



Photos courtesy RunMichigan.com

There's nothing like the winter race season to keep you motivated, including the Frozen Foot Race, scheduled for Saturday, Feb. 16.

# WINTER RUNNING

Lunatic or badass? It depends on your viewpoint

By Erin Crowell

Here is an obvious observation, and something to think about next time you step onto the treadmill: Fewer people run outside during the winter.

Now, take that with you when you step outside for a winter run. You are among the few dedicated people who don't let a little weather get in their way.

While others shuffle along wearing parkas and a look of pain, it's just you pushing through the whiteout, arms and legs pumping. With every step you feel the give of snow and ice – and barriers. Something inside says, "Oh yeah. You—my friend—are a badass." Meanwhile, passing motorists are laughing at the lunatic (i.e. you).

Keep your crazy-self running outdoors during the winter by following these tips and guidelines.

## WARM + DRY = HAPPY

There's nothing glamorous about a winter run. You're decked out in earmuffs and unflattering layers, complemented by the collection of frozen snot on your upper lip. Your face is cold while your body is roasting. Sweat is pooling. You're drowning in your own stench.

But, it doesn't have to be this way.

Wear the right clothing and you'll feel like you're running in your own comfortable environment – allowing you to enjoy your surroundings, rather than fighting it.

Cotton is your worst enemy. It leaves you overheated, wet and blistered.

"As cotton gets wet, it absorbs water, becomes heavy and then becomes abrasive to your skin. Choose clothing made of 'technical fabrics' such as Lycra, DriFit, even Polyester to keep you dry and avoid chaffing your skin," says professional running coach Joe English in a 2008 Running Advice and News blog.

Although a bit pricier, technical fabrics will save you pain and discomfort. They also tend to be less bulky than cotton. Just be sure to keep the rule of three: base, thermal and outer layer. These will wick away sweat, maintain body temperature and protect you from outside elements such as wind.

Keep yourself dry and toasty by running into the wind first, then catching a tail wind on your way home, says Jeff Gaft of Running Fit in Traverse City.

"(By running into the wind at the end of your run), you will get colder because the wind is cooling your perspiration faster," says Gaft.

Also, dress 20 degrees warmer than the outside temperature, adds English. Remove layers accordingly as your core heats up. You should always have a layer covering your skin for protection, such as long sleeves, pants, gloves and a hat (earmuffs are fine, too. The puffier, the funnier).

Wear clothing with bright colors that will stand out against the snow, preferably reflective material – available in the form of vests, shirts and jackets – even arm straps.

As for the runny nose, bring plenty of tissue or use an available sleeve.

## MUST KNOW: SAFETY

Another important element of the winter running outfit is your shoes. As long as you've got decent traction, a pair of running shoes used during the summer will work just fine, says Gaft.

For temperature comfort, run in a Goretex or waterproof shoe. Want more grip? Gaft says to add a traction-aiding device such as Yaktrax, a pair of rubber webbing with snow-hugging wire that fits to the bottom of your shoes.

As far as *where* to run in the winter, Gaft recommends any less-traveled, snowy road, avoiding icy spots and hard-packed snow.

"Snow will give you traction, but very hard packed snow doesn't offer much. If you're running down a slippery road and there's snow on the side, run in that," he says.

Gaft, an ultramarathon runner who has clocked 50 to 100 miles a race, is a regular winter runner. He usually takes advantage of the back roads of his home in Honor and quiet side streets of downtown Traverse City.

"The City of Traverse City does a great job of clearing the sidewalks," says Gaft.

In case you do come across some slick spots, it's important to pay attention to your posture and footfall.

"The most important thing is to have your foot under your knee, and your knee under your hip and land more flat-footed," says Gaft.

In other words, don't land on your heel, with all your balance points and joints out in front of you. Doing so gives you less stability.

## STEER CLEAR...

All the technique and traction in the world won't protect you from injury if you come head-to-fender with a passing car.

According to the January issue of *Runners World*, "Nearly 20 runners had been killed by cars or trucks during the first 10 months of 2009, and more than 40 runners have been

killed since 2004."

On top of that, it's difficult to know exactly how many runners have been injured, and nearly impossible to track the amount of "close calls."

Regardless, it's a hazard to run wherever traffic may be present. Run defensively around cars. Position yourself by facing traffic when running on the road, in some places it's the law, says English.

Also, observe traffic.

"It's not hard to spot a driver that is having trouble with driving in the snow," he says. "If they look nervous about your presence, stop and move over until they pass."

There's no sense in getting all geared up just to get hit by a salt truck. Stay safe out there – and come back home for a nice steamy cup of hot cocoa and a snowball for your spouse or roommate.

You just might have to do another run. Away!

## GETTING MOTIVATED

You've got the gear, you've got the snow. Now, all you need is some motivation. Here are some reasons to keep running outdoors when the snow is falling. To find more winter races in Michigan, visit [runmichigan.com/calendar](http://runmichigan.com/calendar).

### FROZEN FOOT RACE – Saturday, January 16

Run five frozen miles through Traverse City, starting at Eastern Elementary School at 10 a.m. Cost, \$15 for pre-registration, \$20 the day of the race. For more info, visit [runfrozenfoot.com](http://runfrozenfoot.com) or call Running Fit at 933-9242 or 932-5401.



### BIGFOOT SNOWSHOE RACE – Saturday, January 23

Use your winter training to compete in the snowshoe race at Timber Ridge Resort in Traverse City, at 9 a.m. 5k and 10k races available at \$15 for early registration, and \$20 for race day. Don't have snowshoes? Rent a pair for \$7. Call 932-5401 for more info.

