

Winter Outdoor Activities Update for the KML: 2022-2023

written by Chris Guibert | May 15, 2023

The winter season of 2022-2023 was the third season of winter operations for the Keweenaw Mountain Lodge since new ownership took over in the fall of 2018 (and the 5th winter since the Lodge opened in 1934; when the county owned and operated the lodge, they had the resort open the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 winter seasons).

The resort in the winter time is a wonderful place for guests to come and enjoy the winter wonderland of the Keweenaw. This winter guests were able to stay in the historic rustic cabins near the cross country ski trails and the historic lodge building was open everyday for adventurers to congregate around the warm fire to share their plans and daily adventures. The [Little Cabin Cafe](#) offered breakfast, lunch, and warm beverages throughout the day; while the Tasting Post provided a slow dining experience where couples and families were able to enjoy the atmosphere of a WPA-era Lodge and learn about the rustic worldly food that Chef Wi created and served to them.

The 2022-23 winter season was an interesting and learning experience for the KML team and especially for the outdoor activities crew. Winter came early to the Keweenaw with 108" falling before December 31, 2022. A multi-day storm in November provided enough snow to get outside for some early adventures but a warming spell that happened during the last week of the month melted most of this early base. This trend continued throughout the winter with periods of heavy snowfall followed by warming spells. [Keweenaw County](#) received 275.75 inches of snow for the season including 12" in May; on average, the Keweenaw

Peninsula receives 270 inches of snow each winter. The biggest snow event of the year was Winter Storm Elliot which hit the Keweenaw from 12/23-12/26. The Lodge's winter trail system was majorly impacted due to heavy winds with snow drifts 4+ feet in places. It took us two days to dig out the trail system, with our grooming equipment getting stuck too many times to count.



The team started prepping the trails in November by using a newly acquired stump grinder. Over the last few seasons our John Deere Gator suffered damages to its axles and tracks by hitting stumps buried in the snow. This year we were proactive and the team started to grind the culprit stumps across our cross country ski trails. Team members from both the OAC team and the Facilities team took turns trying to master this machine. Let us

just say persistence and tenacity were needed on the hard wood stumps found here in the North Country.





Another lesson learned from the previous years is that we needed to have redundancy in our equipment. We have two John Deere Gators, a 2016 and a 2017, in our fleet. These hardy UTVs are shared by multiple departments, both the housekeeping team and the OAC team use them in their day-by-day operations. In the past, only the 2017 machine had tracks installed on it, so for this season we ordered another set of tracks and had both machines up and running. This made a huge difference because we had no down days due to equipment failure, a big change from the previous season.



