

McGeachie Trails to be promoted as winter sport destination post COVID-19



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A promotional photo and video shoot was produced at McGeachie Trails in Limerick Township on Feb. 27 to highlight the trails' suitability for various winter sports for residents and tourists alike, and to promote economic development. The photo and video materials, focusing on cross country skiing and snowshoeing, were produced by Hastings Destination Trails Inc. with a grant from the Ontario's Highlands Tourism Organization, in cooperation with Hastings County. It is set to be used to promote McGeachie Trails after the pandemic has subsided, likely for the 2021/2022 winter season.

According to HDTI's Cathy Trimble, the organization had received a \$2,500 digital marketing grant from the OHTO recently, and decided to do a photo and video shoot to market McGeachie Trails as a winter tourist destination for the 2021/2022 winter season.

Luisa Sorrentino is the marketing coordinator for economic development and tourism with Hastings County, and emphasizes that the photos and video will not be used to publicize McGeachie Trails this year, due to COVID-19, but will be used to do so next year for the 2021/2022 winter season.

"So, we are not promoting the area this time during COVID-19. We are all local within Hastings County. We're wearing masks and we're doing everything according to protocol," she says.

While there was an uptick in local tourism to the area in 2020, with some businesses seeing a 30 per cent increase in revenues, Sorrentino wants to prepare for when the pandemic is behind us and tourism from other parts of Ontario, Canada and the world can start to resume.

"We've been busy helping businesses survive and pivot during COVID-19, and also to be ready with services when [COVID-19] ends and tourists come back to the area," she says.

To that end, HDTI and Hastings County highlighted the trails' suitability to use for cross country skiing and for snowshoeing. They had Clive Emery, the owner and operator of Trips and Trails Adventure Outfitting (tripsandtrails.ca), and an avid skier and sportsman, to teach a handful of people how to cross-country ski on the trails and take them on a short journey for the video. Trimble

confirmed that Emery was there that morning teaching skiing fundamentals and that the photo and video shoot went well.

?He was the instructor and supported us with equipment for the event. They [his students] were novice cross country skiers and they really enjoyed themselves. Clive just showed them the ropes and they went for a short ski,? she says.

Bernie Hogan was also there that afternoon to teach a small group of people how to snowshoe for the afternoon's video segment and to take them on a brief snowshoeing excursion. They were the Card family; Meredith, Shayne and son Maxwell, and Rick Cassidy and Mary Ann Pierce.

An award-winning long-distance runner and snowshoe racer, Hogan is also the athlete ambassador for northern Ontario with Snowshoe Canada (snowshoecanada.ca/contact). He works at CP Rail as a track maintenance technician. He's been snowshoeing since he was a kid, but took up snowshoe racing a few years ago to keep his conditioning for running in place over the winter. Racing snowshoes are smaller and lighter than traditional snowshoes.

?I started getting injured running in the snow, so I was looking for a different kind of sport and found it with snowshoe racing,? he says.

Hogan has seen more people on snowshoes this winter than he did last year, and says it's even hard to buy snowshoes at all as they're selling out.

Grooming the trails that day was Don Stoneman, a retired editor and journalist, director of Canoe Kayak Ontario and an avid canoeist. He used his specialized extra wide track snowmobile and its grooming attachment.

?It was a bit of a challenge as the snow was so wet, so I just packed it down with the snowmobile. I'll track it when it gets a bit colder,? he says.

The cross-country skiing and snowshoeing were captured for posterity that day by local photographer Emily Musclow (emilymaeannphotography.com) and local videographer Erica Tripp (ericasonsonmedia.ca). Tripp, who recently moved back to Gilmour from British Columbia, captured the action along the trail with her digital video camera and her gimbal, which is a camera mount that uses three motors within the mount to compensate for unwanted movements and keep the camera steady.

?The weather was pretty interesting this morning. It was a bit of a challenge shooting with the snow, but we made it work,? she says.

Overall, the photo and video shoot went great that day and Trimble and Sorrentino were happy with the results.

?The idea is for people, not during COVID-19 but next year, to come up here as tourists or even if they buy a place up here,? says Sorrentino. ?They want to be able to have opportunities to go out and live an active lifestyle and try new experiences, something they've never done before, like snowshoeing or skiing.?