

# Long and winding roads... er, trails

## My first jaunt on Maine's ITS Snowmobile Trail System



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**THE FORKS/GREENVILLE** – For some people, what I'm going to write here isn't going to be a revelation. Some wise folks will just slap their foreheads and say, "Well, duh. We already knew all this." But I know I'm not the only one who's never ventured on a snowmobile before. This was an issue my friends up at The Inn by The River decided to rectify recently.

I hooked up with Joe Christopher at the Inn by the River on the morning of Feb. 9, and it looked like we couldn't have picked a better day. The sun was shining, it was cold, but it had warmed up considerably to a balmy 20 degrees (as opposed to the zero my thermometer had been hovering at earlier that morning).

During the summer, Joe and crew run Three Rivers Whitewater Rafting (the home of serious fun – not to mention our annual Adventure Guru Contest). During the off season, when people are less inclined to throw themselves down the river (it's still flowing, but mighty cold), the Inn by the River remains open to warm up weary travelers, and serve as home base for intrepid snowmobilers.

"It's awesome because it completes the year," said Joe. "You have people in the cities crying about all the snow – and then you

have people out here with snowmobiles who think this is the greatest thing since sliced bread."

I checked into my room and donned some warm gear. Joe had some snow pants I could borrow, as well as a helmet and a down parka. Christopher explained that even though it didn't feel too cold (especially while we were gearing up inside), once we were on the sleds and cruising down the trails we'd cool off in short order.

The plan was to hit the ITS (Intra-State Trail System) and head from the Inn by the River over to Greenville for lunch at The Black Frog. That's a jaunt of about 37 miles one way.

Joe gave me a quick tutorial about the sleds (throttle on the right, brake on the left, keep to the right of the trails). Seemed simple enough, and it really was.

The trails themselves were unbelievably awesome. Freshly groomed, wide enough to let sleds pass each other at a comfortable distance – one can understand the desire to go fast. But I wasn't quite ready for that on the way out to Greenville.

The ITS boasts thousands of miles of interconnected, groomed trails that are maintained by snowmobile clubs across the state. The trails themselves are well-marked with clear signage for turns and possible obstacles (gates, narrow bridges or outcroppings of rocks). When we did encounter other sleds on the trail, we used

hand signals to indicate how many people were travelling in a group (there were only two of us, so Joe would hold up one finger to indicate one follower, and I would hold up a closed fist to indicate I was last).

Joe led the way, keeping a pace that allowed me to get used to my machine. The straight-aways were a piece of cake, and I took it easy on the turns. Basically, riding a snowmobile is like riding a motorcycle – except it's easier to keep your balance and you don't have to put your feet down when you stop. But they can be just as fast (and just as dangerous if you aren't careful – especially when you take into account the close proximity of the trees).

Taking ITS Routes 85 and 86, we covered the 37 miles in little over an hour. At The Black Frog, I enjoyed a warming meal of chicken pot pie with mashed potatoes and cranberry sauce. Joe noted that there are essentially two types of snowmobilers: the kind who enjoy touring the state and taking in the sites at a leisurely pace, and those who enjoy the thrill of speeding down trails as fast as they can.

On the way back, I'd gotten the feel for my sled, and Joe let me take the lead. When there was a straightaway, I opened it up a little – because I have to experience what it's like to go fast, just a little.

When we got back to the Inn by the River, it was lounging by the fireplace, followed by

a nap in the cozy rooms upstairs.

While eating dinner in the lounge, several sledders stopped at the Inn to gas up and grab a bite and a beverage before heading out to their goal. Already they had travelled more than 200 miles (from Shin Pond, to Sherman Mills, to Brownville, to Milo, to Abbot, to Monson, to Greenville, to The Forks – their ultimate goal was Patton Pond).

Bob and Bonnie DeAngelo of Paulsboro, New Jersey, have been coming to the Inn by the River for years to travel the trails on their Polaris snowmobiles.

"This is the place to come in The Forks, and it gets better every year," declared Bonnie.

The couple said that they had tried the trails in lower New England, but found them overcrowded with poor trail conditions and unfriendly people.

"But Maine is just awesome. The people are just welcoming," she said. "It's just the best place to visit."

"You're never a stranger," said Bob. "If you break down on a trail, you never have to worry. [Other snowmobilers] will always stop to help."

Bonnie said that experiencing the freedom and the wildlife is an amazing reason to keep coming back to Maine again and again.

For more information about The Inn by the River, visit [www.innbytheriver.com](http://www.innbytheriver.com). For more information about the Maine Intrastate Trail System, visit [www.mesnow.com](http://www.mesnow.com).