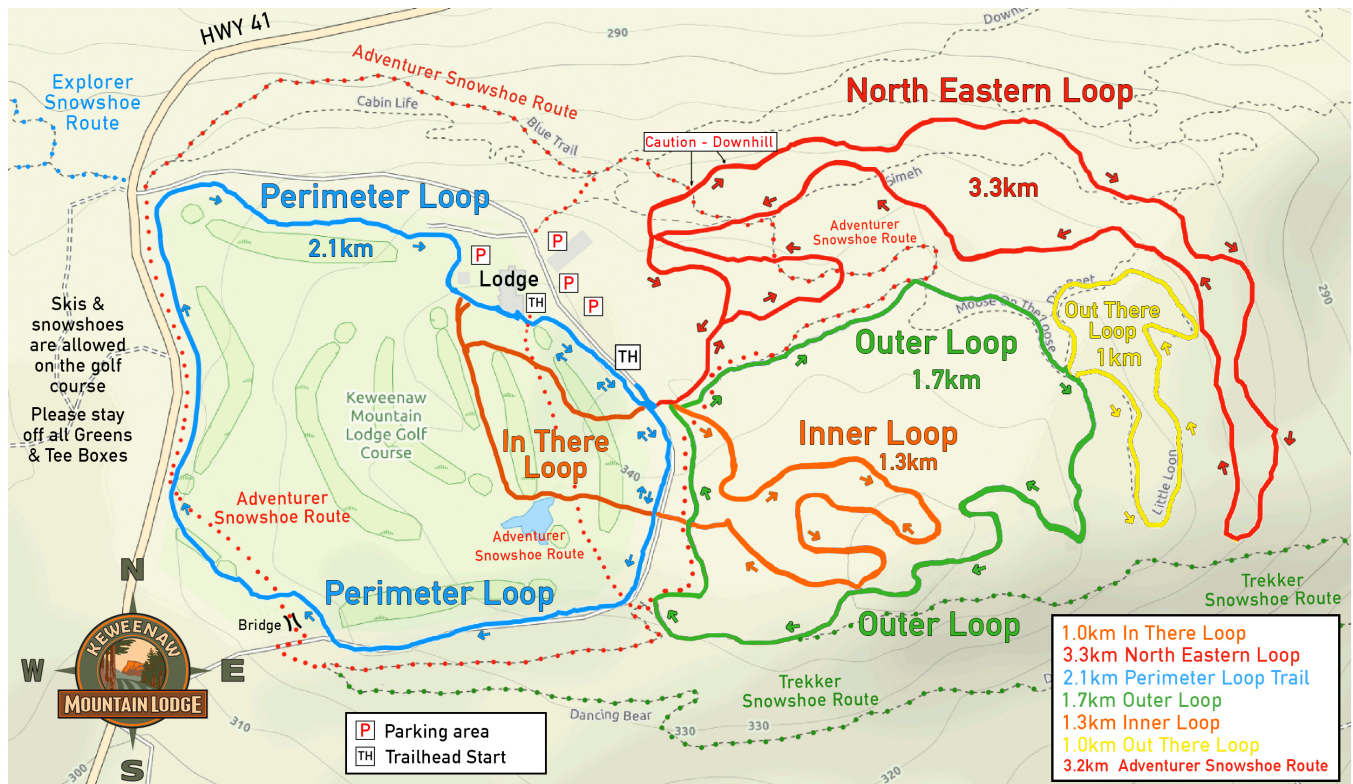
We also assessed and modified all of our cross country ski grooming equipment. We fixed the baffles on our 60" [Ginzu Groomer](#) from [YTS Track Systems](#) and added two [wings](#) to help eliminate the tracks left from the Gators and to provide a smoother skiing surface. Our team also uses a compact drag made by [ABR](#) that had a surface actuator motor that wasn't operating properly which was fixed and modified. And finally we added some cross bars to our roller that was bending after hitting many trees on our narrow trails. These projects were executed by the Facilities team and our new mechanic Adam Bory who joined the KML team in December.



Over the last few years we learned that having a set opening and closing dates for our winter trails gives our lodging guests the ability to plan when they want to come to enjoy the Keweenaw winter wonderland. Our goal is to open the trails on December

15th and close them on April 15th, we communicate this information and the daily conditions on our [Winter Trail Conditions](#) page on our website. This season we were able to open our snowshoe trails on December 15th and our cross country ski trails on December 23rd.

Keweenaw Mountain Lodge Winter Trail Map



Some of the great things about our cross country ski trails is that they are narrow, hilly and surrounded by the wilderness. For the 2022-23 season we wanted to add an easier trail that would be a first step for skiers getting used to our style ski trails. This season we added the *In There Loop* that is relatively flat and open as it cuts across holes 5, 6 and 9 of the golf course. This brought our total amount of ski trails on the property to almost 11km.



