

JIM SERVI

Silent Sports Make Winter Fun

Cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and fat tire biking

Even the most dedicated outdoor enthusiasts sometimes succumb to the dreaded cabin fever with our cold, unpredictable weather here in Wisconsin. But there is a great way to fight that fever while exploring some of the many outdoor gems that Wisconsin offers. Plus, you'll be in great shape to hit the ground running when winter finally breaks and spring arrives.

Winter's silent sports: cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and fat tire biking have grown in popularity in recent years. Many communities now offer local opportunities to experience silent sports, and there has been a surge in trail improvements and new trails across Wisconsin. Here are some great destinations to try.

Several locations on the Ice Age Trail are excellent for cross-country skiing, especially a beautiful 7.1-mile segment near Baraboo with spectacular views of Devils Lake. The 4,755-acre Nine Mile Forest also has a series of trails that are very popular at the base of

Rib Mountain State Park. Another favorite location for cross-country skiing called the Old World Wisconsin Blue Trail, near Eagle, is just over three miles and gives you a feel of Europe. With their vivid re-creation of European farmsteads and settlements from the 1800s, you'll experience firsthand what it looked like when Wisconsin was settled. Once you're hooked on cross-country skiing, there is no greater challenge than the American Birkebeiner. This 50-kilometer route from Cable to Hayward is North America's largest cross-country ski marathon and attracts more than 10,000 skiers from across the globe.

Snowshoeing is another great way to enjoy the outdoors during winter and has less of a learning curve than cross-country skiing. High Cliff State Park is an excellent place to start. The 2.3-mile Lime Kiln trail offers remarkable views of the bluffs around Lake Winnebago. With 1,147 acres, there is also ample opportunity to break your own trail in fresh powder. Wisconsin offers a

snowshoe Scurry Series with multiple destinations, and there are local races in communities throughout Wisconsin. There is one can't-miss location to snowshoe: the ice caves of the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore on Lake Superior. But there is a catch. They aren't accessible every year. The weather and conditions must be just right. 2014 and 2015 were excellent years with nearly 200,000 visitors, but they were inaccessible during several of the preceding years. Call ahead to check ice conditions and don't miss this opportunity if you get a chance to go.

Fat tire biking has been the rage the last few years and with that attention opportunities now abound. For destinations, the Chequamegon Area Mountain Bike Association (CAMBA) trail system is hard to beat. Often called one of the best trail systems in the country for biking, there are 28 trails with more than 300 miles passing by lakes and streams and through nearly every forest type that northern Wisconsin offers. The Lewis-Trow Mounds Recreation-

al Area, near Neillsville, has a challenging trail that weaves through the sandstone crags left by retreating glacial ice. Easier trails can be found at both locations as well. Lewis Mounds Trails holds an annual fat tire race, along with other events including winter camping for the adventurous. The John Muir Trails in the Kettle Moraine State Forest are also extremely popular with their relatively close proximity to Milwaukee, Madison and Chicago.

These destinations are some of the best that Wisconsin offers, but we're fortunate to have locations in every corner of the state to take advantage of winter's silent sports. Giving them a try will make winter a little more exciting while exploring some of Wisconsin's great outdoor places. Hope to see you out there. **QWD**

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