



Area51 - Winter Riding - Snow or No Snow

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Snowmobiling here on the East Coast of Newfoundland can be a very rewarding prospect with a new destination and a new adventure possible on each trip. Trails are accessible just minutes from St. John's, and the country is just beautiful all across the Avalon Peninsula all the way to the Ithmus (a thin strip of land 6-12 miles wide joining us to Central Newfoundland). Unfortunately with ever changing weather patterns and close proximity to the sea, we don't always see the consistent snow conditions experienced on the rest of the island.

Every winter I plan a couple snowmobile trips and book time off work accordingly which is like playing Russian Roulette banking on good weather and/or snow conditions. Unfortunately, like many working people I can't rearrange time off at the last minute due to poor weather so I have to make the best of the situation as it unfolds.

The winter 2007-2008 riding season got off to a late start once again, with our first real snowfall arriving in January. My first sensible trip of the season took me to the Ithmus area of the Avalon Peninsula, and took place in the Middle of January 2008. With only one decent snowfall on the ground, conditions were far from ideal, but certainly "doo-able" (no pun intended!). Trails through the woods were tangly as suspension eating rocks and stumps lay just below the snow, and wet areas were not fully frozen. Unfortunately for me a mechanical problem made this a relatively short trip. The secondary clutch on Project Renegade (previous Sledworthy Area51 Article) had seized preventing full shifting of the clutch. I was able to ride back to the truck with very limited power. A good used clutch was purchased on my return to St. John's, installed and tested the following weekend.

With time booked off work, I was looking forward to a long weekend of riding in the Southern Harbor area on the February 15 weekend. A week before I was scheduled to leave we had a great snow storm and conditions were reported as excellent in the area, but mother nature dealt a poor hand giving the Avalon Peninsula 3 days of warm temperatures, and a lot of rain. Snow conditions fell quickly from excellent to poor and with cold temperatures forecasted for the

weekend, it looked like melting hyfax, overheating engines and exposed rocks would be experienced by snowmobilers.

Like many east coasters I made the best of the situation and went ahead with my trip, but instead of risking damage to my sled, I took my ATV instead. The skidoo was wrestled off the trailer during a down pour of rain, and the bike revived from hibernation, checked over and loaded aboard the trailer for departure Friday evening.

The weekend brought sunny skies and temperature just south of the zero mark, a great day for winter riding. With the snowpack hardened, traveling by ATV was great, even off the main trails we found the snow was hard enough to permit travel by wheeled vehicle with relative ease. That day our crew consisted of 2 ATV's and 2 snowmobiles, whose owners were less concerned with the snow conditions than I!!! We proceeded to explore the area North of the Trail Way North of Southern Harbor to Little Harbor. A well used frozen trail took us across country towards trinity bay within viewing distance of the Bull Arm Fabrication site. This trail crossed several small ponds and gullies bordered by tall coniferous forest and beautiful steep hills. Since we had our ice fishing gear with us, we stopped at many ponds to bore a few holes and try our luck. This also helped us determine that the ponds were still safe to traverse. For lunch we started a fire and before long bacon was browning in the pan. Once cooked a can of beans and wieners was poured over top, meanwhile in another pan a bottled moose the past fall's hunt was warming. This was served with stepped tea and home made bread. That afternoon we didn't travel far, overfull on lunch we spent our time playing on the pond we were ice fishing in and taught Terry how to ride young Joe's Citation skidoo.

My last major trip of the season took me back to Southern Harbor again on the Easter long weekend. This time the weather cooperated and we had decent late season snow conditions. The snow was fairly hard and drifted but fresh falling flurries made for safe operation of the sleds and overall good going. Our plan was to leave Southern Harbor taking trail-way heading West to Clareville where we would stop for a coffee and fuel. Then we would head back East and travel across country via map & GPS to the Black Hills area where excellent riding conditions were reported.

The trip to Clareville was quick and tireless on the groomed trail, but when we arrived at the Warm up shack just east of Clareville we noticed one the left side trailing arm on crew member "Captain H's" sled had come off. On further

inspection we found the washer on the trailing arm bolt failed and the arm pulled over the bolt. Some trail side ingenuity with the factory tool kit got us back on the trail, and with some help from the guys at OMB Supply in Clareville we made a proper repair with new washers.

After a quick Coffee and a stop for fuel, we headed out of town East on the trailway. Unfortunately we didn't get far before crew member "Joe's" sled ran poorly and shut down. After an hour of trouble shooting, we determined that the engine ran lean and failed. Luckily we were only about a mile outside of Clareville so we towed the sled back to town and with the help of a friend we got Joe a ride back to Southern Harbor. With the map and compass member of the crew out of service, we aborted our cross country adventure plan and stuck to the trails we were more familiar with, all in all a great trip!!!

Although the Isthmus of the Avalon is a small area geographically, I am still amazed at the amount of country there is to ride all year long. Nestled among the barren hills and forests are hundreds of ponds and gullies awaiting to be explored. Each trip we manage to find a new trail and a new destination. Cheers to a great upcoming riding season!!!