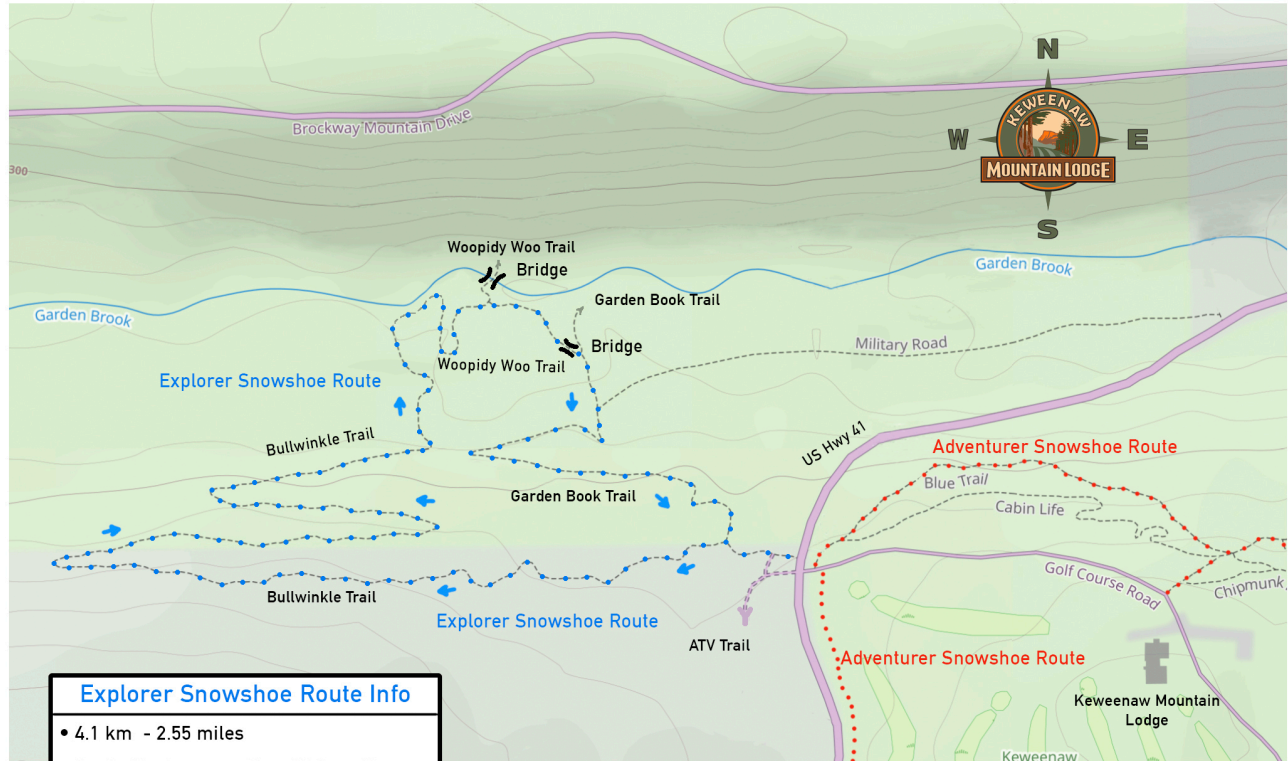
Overall the quality of our cross country ski trails was a significant improvement over the previous season with the biggest component being the consistency in grooming. Many factors contributed to this including: the addition of Adam the mechanic, having two Gators available which allowed one to be worked on while the other was grooming and the constant maintenance of the grooming equipment. But the single biggest component was the commitment of our lead groomer, KML team member John. Groomer John and I constantly talked about snow quality and grooming strategies, both of us on a long-term learning-mission to understand the nuances of laying good classic tracks and smooth corduroy at the tip of the Keweenaw. His pre-dawn-commitment and relentless around-the-clock dedication to the cross country ski trails at the KML created a consistent ski experience. Having an individual that lives on property with the willingness to make the trails great, yielded some of the best skiing since we started grooming in the 2020-2021 season.




[Snowshoeing](#) is probably the most approachable winter sport at the Keweenaw Mountain Lodge and again for this season' [snowshoe rentals](#) were included as an amenity for all lodging guests. The OAC team was on an early mission to expand the snowshoe routes available to visitors. We changed the name of the existing snowshoe trail to the Adventurer Snowshoe Route because we realized that our main snowshoe route involved multiple trails and using the term "route" described it better. This opened the door to creating new signed *routes*, the first one was the Explorer Snowshoe Route located across Hwy 41 in the Garden Brook watershed. This 2.5 mile route offers views of the Brockway Mountain ridge line, a cedar forest and some large white pines along the valley floor. It has a remote feel that brings you closer to nature.

