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**The quiet sport: snowshoeing in Wisconsin**

**By Georgia Beaverson – WisconsinGuide Magazine**

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**Magazine**

The woods and fields tremble with the special kind of hush only a thick layer of white Wisconsin snow brings. Trees stretch thin, dark branches as high into the crystalline sky as possible. Rounded white hummocks soften the ground as far as the eye can see, poked here and there with quills of dried autumn grasses. No road, no trail, no intrusive noise of civilization. This is snowshoeing in Wisconsin.

**Wonders of wildlife**

"You can go anywhere you want," says Dick Thiel, Department of Natural Resources wildlife educator at the Sandhill Wildlife Demonstration Area in Babcock. Unlike speedier winter sports, snowshoeing doesn't require a groomed trail for a good time. "Brush, marshes, and foliage aren't impediments in snowshoes."

Snowshoes are easy to use, too - practically no training required. According to John Heusinkveld, the assistant director of Tomahawk's Treehaven, a field campus of the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, "There are only two snowshoe criteria: snow on the ground and time."

Both Treehaven and Sandhill are perfect spots to experience the joys of snowshoeing in Wisconsin. Treehaven consists of 1,400 acres of rolling terrain, glacial ridges, ponds and streams abutting an additional 800 acres of undeveloped land. UW students use the area for summer field training, but DNR training and various public programs take center stage the rest of the year.

Sandhill's 9,000 acres got its name from the series of low, undulating sandy ridges crossing it. It lies within the bed of Glacial Lake Wisconsin, a large and flat marshland covering part of Wood County and six adjacent counties. Workshops at Sandhill aim to develop skills in outdoor activities such as winter camping, wildlife photography and wildlife watching. Snowshoe classes usually start in early December.

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Both Sandhill and Treehaven provide great wildlife-watching opportunities, especially on snowshoes. Thiel suggests following animal tracks at Sandhill to get an idea how an animal spends its day. Since snowshoes can go just about anywhere, a novice tracker can follow the animal's eating habits, where it drinks, where it deposits scat, and even where it beds down. Common Sandhill animals include deer and porcupine. Both black bears and fishers call Treehaven home. The quietness of snowshoes has enabled Thiel to catch sight of bedded-down deer and birds perched just above his head.

### The skinny on snowshoes

Snowshoes, a Native American invention later used by French voyageurs, once consisted of a wood frame laced with rawhide strips. They came in four different shapes:

- Alaskans. About 48 inches by ten, with a long, narrow outline, Alaskans are almost as long as skis. Good for swift movement over crusted snow in open terrain.

- Michigans, or Maines. With the same general dimensions as Alaskans, Michigans come to a teardrop point behind the heel. Perform well in a mixed environment of field, forest, and brush.

- Ojibwas. Two "tailed" Ojibwas offer superior mobility in both prairie and forest brush.

- Bear Paws. Rounded on both ends, Bear Paws are the smallest snowshoes at thirty by ten inches. Excellent in brushy conditions, especially for a small person.

Modern snowshoes are usually made from lightweight aluminum, titanium or an alloy with neoprene webbing in a bear paw shape. Heusinkveld thinks these shoes fit the bill for most snowshoers because of their light, easy maneuverability and, as an added bonus, they lace up easily. Thiel, while admitting these modern innovations lend themselves to high-tech trail exercise, points out they're more expensive than traditional shoes. He doesn't recommend them for hiking in the woods.

Thiel laments the scarcity of traditional snowshoes, but he's happy Sandhill will offer its first traditional snowshoe-making classes this year. Treehaven has offered classes for years. For a modest fee, an eager beaver can create a pair of traditional snowshoes from a kit over a weekend.

Both Treehaven and Sandhill offer a wide variety of classes at very reasonable prices. Visit their web sites or call for more information:

Sandhill - 715-884-2437; [www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/wildlife/reclands/sandhill](http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/wildlife/reclands/sandhill)

Treehaven - 715-453-4106; [www.uwsp.edu/cnr/treehaven](http://www.uwsp.edu/cnr/treehaven)

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### Wolf tracking in Wisconsin

Each winter, both Sandhill and Treehaven offer eager naturalists a chance to learn about and track wolves in their native Wisconsin habitat. While still on the endangered species list in Wisconsin, the wolf population has grown to 400 over the years, making for an exciting repopulation success story.

