

Lots of opportunity . . .

. . .and the weather's been good

Milton is cross-country skiers' paradise

By STEVE LEBLANC
Special to The Champion

Thanks to several heavy snowfalls so far this winter, hundreds of area residents are flocking to local conservation areas and various other sites to take part in one of Milton's most popular winter activities — cross-country skiing.

For those of you unfamiliar with this past-time, the Milton-Campbellville area offers some of the best cross-country skiing spots in southern Ontario in terms of size, variety and beauty.

With more than 100 km of trails at four different conservation areas, skiers have a world of adventure awaiting them, all within a 15-minute drive from downtown Milton.

Cross-country skiing season officially begins on Boxing Day and runs until the end of February, depending on weather conditions. The sport is inexpensive and is enjoyed by people of all age groups throughout Ontario.

"It's a nice, fun way to get around and it offers good exercise," explains Gary Hutton, manager of community relations with the Halton Regional Conservation Authority (HRCA) and resident expert of the Milton cross-country skiing scene.

Cross-country skiing offers great exercise for people of all ages. It works all major muscle groups in the body and involves little risk of injury. It appeals to a wide age range because individuals can progress at their own pace and can journey through the courses as fast or as slow as they prefer.

Mr. Hutton says getting started in cross-country skiing doesn't require a person to shell out a small fortune on equipment. Complete equipment packages can be purchased for well under a \$100 and special deals can usually be found at various local sporting goods stores near the end of each season.

Mr. Hutton himself has been involved in the sport for more than 25 years. His entire family hits the trails each winter and he says the local ski trails offer something for everyone.

The HRCA takes in four separate conservation areas in Milton and Campbellville in which people can cross-country ski. They include Hilton Falls, Mountsberg, Crawford Lake and Rattlesnake Point.

Each of these conservation areas offers both novice and intermediate trails. Trails vary from two to 10 km and can take anywhere from 30 minutes to two hours to pass through — depending on your time restraints and skill level.

Each of these areas provide something a little different in terms of scenery and wildlife as well.

Hilton Falls has the longest ski trail in the surrounding



After several disappointing winters, cross-country skiers have been rejoicing with the fine weather so far this winter. With lots of places to go around Halton, it truly is a paradise.

area in the Beaver Dam Trail, which stretches out 9.5 km and takes approximately two hours to travel.

Highlights of this beautiful trail include a breathtaking view of Hilton Falls as well as the forest and wetland areas. And if you're lucky, you might get a special treat.

"At the beginning of this trail, each person is given a small bag of bird seed to feed to the birds," said Mr. Hutton. "Some of the most beautiful birds in Canada migrate

around the area and if you're lucky, you can often see many of them."

The area also features two novice to intermediate trails, the Red Oak Trail and the Hilton Falls Trail. Both include great picture perfect views of the Niagara Escarpment and are challenging courses.

Hilton Falls has washroom facilities and refreshment stands, cookout facilities and plenty of parking. It's located on the north side of No. 5 Sideroad, west of Hwy. 25.

At Crawford Lake Conservation Area, one can take in two ski trails and see various sites including a re-constructed Indian village and Crawford Lake and the surrounding boardwalk. Audio-visual presentations of the conservation area are available as are a host of other geological and natural features.

Mountsberg and Rattlesnake Point Conservation Areas are rich with great scenery as well. One of the best views of the Niagara Escarpment can be seen from Rattlesnake Point and quiet, secluded ski trails at Mountsberg offer a host of plant and wildlife.

All trails at these four areas are groomed regularly by the HRCA and all stay opened from morning to night seven days a week during the season. Annual vehicle passes can be purchased and discount packages are available for organized groups and schools.

Admission to any of these four conservation areas is \$2.50 per adult or \$2 per student. Children under 12 and seniors pay \$1.50.

"One nice thing about these areas is that when you pay to get into one area, your admission ticket is valid at any one of the other areas that day. That way you can take in two or three different areas a day," explained Mr. Hutton.

For those without ski equipment, Mountsberg offers rental packages. A complete set for the entire day costs \$9.50 while it costs \$7.50 for a half-day. When you compare this with rental costs for downhill skiing, you can see that cross-country skiing in Milton offers a lot for very little.

With skating, horse-drawn sleigh rides and captive wildlife exhibits included as added features, Mountsberg provides a full day of fun for the whole family.

Other cross-country skiing opportunities can be found at Kelso Conservation Area, Chudleighs and Bronte Creek Provincial Park.

Each of the four conservation areas run by the HRCA are within a 15-minute drive of each other and offer up-to-date trail conditions.

For trail conditions at Hilton Falls, call (416) 854-0262. Trail conditions for Mountsberg can be obtained at (416) 854-2276. (416) 854-0234 is the number to call for trail conditions at Crawford Lake and conditions at Rattlesnake Point are available by calling (416) 878-1147.

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