KML Explorer Snowshoe Route

4.1 km - 2.55 miles



Explorer Snowshoe Route Info

- 4.1 km - 2.55 miles
- Route Starts across Hwy 41 from the main entrance to the Lodge
- Follow blue arrow markers on trees 
- Elevation Gain/Loss from the Lodge

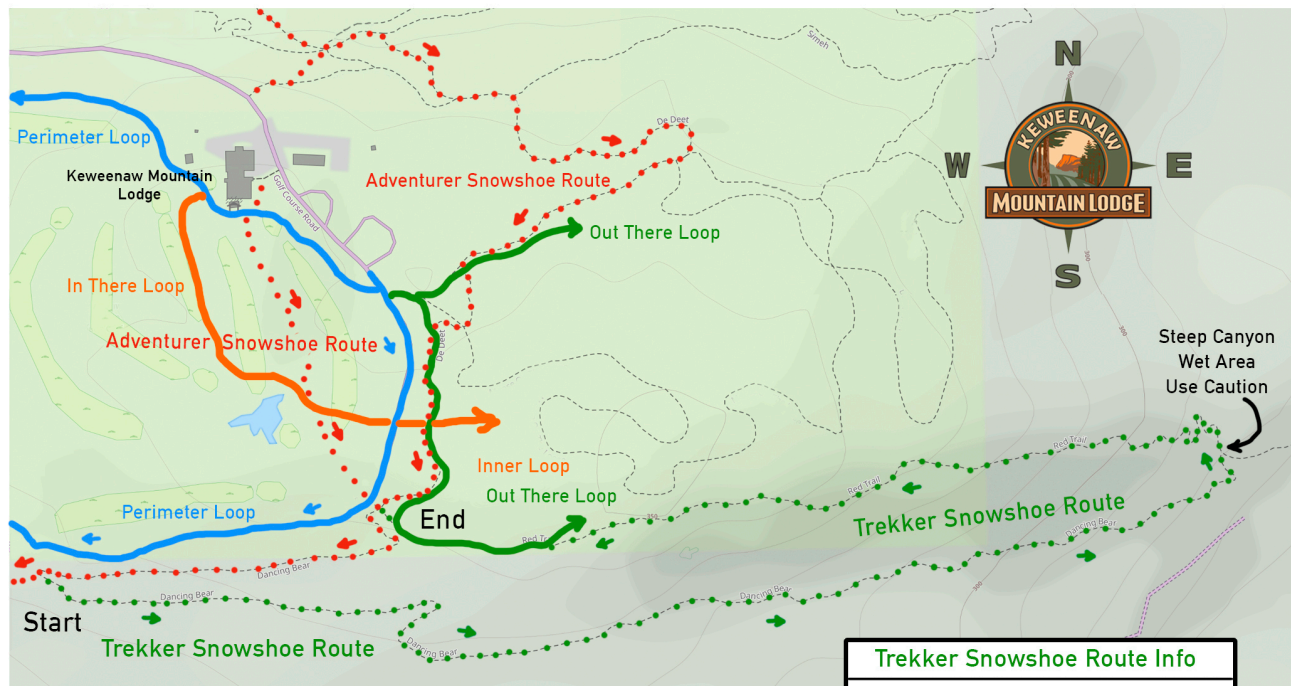
A backcountry snowshoe route with views of Brockway Mountain. This route features a cedar forest, multiple bridges and some giant white pines along the valley floor.



The second addition was the Trekker Snowshoe Route, which takes off from the Adventurer Snowshoe Route. This two mile route follows the Dancing Bear Trail under conglomerate cliff faces and connects with the Red Trail Ridge. The Trekker Route provides snowshoers a remote wilderness experience with views of Lake Manganese, East Bluff, and the Keweenaw Ridge.


KML Trekker Snowshoe Route

3.2 km - 2.0 miles



A backcountry snowshoe route with views of Lake Manganese, East Bluff and the Keweenaw Ridge.

Trekker Snowshoe Route Info

- 3.2 km - 2.0 miles From Start to End
- Starts on the Adventurer Snowshoe Route
- Follow green arrow markers on trees 
- 260' Elevation Gain/Loss from the Lodge



Our monthly, [moonlit snowshoe hikes](#) were popular again this year. We offered them four times, once a month in [January](#), February, [March](#) and April. With over 20 adventuresome snowshoers on the first three offerings we learned more about what is the right number of participants to keep these events personable and allow the guests to be able to get in touch with nature(if you are wondering, we think that number is around 15 participants). OAC team member Amy Oestreich took over as the lead guide and brought her passion for the sport and the Keweenaw wilderness and wove them into talking points on these interpretive excursions.



