

LOCALNEWS

Live on Skis: Old sleds and those that love them

Vintage sled gathering, ride kicks off Friday; culminates with ride, roast Saturday

BY LAUREL BEAGER  
Editor

Saturday's Live on Skis 2014 will draw lovers of vintage snowmobiles to Rainy Lake's ice.

The gathering and ride is being held a week earlier in an effort to avoid competing with the love celebrated on Valentine's Day.

The ice in front of Thunderbird Lodge will again serve as headquarters for this year's event, which kicks off Friday evening with a bonfire and chili feed.

Live on Skis is never taken too seriously, according to long-time local organizer Jim "Doc" Saurdiff, who himself has had a romance with old snowmobiles.

"Nothing is exact with this, that's what fun," he said this week.

The start time of the chili feed is understandably imprecise.

"Well, everybody will get their snowmobiles out and ride and chase around the bay and when the chili gets there, it's there," Saurdiff said.

"We can't get too structured," he added. "We need chaos."

And then Saturday, "We do the thing," Saurdiff explained.

The thing is a ride of the vintage sleds starting sometime between 10:30 and 11 a.m. — or so.

Again this year, the ride will offer a hot dog roast hosted by the International Voyageurs Snowmobile Club. The roast will take place from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the corner of the Hagerman and Arrowhead trails. The club maintains 134 miles of trails around International Falls and the Rainy Lake area.

IVSC President Jim Bigler said the roast started more than 20 years ago as a family ride. The first roast took riders to the Chain of Lakes Trail within Voyageurs National Park. Other years brought the roast to the Black Bay shelter, Blue Ox shelter and most recently, the Hagerman shelter.

Bigler said in more recent years the roast has served as a way for the club to show

its appreciation to members and to welcome visiting snowmobilers riding that day.

"It's just a way to get snowmobilers together for a few hours once a year to enjoy the day meeting new people from Canada to Michigan," Bigler said. "Once again we're hooking up with the vintage sleds, which gives people a chance to look over some of the sleds we used to ride. Only thing required is for people to enjoy themselves."

Saturday's highlight may be the weather, Saurdiff said. Temperatures may be in the double digits — above zero.

But the recent frigid temperatures may keep some folks from traveling the Midwest to get to the Falls. Past years have drawn 300 sleds; Saurdiff predicts maybe 100 sleds this year.

But that's plenty to have fun with, he said. "These old snowmobiles are made to run in this cold, but they're hard to ride in this cold."

Each year, Live on Skis may draw the same people, but many of those vintage sled heads bring different machines to ride and show off.

Saurdiff knows plenty about vintage sleds — he's restored, repaired, bought



FILE PHOTO

Last year drew Chuck Schunemon, left, of Danbury, Wis., who said he discovered his '71 Polaris headed for the landfill and spent the next three years restoring it. His son, Kraig, of Mounds View, Minn., looks on as dad starts up the former police search-and-rescue sled for a ride during Live on Skis 2013 event on Rainy Lake.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Last year's hot dog roast drew many. This year, the roast will take place from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the corner of the Hagerman and Arrowhead trails.

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and sold many over the years. "The old sleds are a lot more fun to ride — as long as you don't go too far," he said. "Over 50 miles you want a new sled. Under 50 miles and you can't beat the fun of an old sled. The new ones, you jump on and go for a ride. The old one, they jump on you and go for a ride and you hang on. They kind of ride you."

The popularity of vintage sleds continues to grow, he said. Live on Skis has been held since 2007, and includes a community of vintage sled lovers. Websites and online chats are set up specifically for vintage sled folks.

"Everywhere in the state, in the Midwest, it's getting bigger and bigger," Saurdiff said. "There are shows and events everywhere, every weekend."

He said the cost to get involved with an old sled versus a new machine may play a role in people's interest. "For a couple hundred bucks you can buy an old sled and go riding with everybody," he said. "It's not quite like that with the new ones."

Saurdiff encouraged local folks to get their old sleds out and take part in Live on Skis.

Live on Skis has had "good years and bad years," Saurdiff said. "It depends on the weather and this year isn't getting anybody too excited. We've got some of the best riding in the state, and it's easier to ride old sleds when the trails are good. Just hope for some warm weather."

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