### THE ICEMAN'S HALF MARATHON/10K – Saturday, February 27

Mt. Pleasant road race for those ready for anything, including ice, snow and wind. Starts at 10 a.m. at 2316 S. Mission St. \$30 for the half marathon, \$25 for the 10k. Packet pick-up will be at the Runners Performance Store. Call 989-289-2361 for more info.

## WANTED: VOLUNTEERS FOR THE 2010 NORTH AMERICAN VASA

The 2010 North American VASA Cross-country Ski Race is seeking volunteers to assist in both indoor and outdoor tasks February 12-14. Examples of volunteer jobs are: ski the course the morning before the race to smooth the ski tracks and remove fallen branches, pack skier registration bags, act as crossing guards at snowmobile crossings, pass out water at aid stations, help with the awards ceremony, help clean-up after the race, and more. Most activities will take place at Timber Ridge RV & Recreation Resort at 4050 E. Hammond Road in Traverse City on both Saturday and Sunday February 13-14.

Volunteers are encouraged to sign up via the internet at [www.vasa.org](http://www.vasa.org) and click on the volunteer link, or for more information call Lisa Taylor, race director, at 631-2195.

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# Strap on Some Snowshoes...

... and embrace your inner snowperson to get fit this winter

By Mike Terrell

Maybe this is the year you want to try snowshoeing? It's healthy and a great way to prevent that dreaded winter ailment known as cabin fever.

There's no easier way to get out into the woodlands and the scenic, silent beauty of a Northern Michigan winter. That's probably why snowshoeing is literally the fastest growing snow sport today. Over six million people across the nation will strap on a pair of snowshoes and take a hike this winter.

"If you can walk, you can snowshoe, and even chew gum at the same time," laughed Jeff Swanson, at Don Orr's Ski Haus in Traverse City where they sell and rent snowshoes. "It's really easy to pick up. We have a lot of first timers come in to rent the equipment and give it a try. There isn't much of a learning curve."

Unless you want to purchase a pair of snowshoes immediately, you can rent them at just about any of the outdoor/sporting goods outlets in the region. The cost is fairly nominal.

## THE OPTIONS

If you decide to purchase a pair be prepared to pay around \$100 to \$150 and up for good snowshoes. You can even get them with step-in bindings. I have a pair with one-snap bindings. No fumbling with frozen straps and frozen fingers. They are wonderful. Just make sure you have a good pair of warm boots to wear while snowshoeing.

If you are new to snowshoeing, you might want to start off with some easy outings along well known trails in some of our many area parklands.

Do stay off cross-country ski tracks, since snowshoeing damages the ski trail. All state land trails are open to both cross-country skiers and snowshoers, but it's still a matter of being courteous to each other in sharing the trails by walking off to the side of a ski track. State land trails in northwestern Lower Michigan which are groomed strictly for skiing this winter are the VASA near Traverse City, the Cadillac Pathway, and Ogemaw Hills near West Branch.

The beauty about snowshoeing is that you can explore areas that you might not enter during warmer months. Here are a few suggestions for some of my favorite snowshoe outings in the northwest corner of the Lower Peninsula:

- Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore has three scenic trails that offer 1 1/2 to 2-

mile out-and-back outings. Empire Bluffs is a 3/4 mile one-way trail that offers stunning overlooks of Empire, the valley and the Lake Michigan shoreline.

Pyramid Point Trail is about the same length and also offers panoramic views of the shoreline and Manitou Islands. Both trails emerge on sandy bluffs 300 or so feet above the lake; a bit of a climb, but worth it.

The Tweedle/Treat Farm Trail, located just south of Empire Bluffs off Norconk Rd., is the easiest of the three. The mile-long, one-way trail takes you through an early 1900s historic farm, with buildings still preserved, and over to the edge of a bluff overlooking Lake Michigan.



- Deadman's Hill Overlook offers panoramic views of the Jordan River Valley, and snowshoes are perfect for the 3/4 mile trek to the overlook. The access road off U.S. 131, north of Mancelona, is plowed part way back. From the overlook,

perched on a tall bluff about 400 feet above, you look out over the eastern end of the valley. Distant snow-covered hills blend into the horizon.

If you are up for a really good workout take the Jordan Valley Pathway down into the valley and back up. There's a 3-mile loop. It's a strenuous outing, but the beauty of the valley in winter and quiet solitude – if no snowmobiles are around – is priceless.

- The North Country Trail offers numerous snowshoeing opportunities. One of my favorite sections is near Tippy Dam north of Wellston. The NCT parallels the Manistee River, and you can access the trail where it crosses Drilling Rd., just north of Sawdust Hole Campground and the dam on the north side of the river. You park along the road, and it's about a mile down to the river off the bluff. The NCT continues for another mile right along the river before it starts back up a wooded bluff on the far side of the valley. You could continue on, but I normally turn back at this point for a 4 mile round-trip outing. It's beautiful and quiet, very tranquil.

- Go 'old school': Ever wanted to build your own pair of classic, wood-framed snowshoes? Hartwick Pines State Park is hosting a weekend build-your-own-snowshoes workshop Jan. 30-31. The cost is \$160, which covers all materials. Detailed instructions on how to finish your shoes is given if they are not completed in class. The deadline to register for the workshop is Jan. 16. Call 989-348-2537 to reserve a spot or for more information.