

MacKenzie Trail establishes link to Caberfae

Even on winter weekends, the MacKenzie Trail parking lot off 38 Road behind Caberfae Village rarely has more than a few cars parked there. Although this is an official Manistee National Forest trail, most of its skiers live in or near the Caberfae Village. But that's about to change.

Just up the road there's Caberfae Ski Resort. Thousands visit there, yet few know that just beyond the chairlifts, there's 15 kilometers of groomed cross country trail. That's not surprising because until last year, it was almost impossible to access the cross country trail from Caberfae.

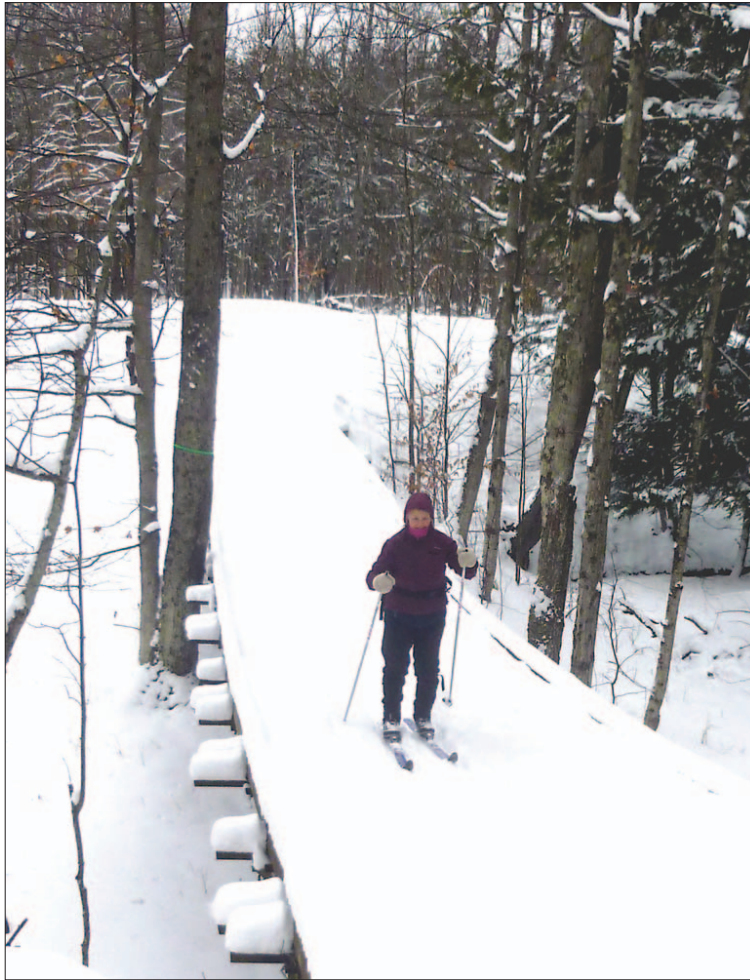
When the MacKenzie trail was established in the 1970s, most of its users entered the trail from the downhill ski resort. But the access disappeared when the resort reconfigured its downhill runs.

This year Nordic skiers are once again able to reach the trail. The project got its start two years ago during a meeting of the Cadillac Visitors' Bureau Trail Committee. In looking at trails in the Cadillac area, the question was raised, "Could a connector trail from Caberfae to the MacKenzie Pathway be re-established?"

Pete Meyer, the director of operations at Caberfae was contacted.

Meyer agreed to lay out and mark a connecting trail. At the starting point, located just to the south of the Caberfae Ski Club is the first of two covered signs with maps showing skiers the way. These were built by Jacob VanDrie to fulfill the project requirement for becoming an Eagle Scout.

Earlier this month Cyndy and I tried out the new entry point. The map showing the connecting trail as well as a detailed depiction of the entire trail system, will be helpful for those skiing this for the first time. Beyond the two signs, which are spaced about 50 yards apart, blue diamonds appear on the trees to point the way across a fairway that's part of the resort's golf course. On the other side of the fairway, the signs pick up again to lead skiers along the edge of the woods. Although this section has not been groomed, enough skiers had been through ahead of us so that the skiing was easy. Continuing down along the fair-



The new Caberfae access to the MacKenzie Trail goes along the ninth fairway of the Caberfae Golf Course.

way, we crossed two bridges. Immediately after the second bridge, the trail climbs a hill and shoots into the woods. The next hundred yards we followed the trail through the forest before entering the

MacKenzie Trail at signpost 21.

From here on the trail is groomed and well-marked.

We've been cross country skiers since the 1970s. Before the Cadillac Pathway



Dave Foley

On the Outside

was developed, this was the only established trail in the area. In 1975, I bought a pair of used wood skis. Long and wide, they were distant cousins to the skinny high tech plastic skis, but wood boards were perfect for breaking trail.

Those fat board skis are long gone and not needed anymore as the MacKenzie Trail usually sees a groomer most weeks. Often using two snowmobiles — one to pack the trail

and the other following with a groomer to cut a set of parallel tracks — several volunteers, residents of Caberfae Village, keep the trail ready for Nordic skiers.

The network of paths totals about 15 kilometers, seven or eight Ks make up the inner loops which get the most skier traffic and the most frequent grooming. The outer trails are narrower and push back further into the forest. The wind-storm that passed through the area last summer dropping thousands of trees, hit the MacKenzie Trail hard. Volunteers from Caberfae Village managed to open the main trails, but the outer sections still are blocked in some places by fallen timber. The Manistee National Forest Office plans to send out a crew to clear those trails.

With the new entry point at Caberfae, there's been more interest in cross country skiing. Pete Meyer purchased cross country skis, boots and poles so those looking to try this Nordic sport can be outfitted at the resort. While the trail system caters to cross country skiers, snowshoers are using the paths as well. Those who plan to walk the trail system in snowshoes are encouraged to walk along the side of the trail so as not to mash down ski tracks.

With the addition of the Caberfae entry point, the MacKenzie, always a favorite with locals, will likely be discovered by a new generation of cross country skiers.