Jim Halfpenny conducts Treehaven's A Study of Wolves Weekends. Classes consist of learning about

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wolves, their habits, their interaction with man, and how to track them. Participants take the opportunity to hunt for wolf tracks and trail them in Treehaven.

At Sandhill, wolf-tracking weekend class participants hear lectures on wolf ecology in the morning, then follow tracks in the afternoon, sometimes using Michigan snowshoes. The weekend ends with discussions of wolf status and management issues.

"It's a life-changing event," promises John Heusinkveld of Treehaven.

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### City snowshoeing

Inside Appleton lies a hidden gem for winter enthusiasts: the Gordon Bubolz Nature Preserve. While it offers groomed cross-country ski trails for those in a hurry, executive director Mike Brandel urges snowshoe enthusiasts to take advantage of its 775 acres of hardwood bottomlands, white cedar forests, prairies and ponds.

"It's very good for winter birding," says Brandel, listing owls, woodpeckers, ruffed grouse, and even a

few northern shrikes among its winter citizens. Deer also winter here.

Bubolz offers its own snowshoe-weaving class at the end of January for anyone 12 and older. For more information, contact the preserve at 920-731-6041 or <http://my.athenet.net/~bubolz>

For more on Where to go & What to do in Wisconsin, check out <http://www.WisconsinGuide.com>

None

### **Wisconsin Friday night fish fry - 10 of the best**

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Fish fries - a Wisconsin sampler

In the course of collecting folktales in Wisconsin for almost thirty years, I have sampled over a thousand fish fries. I found them in upscale private clubs and in spots that were bare bones rustic. There are thousands more I haven't seen. WisconsinGuide writer Samm Dowell has picked my favorite - Molly's Grill in Black River Falls. Here are some others I find "distinctive."

\*#10 - Dave's Who's Inn - a young blue collar version of a fish fry/music club. 835 Indiana Avenue, Sheboygan.

\*#9 - Doug's Grand View Inn - classic northwoods spot with year-round outdoors sport enthusiasts.

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22270 Highway 63, Grand View/Bayfield County.

\*#8 - Longbranch Saloon - hard by the Marsh country, filled with tall tales and tongue-in-cheek whoppers. Brings out an eclectic crowd. W1936 Eagle Road, Germania.

\*#7 - Sportsman's Grill - nestled in the east bank of the Mississippi River and a great place for soaking up river culture. Though not always available, the catfish platter is worth the trip. Highway 35, Ferryville.

\*#6 - Lakefront Brewery - lively German-style hall, with a family atmosphere. Old Milwaukee flavor! 1872 N. Commerce Street, Milwaukee.

\*#5 - VFW Post 2312 - solid Americana and plenty of living history. A great example of how fish fries build community. 1428 17th Street, Monroe.

\*#4 - Green Lantern -

a retreat spot for visitors to the nearby Vietnam memorial at the Highground, the mood is quiet and the fare simple. Fish fry every day! 231 W. 7th Street, Neillsville.

\*#3 - Hookers Resort - lazy summers and cozy winters. Heard my first Norwegian joke here. Highway V, Poynette, on Lake Wisconsin.

\*#2 - Titledown Brewing -

rail depot nostalgia, classy atmosphere, and delectable perch. 200 Dousman Street, Green Bay.

\*#1 - Polar Bear Pub and Eatery - farmers, construction workers, and card

players. Closest fish fry to my farm, with warm proprietor Linda presiding. Highway 39, Linden.

- Dennis Boyer

Dennis Boyer, author of regional lore like *Gone Missing: A Supernatural Tour of the Great Lakes and Snow on the Rails: Tales of Heartland Railroading*, also compiled *Great Wisconsin Taverns*.

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