

MaineX

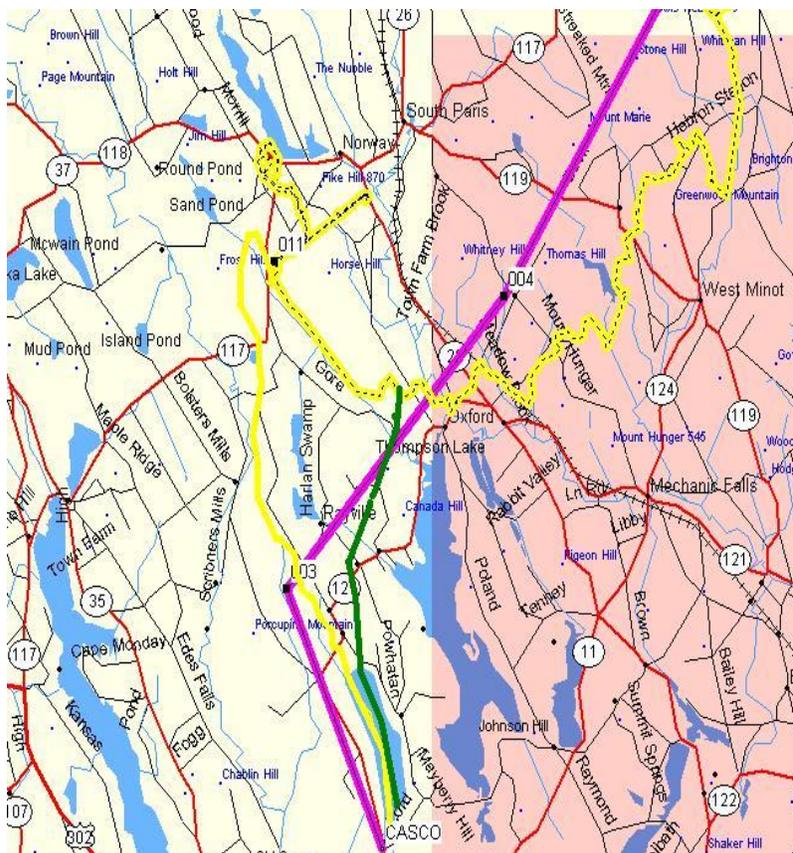
Day one – Casco - Bingham

After a day and a half of procrastination I had to realize that there's no way I'll ever really do this trip justice with mere words and a few pics. I just had to dig in and do the best I can. The idea of 1200 miles on a snowmobile in seven days does get the imagination going, however. My wife says I can't do this again next year – I sure am going to miss her. It's Friday morning February 8, 2002. The phone rings and in 20 minutes I'm on the trails heading for Mike's. That was the beginning and the end of early starts for the ride. One thing I had to work hard to get used to. OK, enough on that. So, 2 hours in the trip, and I'm across the street from where I started at the store. My dad came over thinking something had gone wrong. OK, ok, I'll shut up!!

Finally, Mike (MadMike, crazy Frenchman), John, Pete (Popeye), and myself are on the trails! Casco to Madawaska and back! Can we do it? First task – find ITS 89. Larry tells us go right at the firebarn to avoid the powerline. Hmm, we come up to the firebarn FROM the right. Turn around. We find a sign pointing to the pipeline – heck with it, we know this way – take it. We get on the ITS and rack up some good miles...before we get lost again. Spot a Yamaha dealer and go inside for directions. I really didn't think it was necessary to take off my Polaris helmet in order for the guy to be helpful. I was wrong. After pulling out his eye teeth he finally gave me so so directions. What was really helpful was the Oxford Co. maps they had. We find that the way we went is about 30 miles longer than the short way. I get back to the group to find our newest challenge. Mike's sled broke a tie rod. Looking at our invaluable map we see a SkiDoo dealer is about 5 miles away. John and Pete head for it, while I hang back with Mike who gets on the cell to dispatch the chase car (his wife). We send her eastward from Casco – while contacting all of the dealers along the way. We locate the part in Westbrook. So, Larna is about 40 minutes away with the part. Mean while, of course, the local dealer doesn't have the part (what the heck DO these snowmobile dealers stock for parts anyway!!!!?). At least they know a local welder.



Our Trip Coordinator



John takes the part there and he welds it. Nice looking job – we never found out if it was as good as it looks. Well, it's lunchtime, and we sit down to eat and wait for Larna.

