

A History of the McCaskie Trail

The McCaskie Trail was the first road to provide vehicular access to the cottages along the north-east end of Loon Lake. It began at what became North Loon Lake Road near the current Rogers cell tower and connected to what is now Redwing Drive, a distance of 1.37 km. It is shown on the map of the; "Loon Lake Wetlands Conservation Preserve C1" as a "secondary road".

My family purchased one of the first Crown Land Lots at the north-east side of Loon Lake in 1959.

When we began building the cottage in the Spring of 1960, my mother who was originally from Bracebridge, enlisted the help of her family members to build a road. The west end of Loon Lake and all of Turtle Lake at that time was still private "farmland" and cottage lots and Loon Lake Road had yet to be created. The 16 Crown Land lot owners on the north-east side of Loon Lake initially chipped in \$100 each and my mother's brother-in-law from Gravenhurst agreed to build a road to serve the 16 lots. His name was Fred McCaskie. Fred was a local entrepreneur and although not a road builder, he had some equipment, loved a challenge and had a strong work ethic. My mother's father, Bernard Henry of Bracebridge was Fred's main "crew". Bernard had been a Muskoka logger, farmer, lake ice-cutter and carpenter. He had experience with dynamite and although in his mid-seventies still had plenty of energy and drive.

What was to become North Loon Lake Road was actually a rough laneway ending at the Birkenshaw family farm about 1 km north of the lake. The route chosen began about 500 metres south of Musquash Road on the Birkenshaw lane and branched off near the present location of the Rogers cell tower.

It was agreed that the road should only traverse Crown Land.

Once completed in 1961 the road came to the lake lots near the north-east corner of Loon Lake and ran parallel to the lake ending just west of the first island at what is now #33 Redwing Drive, a total distance of about 2.5 km. The portion parallel to the lake east of 33 Redwing now forms the eastern section of Redwing Drive maintained by the cottagers. The road was also used by Ontario Hydro crews to bring power to most of Loon Lake.

The McCaskie "road" was upgraded and maintained by the cottagers until the early 1970's. The main challenge was the section of road that ran across the west end of the Mud Lake "swamp". Although the cottagers tried valiantly to build up that section, the swamp "swallowed" every bit of the tons of gravel that were added.

By that time Redwing Drive was completed from North Loon Lake Road and connected to this road. Attempts were finally abandoned to overcome the Mud Lake swamp and the road ceased to be used by cottagers.

The road continues to be used by hunters, hikers, snow machiner's and ATV enthusiasts. The entrance at the north end near the Rogers tower has been blocked off and now ends at Mud Lake.

Muskoka has a rich history of the opening of the lakes and the determination of the many that tackled its granite ridges and bottomless marsh gullies.

I for one, am very thankful for those who put in a great deal of time and effort to make our beautiful lakes so easily accessible.

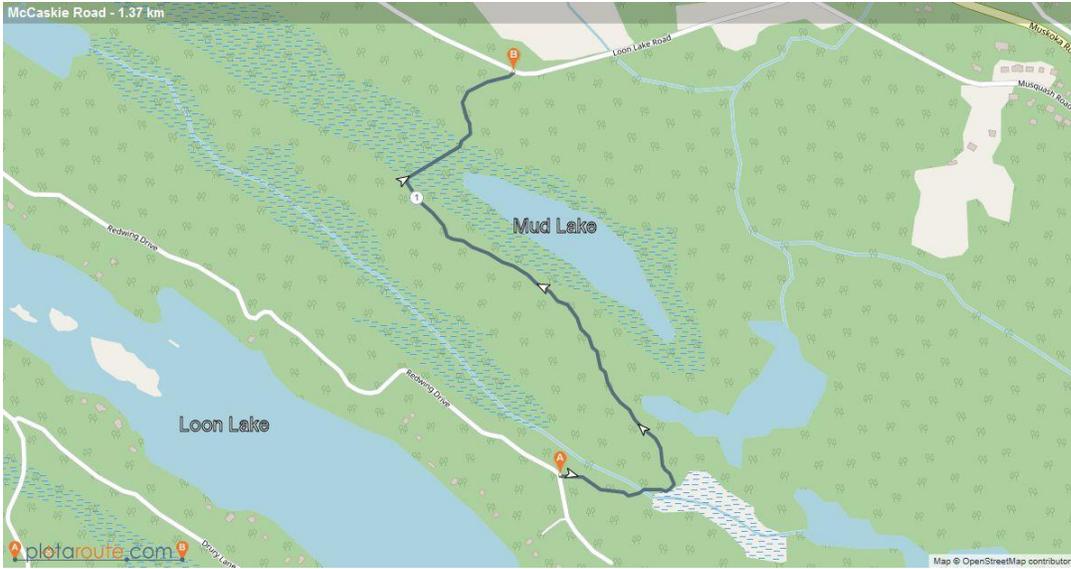
Steve Farrant

45 Redwing Drive

October 2020

Revised Sept 19, 2020

McCaskie Trail from Loon Lake Road to Redwing Drive. Constructed in 1960



McCaskie Trail signage at the corner of Redwing Drive and McCaskie Trail

