

History of the Gunflint Trail's Banadad Ski Trail



What is known today as the BWCAW'S longest groomed ski trail, the Banadad, was developed many years ago as a network of old trails and logging roads.

In the late 1920's Charlie and Petra Boostrom established their homestead just southwest of Meeds Lake on Moon Lake. With the Boostrom's help a logging camp was built near the lake and a logging road constructed between Moon and Poplar Lake. Most of the timber from the Moon Lake area was transported along this road across Poplar and then down the Gunflint Trail to Grand Marais. Some of the logs were sawed at Sam Sepalla's saw mill located where Poplar Lake Lodge now stands.

Construction of the Finn Lake logging road began in the late 1950s. This road was to become the eastern end of the Banadad. The road began at the General Logging Company's abandoned railroad grade just east of Poplar Lake (now the Lima Mountain Grade) and proceeded due west about ten miles to Finn Lake passing just north of Moon Lake enroute. Portions of the old Moon to Poplar logging road were incorporated into this new road.

The construction of the road and the subsequent logging was controlled by the Kimberly- Clark Company. While several small logging camps sprung up along the road, the company's largest camp was built just north of the old Moon Lake logging camp. According to Hank Larson who was logging in the area during this period, "in 1962 there were some eighteen to twenty-four men logging in the Finn Lake area. About twelve of them were "shackers." Shackers is the term used to describe the men living in the camps.

During the early 1960s another road was constructed from the Finn Lake Road north between Banadad and Rush Lakes across the Banadad Creek, continuing north for another quarter mile where it intersected with the Dawkin's and Birch Cliff Logging Roads. The Dawkins Road came in from the west and the Birch Cliff Road from the east. The Dawkin's road, also know as the Rib Lake road, began at the Gunflint Trail near the Loon Lake Public Landing. The Birch Cliff road connected with what was then the Winchell Lake fire trail beginning on the Gunflint Trail just east of Poplar Lake (now the access road to the Poplar Lake Public Landing).

In 1964 with the passage of the Wilderness Act most of this area was place within the newly created Boundary Waters Canoe Area (BWCAW). The act prohibited logging in most of the area. Road

construction and logging ceased, the men moved out and over the next twenty years the forest began to reclaim the logging roads.

Meanwhile the resorts on the Gunflint Trail began developing cross country ski trails. In 1972 the first ski trails of what was to become the Upper Gunflint Trail system were constructed by Borderland Lodge. About the same time the owner of a now defunct resort on Hungry Jack Lake and Bearskin Lodge began developing ski trails. These trails were to develop into Bearskin and Golden Eagle Lodges' Central Gunflint Ski Trail System.

Following a bitter struggle pitting mostly city "preservationist" against "local" people from the area surrounding the BWCAW the 1978 "BWCAW Act" was passed by Congress. While local residents were not happy with the legislation, they had managed to incorporate into the bill a provision that allowed for the grooming of ski trail within the BWCAW by snowmobiles.

By the early 1980s Borderland, Gunflint and Heston's Lodges in the Upper Gunflint area and Bearskin and Golden Eagle Lodges in the Central Gunflint had develop extensive ski trail systems. They were now interested in connect the two systems. Thus in 1982 at the urging of the lodges, the U.S. Forest Service authorized the construction within the BWCAW of a ski trail between the Upper and Central Gunflint ski systems. The old Dawkins road, Birch Cliff and Finn Lake system was selected as the proposed route for this trail. During the summers of 1982 the accumulated forest growth was cut and cleared by crews from the Forest Service from the Dawkins, Birch Cliff and the eastern end of the Finn Lake Roads. Grooming by snowmobile of the this trail was authorized and the trail was opened for skiing that winter. The Subsequent year the Finn Lake Road and Banadad links were cleared and this route replaced the Birch Cliff section as the Banadad's eastern end.

The Upper and Central Ski system were now connected by a twenty- seven kilometer groomed ski trail through the wilderness. First called the Ski Thru Trail, Artery Trail or Tucker Lake Trail, depending upon whom you spoke to, the trail was officially named, by the Gunflint ski resorts, the Banadad in 1984.

Many of the trail's early beginnings can still be seen. Skiing the Banadad from the east end about eight kilometers from the Lizz- Poplar Portage, the clearing where the Kimberly-Clark logging camp is still visible. However, all that remains of this once busy log camp is a dilapidated outhouse. Further along the trail at what is now called Moose Kill Hill is the junction where the Banadad link branches north off the Finn Lake Road. Another mile and one half further along the trail is the intersection (called Mid Trail Junction now) with the Dawkins and Birch Cliff roads. The Birch Cliff road (now called the Moose trail) is primarily used to supply the two yurts located at Bedew Lake.

In an interview a few years ago logger Hank Larson described the beauty of the area. He particularly mentioned the rugged terrain and hills along the road near Banadad Lake. The two largest of these hills were named "Whoopie" One and Two by a party of passing skiers in 1985.

By the way, 'Banadad' is the Ojibwa equivalent for 'lost'.