Back on the trails in need to do some serious miles now. We press it for a good 30 miles or so. Hmm, this intersection looks familiar, it's route 121 and 26. About 7 hours into the trip and we're 20 miles from home by car! But now, the ITS turns north and we start making progress. By now we're getting into some half decent snow around Hebron/Buckfield. A nice 3" or so of soft stuff on top of a hard base. Great, unless you find you're skis are out of align. My sled turns into a Dodge Dart.

We roll into Bingham about 9:30 at the Bingham Motor Inn to be greeted by the Bingham...B... (mental note:keep it G rated) ...ah never mind. Problems with the reservations. She calms down and gets us in one room with 2 cots and manages to talk the Irving station across the street into making us some sandwiches ½ hour after they usually stop doing that. We eat – say about 3 sentences each and are out cold. Popeye's sled – our official odometer read 238 miles for the day. However, he did a lot of extra-curricular riding and we took the long way from Casco to ITS89.

Day 2 – Bingham to Shin Pond – 214 miles

My situation is either I fix my alignment or drop out. There's no way I have the power to fight that Dodge Dart another 1000 miles. Nothing to loose – I buy a tape measure and give it a shot. I make my assessment and get a second opinion – same assessment. One turn out on the left side. Get on the trails. YES! I've got a screaming Polaris again. Riding from Bingham to Greenville was pretty decent – constantly improving. It's mostly rail bed – not the best grooming, but I really enjoyed the high speed bumps. That's what the Edge is all about. There's about a 10 mile strait along Mosquito Pond/Moxie Pond. The only risk is your own – boy do I love to pound on that Edge! We're really starting to tighten up as a team too. Everybody is right there – watching out for each other. Life can't get

Short Way in Green – Actual in Yellow



Bingham Motor Inn



We'll Never Tell What We Were Really Thinking

better....or can it?

Well, the nice Folks in Greenville were kind enough to set up some lunchtime entertainment for us – Ice Enduro’s on Moosehead. We stop at the Black Frog for lunch and to watch the festivities. Mike finds one of them famous pictures of Marlyn Monroe naked – parks it right there. We eat lunch - Oh well, can’t stay...we hit the trails. We get out of town and the nature of the trails bring back my prior Larry and Craig training from this country. Best riding of the trip OMHO. I just love those valleys. You come over the hill and you can see there’s nobody for ½ mile – yet there’s turns and bumps.....cut it out! Whoops, nobody behind me again.

Up to Kokajo (No, that’s not how you pronounce it, but don’t ask me), and east towards Katahdin. The trails just keep getting smoother and faster. To our good fortune someone (forget which place) advised us to go off the ITS through Baxter SP. Also, to our good fortune we were a good 3 hours behind schedule. We get our last daylight view of Mount Katahdin and a view of pretty much the next 40 miles into the valley that we’re about to ride through. It was getting pretty dark as we zip past the front gate. We’re greeted with the kind of sights that make you wonder if you hit a tree and this was heaven.



Nice Place. Just make sure.....>>>>>>>>>



Ah Mike, Rule number three?



..... You Don't need Gas.

I hope I never forget the scene we had of Mt Katahdin back lit by about 2 gazillion stars. Yes, life CAN get better. A word of advise though – the trails aren't marked (for snowmobiles at least). There's about 4 or so turns in there. Just keep updating your reference of where Katahdin is and it's not a big deal (GPS helped a bit too). We sadly leave Baxter only to move on to the top lodging treat of the trip – Mount Chase Lodge.

<http://maineguide.com/patten/mtchase/mtchalod.html>

We were smart enough to keep calling them to let them know our progress, which earned us an awesome supper even though we didn't get there until 8-9. Pork Roast, Home fries...can't recall the last time I had that. Pretty much the same senerio as the first night. Ate a great Pork Roast dinner – three sentences each – out cold.

Day 3 – Shin Pond to Fort Kent – 175 miles

Speaking of cold. That morning was COLD. That's all I really remember about that morning. I think I had reached that platow after a long period of physical stress where your mind turns off a lot of feelings (read PAIN) so that you can continue. Like when you're jogging and you start to feel like you can't go on, but then you reach a level of numness that allows you to keep in it. After an hour or so, your body gets the adrenilin flowing and things get comfortable again. I do remember in the afternoon coming out of the woods to white. I mean white. All you can see from top to bottom is white. You think, what is this? A lake? A wall? It was the first of the HUGE HUGE fields of Aroostic County. And this one was just a baby from what I'm told (explanation to follow).

