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| **History of Snowmobiling**

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| History of Snowmobiling | http://millinocket-maine.net/images/historytitle.gif |

by Stephen Campbell,  Museum Directorhttp://millinocket-maine.net/images/CDI8390.gif       The history of the modern day recreational snowmobile is fairly recent, however, over the snow travel goes back many years. What is amazing though is that man actually flew before he could master snow travel. The Wright Brothers Flew in 1903, the very first vehicle that was built to go in snow wasn't built until 1908. That was actually the Lombard log hauler designed and built in Waterville, Maine. It was a large cumbersome machine that resembled a steam locomotive, only it had a half track design and front skis.       In 1909, a man by the name of O.C. Johnson built an over the snow machine that actually went on top of the snow, sometimes. It was roughly ten feet long, used a track design, "one lunger engine", and it steered, well almost.      Then in 1913 Virgil White, a Ford dealer in New Hampshire, invented a track and ski unit conversion for the Model T Ford. This invention was almost simultaneously invented in Waterville, Maine with neither man having knowledge of the other. Mr. White was the first to use the word "snowmobile". Early in the winter of 1922, fifteen year old J. Armand Bombardier designed a wind driven sleigh with a Model T engine. This was to be the first of many snowmobiles designed by Bombardier.      One of the most amazing snowmobiles was built in 1924 in Sayner, Wisconsin. It was the invention of a gentleman by the name of Earl Eliason. Mr. Eliason called it his motor toboggan, and that basically was what it was. It was a wooden toboggan fitted with two skis, which were steered with ropes, powered by a 2 1/2 horsepower Johnson outboard motor, and was pushed by an endless steel cleated track. The amazing part is that it was a front mounted, liquid cooled engine that used a jack shaft. All these are qualities that are credited to modern day snowmobiles. Mr. Eliason patented and manufactured his machine until 1939 when he sold out to F.W.D. Corporation in Canada. F.W.D. made these right thru to 1960.      As time past, a few machines came and went, including Bombardiers, air driven and half track series of the 30's, 40's and 50's.  However it wasn't until 1954 that the modern day recreational snowmobile was born. David Johnson was a partner with Alan and Edgar http://millinocket-maine.net/images/muesgts.jpgHetteen of Polaris Industries, the former Hetteen, Hoist, and Derrick. At this time Mr. Johnson made his design of a snowmobile during a weekend adventure, unknown to the other two partners. This became the very first Polaris, which David was quite proud of. However upon their return, the Hetteen brothers weren't real pleased with the expenditure of time and effort wasted on something unrelated to their manufacture of farm equipment. They told David to get rid of it, which he did. He sold it, much to their amazement. As the winter progressed through, there were constant problems with the machine and Polaris felt obligated to service it because it was their manufacture. After several trips on snowshoes and literally backpacking the machine out, David convinced the Hetteen brothers to make a second machine for the purpose of pulling out the first one. Thus the early beginnings of the Polaris Sno Traveler. Polaris built a few machines per year from 1955 to 1957 and then phased out of farm equipment and began manufacturing sleds.

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| http://millinocket-maine.net/images/shop_small.jpg |
| E.B. Campbell Garage and MarinaSpring of 1963click image for larger size |

  This brings us to Millinocket, Maine and the purpose of a museum. Polaris decided in 1958 that they had to set up a dealer network. Bob Morrill of Yarmouth, Maine was chosen as the eastern distributor, at roughly the same time Ray Brandt of Boise, Idaho was set up as the western distributor. In the fall of 1958 Mr. Morrill ventured north to Caribou to see Linwood Willard, who was selling chain saws; and to Millinocket to see Earlan B. Campbell, who was also selling chain saws along with boats and motors. It is believed that these two gentlemen were among the first five in the United States. http://millinocket-maine.net/images/salem1.jpgThey were the first two in Maine. Mr. Campbell had been a trapper, hunter, and bush pilot for years, so obviously, right off, he tried to do the same with the new invention that he had done with his snow shoes. However the snowmobile wouldn't go half the time unless a trail was snowshoed first. Because of this, Mr. Campbell, through many conversations with Mr. Morrill, felt that the machine could be greatly improved. It was discussed with the Hetteens and David Johnson, who claimed that the sleds went quite well in Minnesota. The reason for this is that Minnesota is flat and cold, and the snow conditions are the same all the time. In Maine its obviously very hilly and snow conditions change from day to day. Therefore, through the efforts of Bob Morrill and Earlan Campbell, Polaris decided to do a certain percentage of their testing in the Allagash Region of Northern Maine. Mr. Morrill was the first organizer and Mr. Campbell was the guide and mechanic. As many as twenty machines at a time made these long voyages in the dead of winter to test new equipment as well as clothing. Many advancements leading to the modern snowmobile were made during these trips from 1961 to 1966. Several of the snowmobiles housed in the museum are prototypes that participated in those trips.

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| http://millinocket-maine.net/images/1964ke95_small.jpg |
| click image for larger sizeSteve Campbell on a 1964 Polaris KE95 Prototype  |

   In 1994 Bob Brodeur, a member of the Northern Timber Cruisers Snowmobile Club, held a Pioneers Reunion to commemorate these events and honor the gentlemen that participated. At this time it was conceived that a museum would be a fitting way to honor the snowmobile history, specifically the important part that Millinocket, Maine and the Allagash played in it. The project was initiated with a re-enactment of the early trips by traveling from Millinocket to Nugent's Camps at Chamberlain Lake on antique snowmobiles in 1985. It was called "Allagash 85, the Earlan B. Campbell Memorial Expedition". Prior to leaving on the trip there was a ceremonial ground breaking for the museum by DavidEarly Design Polaris Logo Johnson, Edgar Hetteen, and Paul Doherty, who all went on the trip which followed most exactly the earlier route in 1962. Seven of the machines and twelve of the people actually went on one or more of the trips. Even the clothing was of the earlier design including military parkas and "Bunny Boots".    The re-enactment of this trip covered 75 miles each way and took 4 days to complete. Average speeds were 7 to 9 miles per hour, with an occasional burst of speed during races which reached 19 miles per hour. Today, with modern machines, this trip could be made in 4 hours. All the machine made the entire trip under their own power though, and proved the mechanical prowess of the early sledders.      Many events followed this 1985 excursion to raise money to build this museum. It was a long hard road that included public suppers, catering outside events, raffles, and much more. But finally the dream became a reality, and many snowmobiling pioneers were here to cut the ribbon on February 25, 1989. It is now a fine representation of the snowmobile's past, and will prove to represent even more as time passes and more exhibits are initiated. It is also here to honor all the great people in the history of snowmobiling. But even more than that, it represents the determination of the people in the Northern Timber Cruisers Snowmobile Club who worked so hard to make it a reality. It is to these people that it is dedicated. Please enjoy your tour |