

The Toboggan Slide

Say “toboggan slide” to a long-time area resident and you’ll see a great big grin! The toboggan slide in Ellison Park attracted winter recreation enthusiasts to a high bluff on the south side of the park. Located in the towns of Brighton and Penfield, Monroe County established the park in 1927 with a gift of 210 acres of land from Frank T. Ellison. This was the County’s first “wild” park. Visitors were encouraged to hike, ride horses, and picnic in the natural setting.

The creation of a toboggan slide in time for the winter holidays in 1935 was met with great enthusiasm. Parks department crews borrowed plans from other communities with successful slides. Some of those used the winter slides in the summer by adding a sheet metal base that could be waxed for summer use. Monroe County’s did not.

Monroe County’s 800-foot wooden chute dropped from the backyards of Ellison Park Heights to a 1,000 foot straight-away heading toward Blossom Road. After it was packed with about four inches of snow, attendants poured water over the slide to enhance the slipperiness. A four-person toboggan reached speeds of 60 miles per hour as it flew down the chute and over the packed snow in approximately nine seconds. Attendants at the bottom made sure that end was clear before the next toboggan began its trip. A wooden cabin on the lower level offered some warmth and rest before riders hauled their toboggans back up the hill to wait in line for another run.

Avid tobogganers hoped for a succession of below freezing days in the winter that would bring about optimal conditions for the slide to open. Operating from early afternoon through late evening, the slide’s slipperiness at opening time deteriorated through an afternoon of heavy traffic. Even though bathed in floodlights, sometimes attendants found it necessary to close the ride at night due to poor conditions on the chute.

All participants had to stop at the cabin to sign waivers before taking a ride down the slide. Children between eight and ten years old had to be accompanied by adults.

The slide did not open in the winter of 1942-1943 because of restrictions due to World War II. The floodlights could not be used at night because of black out conditions and there were restrictions on the use of electricity for unnecessary purposes. Parks department manpower was at a low point because so many were in military service. With the end of the war in 1945, the toboggan chute reopened but by 1950 the parks department’s attendance figures indicated a substantial drop for the toboggan chute and by the early 1960s it was closed for good.

Fond memories of heart-stopping toboggan runs bring on those big grins!

Mary Jo Lanphear
Town of Brighton Historian
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