Another winter event that saw some transformation was the [Snowshoe Hare](#). The [2nd Annual Snowshoe Hare](#) event received a makeover with a new logo. It took place at the Keweenaw Mountain Lodge on February 4, 2023 with a slightly overcast sky and temperatures holding steady at 9 degrees for most of the day. This fun, joyous and adventuresome day celebrates snowshoeing in the Keweenaw and consists of a race, guided hikes and interpretive discussions. Similar to the event in 2022 there was

little participation in the race. One of the highlights of the day was the presentation “History of Snowshoeing” by [Iverson Snowshoe](#) owners, Jim and Victoria Baker. This informative talk almost brought tears to Jim’s eyes as he discussed his passion for snowshoeing. The Bakers also brought a large selection of snowshoes for guests to demo. As we look forward to 2024 the event will continue to evolve and focus on the [educational components](#) associated with snowshoeing, so people will leave the event with more knowledge than they came with.



[Dawg Daze](#), a fundraiser for the [Copper Country Humane Society](#), is an annual event that celebrates winter, trails and dogs. [This years event](#) took place on March 4th and was officially added to the [Cooper Dog](#) event schedule. The weather for the event was sunny and unseasonably warm with temperatures in the mid-30’s. The Perimeter Dog Derby offered a smooth race course for the skijoring teams and the costume contest brought smiles and wagging tails.



Another project the OAC team has been working on is revitalizing the [Snow Terrain Park](#). In the fall our team cleared the underbrush from the slopes to open up the terrain. The park is located behind cabin 23 and to our surprise most of the park lights were still working when we flipped on the switch. This gentle sloping area was first cleared sometime in 2009 and operated from January 2010 – March 2011 (at least this is our best estimation) as the Ocho Potter Terrain Park. Our team rode sleds, snowboards and [snow skates](#) to try to figure out what the best usage of this area might be. We haven't settled on a master plan but we hope to come up with a vision for next season and open up this area for lodging guests to play in the snow.

[Picture of Snow Terrain Park]

This was also the first winter that the [Keweenaw Dark Sky Park](#) was open to the public. The Lodge's property is open every night for stargazing and aurora hunting. Winters can be a great time to view the night sky with our long nights, in December and January we can have almost 13 hours of darkness. We do get socked in frequently with lake effect snow storms that form over Lake Superior, but when the night is clear the stars shine bright overhead unlike anywhere else in Michigan. There were two major northern lights events that happened this season. On [February 26th a G4 solar storm](#) lit up the sky above the lodge in a spectacular display of colors.



Then on March 23-24 the solar storm of the season hit a KP of 8 and rocked the whole night unlike anything I've ever seen before. This event was seen across the country and was a mesmerizing display of celestial colors.



The winter season of 2022-2023 was filled with challenges, learning, and joy. The KML team is starting to settle into a groove with running a four season historic resort. This winter season we got better at planning for the challenges of operating in a remote area that receives on average 280" of snow a year; this is a far better strategy than operating in a reactionary way. Since the new ownership took over the Lodge we continue to work on our goal of helping individuals get closer to nature. We do this through our [lodging services](#), [outdoor activities](#), [dining services](#), and [event and education offerings](#). At the Lodge, our [core values](#) are like a pyramid, we build from the bottom up and this winter season was another building block of the Lodge's transformation into a destination wilderness resort.

FUN.JOYOUS.ADVENTURESOME.

[[getting people closer to nature](#)]



[Chris Guibert](#)

Chris Guibert: I have a strong passion for all things outdoors and have worked as a tour guide and professional photographer for the last twenty five years. As the Lead of Outdoor Activities at the Mountain Lodge I want make sure you and your family have a great experience while staying and playing. Please feel free to ask me any questions about the trails, regional activities and local secrets.