As we descend into Fort Kent sometime after dark (or were we far enough north so that it's dark all day), we begin to experience a new element to the trip – weather. No matter for now, we're done for the day. Into the second place winner for lodging – The home of Elmer and Sarah Daigles bed and breakfast.

<http://www.mainerec.com/daigles.shtml> Of course, the results here are skewed since we stayed 2 nights



.On This Map ITS forms a "U" shape. North, South, East, West – it does it all! Ayuh, ya just take 85 south till it becomes 85 north again...then well...umm...come to think of it ya can't get thar from here.



Elmer, Mgr of Daigles, with us all telling it over at once

at Mt. Chase, and only one at Daigles (Bingham wouldn't have gotten into the running after a month). Anyway, it's a very "at home" kind of place and we decided to go do our celebrating down town. Now, here we are 600 miles from home (by sled) (does anyone know how far it is by car)(home being Casco, Me) – the small world phenominom is observed. I guess it's not too surprising that since Mike's a crazy Frenchman that Elmer would know Mike's father, grandfather and various other relatives – one of which was named Philip (I'm sure he was the smart one).

Day 4 – Fort Kent to Shin Pond – 164 miles



*Not your recommended start on a COLD morning.
Mental note: Next time find a way to fit the cover!*

Well, you see it's like this. We wake up to see school closings pretty much from Greenville north (not Fort Kent however), and we get up and see our sleds with a solid coat of crusty snow. We talk it over breakfast and decide to rename ourselves "Team Fort Kent" instead of "Team Matawaska" (too bad, the former sounds a lot catchier), and head back to Shin Pond. Getting there in the day light had a lot of appeal. Now running a bed and breakfast and all, and how



Need I Furnish a Caption?



Incidental Entertainment...SkiDoo 0

late we got in I guess that Elmer and Sarah didn't have much chance to talk about the day. When Mike comes into the room, Sarah looks at him. Have you been here before?, she says. Nope. Elmer fills her in. She knew.

Off we go. Another cooooooollllllllld morning, compounded by very frost bitten sleds. We discover that long and smooth trails don't help to warm ya up. Face mask frosting was a big challenge too. Pete's heated modular quit. I felt much better after I had a chance to pound on that Edge in the rough for a spell. I'm in the lead watching out for Mario (and there sure are a lot of them). My philosophy is to ride not only to keep myself from screwing up, but also with a buffer so that I can safely ditch it if someone else screws up. Sure enough, it paid off. I met 3 Mario's in a tight two sled wide trail. I didn't have time to signal the first guy since I was too busy trying to see though the wall of snow he was kind enough to provide me in the face. I WAS however able to signal the other two (who incidently were unable to signal). Although, the signal I gave was the kind where the back of my hand was facing them. I was hoping to piss them off enough to turn around (Mike and especially Pete (aka Popeye) aren't what you'd call average build if you know what I mean). I mean, here's the thing. As far as I'm concerned, there's no need for a speed limit in Maine. If there was, doing a trip like this would not be possible. I think all you need is to follow three rules... 1. Read and respect all caution signs (including the words written in black magic marker like "logging" and "plowed road" (see example at right). If the signs say slow down, then do it! There's tons of places where you can go fast. 2. Be in control enough to give on coming traffic the appropriate signal. I don't care if you have to take drastic measures to get woed down – just so long as you do. 3. Be able to keep it on the trails. If you can't do that you need to re-evaluate your speed. Simple as that. Obviously, there's a lot of people that need to learn those rules. I think making club membership or the completion of a safety course manditory is a good idea. However, Sheldon has a good point in we probably don't want more members that never do anything (I'm not a saint in that



Plow 1



Viewable from Portage. My kind of place. My guess is the windmill was doing about 100RPM.

category). OK, I'll get off the soapbox. I just had to get that in since it was my main topic of thought for that morning.

So, into Portage we come for lunch. Nice looking house on the hill...some day we all say. Nice restaurant. We set down at a long table, helmets and all. This guy sets down in the middle of the table on the other side. He lets us tell it over for a while – then pipes up. You boys like the trails? He says. Sure did! We say. See that box over there? Yep, already dropped a fin each, and we bought stickers too! Well, he warms right up – tells us he's the groomer. Made 7.7K last year – 6K unemp. 1.7 grooming. Problem with ice fishing around here is you can't fit the fish through the hole!!

