north of Huntsville, where we plan to do some skiing, snowshoeing and skating on their generous groomed trails and ice loops. We check in at the park office to get a trail pass and a map, and then after a brief but heated discussion on which trail to ski, (my wife favours around the lake and I want to ski down the tube run), we decide to ski around the lake.

I clip my boots into the ski bindings, grab the poles and prepare to stride off down the peaceful trail. Instead, I lose my balance and fall clumsily into the soft deep snow. I find out what the poles are actually for, as I slowly pry myself back to my feet, and then fall the other way. I contemplate pulling out an excuse, a bad back, a sore knee, a concussion - I bonked my head and can't remember how my legs work. Instead I persevere, we are off, and I am soon mastering the technique.

My poles flick at the snow, working in unison with the skis. I push hard down the packed track; the dense groves of silver birch, maple and aspen that hedge the trail are nothing more than a blur in my periphery. I glide effortlessly along, climb up short hills, and then swoosh down long looping slopes that carve through thick stands of pine.

I begin wondering to myself whether there is enough time to prepare myself for the 2018 Korean Olympics. "Coming around the last corner,

from Canada, well in the lead, is skier number 13 in his flashy tight lycra ski suit. What an effort - what an athlete ... TRACK!" I am brought back to the moment as a frail-looking elderly couple shouts "Track!" and swishes past, with a "Thank you," given in a thick Norwegian accent.

"Yes, well we kick your butt in hockey," I holler after them. Okay, the Olympics are out. I am having fun though, exploring Arrowhead Park like this. The weather is pleasant. It is quiet; the heavy snow deadens any sound. Silence - save for my heavy breathing, the sound of the wind and the twitter of the occasional bird.

We ski most of the 33 kilometres of groomed classic trails that the park offers, along the East River and around Arrowhead Lake. Afterwards, we snowshoe to Stubb's Falls, and watch the water gurgle over a snowy ledge and down through a frozen wall of ice. It is beautiful, a natural ice sculpture. My wife scurries off ahead in her modern and fancy aluminium shoes, light-weight and barely bigger than my snowboots. I plod along behind in my authentic chestnut and gut-line beavertail shoes, circa 1749.

I will get her back later, doing my best Eric Heiden impression on the oval skating track, while my wife teeters around unsteadily, looking for a hand to hold. We even bounce down an icy bobsled-like run, piled together on some rubber tube, and here I do hold on to her, tightly, lest I get catapulted away. At the end of the day we head home to our cottage to cosy up to the fireplace - tired and satisfied, after a day well-spent in Muskoka's splendid winter playground.



### Ski Muskoka:

Arrowhead Provincial Park grooms and maintains more than 33 km of cross-country ski trails that are designed for classic skiing or skate skiing. The Ontario Parks Ski Report [www.ontarioparks.com/skiereport](http://www.ontarioparks.com/skiereport) provides updated trail conditions, and if you weren't good enough to get ski gear for Christmas, equipment rentals are available.

Other great Nordic ski locations include the Bracebridge Resource Management Centre, located on the east side of Highway 11 just north of the town, which boasts 17.5 km of groomed trails. The KOA Gravenhurst/Muskoka offers 15 km of groomed and track-set ski trails throughout their 785 acres of wilderness. The Frost Centre Ski and Snowshoe trails located 12 km south of Dorset offer 26 km of beginner to expert groomed trails.



James Ross

Is the author of the books "*Cottage Daze*" and "*Still in a Daze at the Cottage*" (Dundurn Press), featuring the best of his cottage stories.

Visit [www.cottagedaze.ca](http://www.cottagedaze.ca)



## Building passion for rowing in little ones

In 1994, the MLA marked its 100th annual Aquatic Regatta. The celebration of that milestone included the introduction of a new class of racing vessel, the Wee Skiff. That year the race was won by John Coutts, who is the son of one of the Aquatic Regatta's co-chairs, Lynda Coutts. John Duncan, long-standing member of the MLA, recalls how the Wee Skiff came to be.

