

MONT-LAURIER QUEBEC BY SNOWMOBILE

40th Celebration of Historic Quebec Snowmobile Ride!



(Written and published by Luc Belisle, edited and altered by Bob Petit, and translated by Zen Waiter.)

This coming February 20th 2014, will mark the 40th anniversary of the completion of the first leg of a safe snowmobile trail, conceived in the mind of Bob Petit, which would one day connect all the cities towns and villages in the province of Quebec. It was called "The Good Will Expedition; Mont-Laurier to Quebec City."

This was in fact, the very first secure snowmobile trail on the planet, which would eventually lead to the creation of a system of snow trails, that would span hundreds and even thousands of miles between all the communities of Quebec, from the remote villages of James Bay to great cities like Montreal.

"In 1967 two of my close friends were killed while riding their snowmobiles on public highways. Some time later, I was also seriously injured while riding on a public road. It was then that I realized the urgent need for safe snowmobile trails.

" (Bob Petit quoted in the "Journal Le Courant" in Mont-Laurier Quebec)

In those days there were very few miles of safe, properly groomed snowmobile trails in Quebec. Each town had limited resources and poor equipment for maintaining trails. They would create some trails through farmland and wooded areas, but their trails would often run on the side of major highways or secondary roads.

Each one of these towns and villages would refuse to hook their trail up with the neighbouring club's trails. Each club would work hard to have their own trails and they were not willing to share them with strangers from other towns. It was in this context that visionary Bob Petit began to preach his idea for a snowmobile trail system, that would connect all municipalities, to keep snowmobile enthusiasts safe by keeping them off highways and roads, and also to allow them to travel longer distances, to discover other regions.

In 1972, Petit, a long time resident of St. Jean de Matha in the Lanaudiere Region, got the attention of Bernard Deschamps and Gill Tinkler, and convinced them that a continuous trail to connect Mont-Laurier to the north, and Quebec City to the south, was in fact possible. "At first they thought I was crazy, but they soon became believers." said Petit.



Bernard Deschamps, president of the Anti Loup snowmobile club of Val-Barrette, was the first to get on board. Gill Tinkler, owner of the Central Hotel in Mont-Laurier followed suit. Together they began speaking to other businessmen in the region, and met with all the local snowmobile clubs involved, organizing numerous weekend excursions to sell the dream, and to map out the proposed trail.



Petit's best friend at the time was a very popular television personality in Quebec, Denis Drouin. He loved the new sport of snowmobiling and was ready to spearhead Petit's dream of building Quebec's first Trans Quebec highway for snowmobiles. In 1973, Drouin approached the head of Bombardier, the world's premiere snowmobile manufacturer at the time, and convinced them to sponsor the project, sort of. They agreed to get involved 'next year', if indeed Petit could make the trip.

On the morning of Feb 20th 1974 the Good Will Expedition from Mont-Laurier to Quebec City headed south. There was Petit, and two friends. Claude Rondeau of the Joliette Journal, and Yves Champoux from the Nouvelliste of Three Rivers. They were invited along to witness history, and write about it for their readers. Champoux rode along with Bob in a borrowed Bombardier Elite. It belonged to businessman Bruno Myre of St.Gabriel de Brandon. It was the first sled in history to hold two passengers side by side, but it was no good in deep snow or climbing hills that were not properly groomed. Rondeau followed close behind on Petit's new Ski Roule.

"It was a bloody nightmare", said Petit, "the trail in many places, was barely existed and it was a rough ride. The worst was the trail built by the Annonciation club. We had to get out and push the Elite up every hill!" he said. "Things got even worse when we rode over the tracks at a level crossing and snapped off the ski suspension! Two hours and \$300 later, we were back on the trail. Snowmobiling wasn't always fun in 1974." he said laughing.



There are many long tales of frustration that could be told about each length of journey. Both the journalist friends threw in the towel at St.Gabriel de Brandon; it was more than they could take.

Petit picked up a new passenger in Jean Francois Lessard, the club administrator in St.Gabriel de Brandon. Together they finished the journey.



The exhausted riders finally got to **Quebec City**. The



first day, it poured down rain. The day after it was -25 Celsius and the rain coated Petit's sled with two inches of clear ice. They had to break the ice off the machine with a hammer. Petit was exhausted from his week long excursion, and had to get back home to return to work.



Justin Cossette, the head of the Tourism Region of Quebec City and his wife Celine, congratulated Petit, and then drove him back to St. Jean de Matha in Lanaudiere with his snowmobile, in his pick up truck. "The following year, after much more work, the province of Quebec will celebrated and inaugurated it's first Provincial snowmobile trail, 803 kilometers (508 miles) of safe and maintained passage for snowmobilers, from Quebec City to Mont-Laurier. " said the legendary Bob Petit with pride.

"Nine hundred and sixty signs were erected on that route, with a big number 3 on each one. My father Ferdinand Petit with the help of my mother, fabricated each sign in his garage for the inauguration in January 1975. It was the first of many Trans Quebec snowmobile trails, in a snowmobile trail system envied, respected, emulated, and unparalleled throughout the world.



Mr. Petit at 74 years of age, remains even today as an important figure in the sport of snowmobiling in Quebec. His influence is still felt in many ways, notably through communication. He still updates his amazing snowmobile website with photos articles and videos on a regular basis, and has written important snowmobile articles about safety and destinations for over forty years. The author of his own snowmobile story in book form, plus years of television shows, personal appearances and a snowmobile radio show that spanned over two decades, establishes Bob Petit as a true historical character in the province's favourite winter sport, know throughout the world. Petit's contributions have been recognized through countless awards including a medal from the Assemblée Nationale of Quebec, and accolades from numerous tourist associations.

On January 25th 2000, at minus 40 degrees Celsius, it was the departure from Mont- Laurier of the historic 25 anniversary of the first trip to Quebec City by snowmobile. Next year we will celebrate 40 years of safe trails and far flung destinations in Quebec. The dream of one man, Bob Petit, was finally realized. Today, thousands of miles of well maintained secure snowmobile trails criss cross and connect the vast territories of Quebec, with common purpose and vision; to safely enjoying God's glorious creation in winter. After all, in Quebec we say

"Mon Pays C'est L'hiver!"

1974 to 2014 Forty Years of History.

