



PHOTOS: MARILYN FORBES/FOR THE TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Dave McCarty, of the Maple Summit Snowmobilers, places trail signs along the 53 miles of trails maintained by the club.

Club keeping tabs on trails

Volunteers maintain rustic routes for snowmobile riders.

BY MARILYN FORBES
FOR THE TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Snowmobile enthusiasts learned quickly in the late 1950s that the machines are great fun — but you need a safe place to ride them.

Maple Summit Snowmobilers Inc. answered that challenge with an extended trail in the Laurel Mountains.



Still in storage are dozens of markers and warning signs the Maple Summit club will hang once the trails are ready for riding.

About 85 members from Pennsylvania and Maryland, of which about one dozen are active, main-

tain the trail, says club vice president Jon Podlesny.

The club's initial goal was to

connect small patches of existing trails into one long run.

"You would only be able to go so far and then you'd have to turn around," club treasurer Dave McCarty said.

"We wanted to come up with something for riders to enjoy longer rides in safe conditions."

The organization enlisted the aid of the state, private land owners, and Seven Springs Mountain Resort.

"In 1992 we rededicated some trails," McCarty said,

The trail maintained by the

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club begins just north of Ohiopyle State Park at Pennsylvania State Game Lands 111 and runs until it reaches the Seven Springs area.

The group of volunteers took over the responsibility of maintaining the trails, a year-round project.

"There is a total of about 200 miles of trails, and we have 53 miles of trail that we maintain," McCarty said.

"We usually start in September and work as often as we can until Thanksgiving, when hunting season starts."

"Dave and his guys do a great job," Don Stiffler said. "They perform a service that enables snowmobilers to come out and enjoy the trails."

Stiffler, assistant director of forestry for Forbes State Forest, said he is grateful for the help the organization has offered over the years.

"They have come out and lent us a hand in the worst of conditions," Stiffler said. "They have really pitched in to keep the trails open."

Both Laurel Hill and Laurel Ridge state parks also are thankful for the work the group performs.

"They are just great," said James Juran, assistant park manager at Laurel Hill State Park. "They are an extension of our park, just like the regular volunteers."

Work starts in the fall with a routine inspection of the trails, noting needed adjustments, improvements and necessary clearances.

The club has received two grants since 2000, allowing for the purchase of equipment and supplies.

"We clear the trails of fallen trees and brush, and we have built bridges that were needed," Podlesny said.

The club has constructed eight bridges since 1992.

The organization has pur-



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As they get ready to prepare the trails, club treasurer Dave McCarty and vice president Jon Podlesny inspect maps of snowmobile trails in the Laurel Highlands.

chased a Kawasaki "mule" mini-vehicle and a "groomer" used to regulate the surface of snow. It recently acquired a John Deere backhoe for larger jobs.

"Before we had the equipment, we had to do everything by hand and go in by foot," McCarty said, adding that some of the jobs they found necessary to perform on the trails included exposing and replacing broken drainage pipes, digging ditches and pulling up stumps.

Once the snow flies, the club is responsible to open all access gates, post all trails with bright orange diamonds that indicate paths, and post all signs.

"We have a problem with people stealing the signs, and hunters shoot at them, but we just keep putting them up," McCarty said.

Join the fun

Maple Summit Snowmobilers Inc. is open for membership. Anyone age 18 and older can become a club member; children younger than 18 automatically become members with adult registration. Anyone interested in joining or in volunteering may contact club treasurer Dave McCarty at 724-857-0315.

When conditions are at a peak, so is the work.

"We take out the groomer a couple of times a day if it's needed," McCarty said. The machine levels out the trails, which average 20 feet in width.

All of the hard work and deter-

mination to keep the trails open and manageable is done for the love of a good ride.

"We are a family-orientated club," McCarty said. "We want to promote snowmobile riding and to try to keep the trails nice while promoting safety."

The trails maintained by the club are open to anyone who is registered with the state and insured. No ATVs are permitted on the trails, and all riders must wear helmets.

Maple Summit also is a social organization, meeting monthly, holding annual summer and Christmas parties, and donating to local charities.

"We hold fundraisers and have cookouts along the trails in the winter," McCarty said. "We like to get people excited and enthused about snowmobiling."