"It all began in 1991 with the arrival of our first grandchild. I realized that our seventeen-foot Muskoka rowing skiffs were too large and cumbersome for a small child to handle and learn to row at a young age. The oars were long and heavy, they slipped in and out in the rings, and they rotated and twisted, thus digging too deep or skipping across the lake's surface; control was virtually impossible for these youngsters.

The large skiffs were heavy and could not be dragged up on shore or over rocks without damaging them.

We were going to need a boat that was inexpensive, small and tough in which a three or four year old could play and learn the fundamentals of rowing. It had to be easily turned and could be left on the beach or dragged up on a dock without being destroyed by sun and rough use.

An idea was beginning to form.

Four by eight foot sheets of marine plywood should make the building job easy. A wee boat about eight feet long and almost three feet wide sounded about right. Some quick calculations showed that the sides needed to be about ten inches high in order to allow a forty pound kid to stand in one corner and still not swamp the craft. It had to provide for several friends to join in the fun, so this determined the number of seats needed. I wanted it to look like a boat, hence a pointed bow and flat transom stern, but I also wanted it to be easy to build and yet maneuverable.

A flat bottomed boat would not turn easily and yet I did not want to cut the plywood into curved sections. My "Aha!" moment arrived when realizing that spreading the side gunwales apart would cause the "ends" of the boat to lift, thus creating a fore and aft rocker which would allow the boat to turn more easily.

Simple six foot oars which were pinned into their oarlocks would prevent them from rotating or slipping in and out, thus giving the child an easily-handled oar and eliminating the need for wrist control.

After making some sketches with dimensions, a prototype was built and shown to the MLA Regatta Committee. With enthusiasm, the idea was approved and four members agreed to purchase Wee Skiffs for use at the next regatta. Since that time my son Peter and I have built over forty boats, most of which have been purchased by Muskokans at the Regatta's silent auction. Detailed building plans and instructions are available from the MLA office. Rossiter Boats has since made a mold from our boat and produces the Wee Skiff in fiberglass for general sale."

In an effort to kick-start a resurgence in the use of the Wee Skiff, the MLA is asking its members who

might have a "previously-loved" Wee Skiff to pull it out and share it at the Regatta. Members are encouraged to pick up the craft's design and building plans from the MLA office and engage your children and/or grandchildren in a rewarding summer project building a Wee Skiff. Rossiter Boats sells a new fiberglass model for approximately \$1,350. The MLA is also happy to connect owners who have no more use for their Wee Skiffs with families looking to add one to their boating fleet.

**In an effort to kick-start a resurgence in the use of the Wee Skiff, the MLA is asking its members who might have a "previously-loved" Wee Skiff to pull it out and share it at the Regatta.**

Let's do John Duncan proud and rekindle the love of rowing for kids of all ages. It is the perfect boat for children to load up with fishing gear, get out and explore in or race in a regatta.

The MLA encourages all Wee Skiff owners to loan their boats to next year's regatta so that kids who have never tried one can experience the thrill and independence of rowing their own boat.





# Photo Contest Winners

Congratulations to this year's Photo Contest Winners! We received over 100 entries and were impressed by the quality of the submissions. The selection wasn't easy but a panel of three judges agreed that the following pictures best reflected their respective categories. The first prize winners of each category will receive an 18"x 24" plaque mounted print of their photo, courtesy of Aben Graphics, which will be presented at the AGM in July.

## WINTER IN MUSKOKA



Photo taken by Sue Hare



Photo taken by Martin Kates



Photo taken by David Nash

## ACTION AT THE COTTAGE



Photo taken by Stephanie Young



Photo taken by Stephen Sims



Photo taken by Graham Brown

# PHOTOS BY KIDS 14 & UNDER



Photo taken by Sara Lillie



Photo taken by Avery Lanka



Photo taken by Avalon Straiton

## MLA 2016 PHOTO CONTEST

Entries may be submitted by MLA members and their families in the categories of:

### My Muskoka

Your most amazing Muskoka photo.