We reach our days destination in daylight (barely) for the first time somewhere around 5. Wow, not late for dinner by almost an hour! We had a cabin so we headed down to the local store for some celebratory beverages. Back home for a Roast Beef dinner.

Day 5 – Shin Pond to...Bingham?

Pete's not having a good time at all so we decide to ride to Millinocket to see if we can fix his helmet. I admit I had a bit of a hangover, and sore muscles, but there was definitely something else wrong. The usual morning pains weren't going away. By the time we got to Millinocket I was really hurting. There's just no way I'm continuing. They talk me into checking into the Katahdin Inn at least for a couple of hours – see what happens. John finds accommodations in Rockwood and I'll catch up if I feel better. I spend the afternoon cycling through wanting to throw up to maybe I can ride now (I knew you'd appreciate me sharing). I'm about to doze off – I hear loud foot steps – key in MY DOOR? – the maid thinks it's empty? – Nope, it's Mike – tree jumped out in front of him. Broke the same tie rod we fixed in day one – bent trailing arm. See Mike was having trouble grasping that you gotta keep it wowed down when your in the trails close to towns. To make a long story short Mike's the only guy we



Summertime pastime on Portage Lake.



Dinner at Mount Chase Lodge. Cut it out.

know that can call a friend and have him pick up his wife's sled and drive 4 hours so he can swap. The cards are set – we at least stay the night.

Day 6 – Millinocket to Bingham

I'm still pretty unsettled. We head over to the Best Western where Mike's friend is to swap sleds. I sure was mighty tempted to load my sled up beside Mike's. But I can't make Mike ride to Greenville alone. So, Mike in the wife's Legend and I head for Greenville. I gotta at least try 20 miles. I slowly improve and decide I'm in for at least this leg. We get to the Black Frog right on (the revised) schedule – 1PM. I get a bowl of seafood chowda, and a Bass. Just what the docta ordered. That lead us right into another fine afternoon of riding. Another run down the road next to Mosquito Pond/Moxie Pond. 14 miles out of Bingham and it's only 2PM. One thing bad about doing a very long trip like this is the playgrounds you have resist. I could have used my camera memory up about 4 times over just documenting them all. But since we had time, we had to do at least some conservitive play. Umm well, guess I need to teach John how to use my camera better. Not that I did a great job capturing his action. We'll have to try that again when we're banging around Casco.

In we come to Bingham. We're greeted by...well you know who (I sure hope she never reads this, THAT would be a scary thing!), and we meet her husband – cleaning one of his guns (not your safest combination). Shows us this new cleaning stuff that just came out. We get a tour of the animals he's shot. Very impressive. He gets his prey in sight – thinks of his wife – Blam! – you have an expert hunter. OK, I've gone overboard on this. There's just too much potential here.

Day um, what day is it?HOME! - 129 miles to go.

This is the part you have to do so you can say you



Plenty of Snow outside of Millinocket.



Time to spare, so we attempt some action shots.

did it. We left from Casco and rode our sleds to Fort dang it Kent...talked it over with Elmer.... and rode back again! We had the reports – riding was icy – watch the temp. We get rolling with 129 miles to go. The first 30 or so had the awesomeness we were used to. At some point we lost the ITS – too late to turn back - and were in for a history lesson. We found ourselves on some single width trails heading for who knows where. Caution signs have words on them we hadn't seen yet like "water crossing". I had to dismount and check that one out. Lot's of "fish stories" came to mind, but the truth of the mater is it was well frozen. I think Framingham was about where things started looking like we were getting somewhere. One interesting thing I'm not exactly sure what town we were in at the time, but we passed the entire population on snowmobiles! Thursday noon time and they're all out! Trails are pretty tight – 20 mph maybe. I give the signal (3 behind). The first 20 or so give me the thumb pointed back – (more than you can count on one hand signal) – one guy puts his shield up "There's a whole bunch behind me" he says. I don't think it's a stretch to say there was 40 sleds in that group. My kind of town!! 1186 miles in all. What a ride!



Sure the wife's sled will fly.



Never let a crazy Frenchman ride your sled.



What's that say? WATER CROSSING?