### Active Muskoka

Your favourite Muskoka activity.

### Relaxing Muskoka

Your reason for coming to Muskoka.

Start snapping your pictures now for the 2016 photo contest. Visit our website at [www.mla.on.ca](http://www.mla.on.ca) for more information.

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## Congratulations to the Early Bird Prize Winners!

The following names were drawn from those who renewed their membership by December 31, 2015:

**Allan MacLean-Howard** will cool off with a gift basket from the Muskoka Brewery.

**Janet & Bill Graffin** will relax and enjoy a sunset dinner cruise for two on the Segwun this summer.

**Anne Cooper** will enjoy a fine dining experience at the Crossroads Pub.

**John Pildner** will receive a tray of seedlings from Seedling Day.

*On behalf of the MLA, your commitment and continued support is appreciated.*

## Another reason to love winter in Muskoka!

Imagine! The winter air is crisp, the moon shines brightly on a snow-white landscape, and you are skating under the night sky, dotted with millions of twinkling stars. Festive lighting illuminates the path and live music encourages some fancy footwork. It sounds like a Disney dream.

Wake up! You're not asleep; you are at the Memorial Park Winter Village in downtown Bracebridge, sipping hot coffee and lacing up your skates, getting ready to step out on to the twenty foot wide skating trail that meanders throughout the park circumventing the historic band shell and cenotaph.

The brainchild of Mike Jefford and Chris Howey, the idea to build a skating trail in Memorial Park with concept drawings emerged on Facebook in the fall of 2014. In April of 2015, the idea was presented to Bracebridge Council and Public Works and Recreation were asked to complete a technical evaluation of the site to determine whether a skating trail would be possible. In July, staff submitted their technical evaluation and was then given direction to investigate and report back on funding mechanisms, capital costs, development, maintenance requirements, etc. In October, approval was received for use of the park and some funding was granted, prompting the formation of an ad-hoc working group led by Councillor Chris Wilson.

Their goals were simple: give residents of all ages a healthy wintertime activity in a picturesque setting, create opportunities for musicians, vendors and not-for-profits, increase wintertime tourism, and support business in Bracebridge.



In preparation for a January 2016 grand opening, construction began in November. Electrical work and the installation of water lines in to the park were completed by the town, and the trail was built by Beaver Creek Community Services, led by Chris Howey, who will also maintain the ice from Monday to Friday. Volunteers are currently being sought to help maintain the ice on weekends. All snowfalls will be cleared by MJC Muskoka Inc.

Amenities on site include portable washrooms, benches, rubber mats between ice, vendors and bench areas, and a band shell for musicians. The park will be decorated for winter, with the band shell draped in garland and lights, and cube lantern tables and lights will brighten up the vendor



Photo by Mike Jefford

area. Vendors will be invited to sell food, beverages, hats, gloves, winter recreation products, outerwear, skate rentals, arts and crafts, etc.

Already, themed nights are under development including country night, Valentine's, and a celebration of the decades. The first annual Fire & Ice Festival in Bracebridge will also include activities at the Winter Village.

Community involvement will be a significant contributing factor to the success of this project and the committee is looking to collect \$20,000 in cash and in-kind donations. There is also a push on for business and not-for-profit vendors to set up stations. Musicians are also being sought for Friday evenings and Saturday afternoon/evenings.

Originally scheduled for January 2, unseasonable temperatures prevented the making of ice so the grand opening was postponed until Saturday, January 23, with festivities from 3:30 p.m. until 6:00 p.m. The Official Grand Opening and welcome to visitors was presented at 5:00 p.m.

This year, instead of skating inside a cold and stuffy arena, residents and visitors alike can enjoy the fresh air and the exhilaration that comes with embracing Winter in Muskoka!



### Contact Us

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