

The Lost Trails of Paul d'Allmen

Almost killed in World War I, an unsung Swiss came to map the cross-country ski trails of the Laurentian Mountains.



LAURENTIAN SKI MUSEUM

In 1931, D'Allmen (at left, skiing in the Laurentians) created his first trail map (opposite page). Called "Laurentians Ski Map," it measured just shy of four feet square and was painstakingly drawn in India ink. The map covered 300 square miles of terrain and countless miles of ski trails. It also included 10 resorts, such as Chalet Cochand (upper center, north of Ste-Marguerite) and the Laurentian Lodge Club (lower right, just south of Shawbridge). The famed Maple Leaf Trail, cut and popularized by Jackrabbit Smith-Johannsen, had not yet been conceived.

BY JOSEPH GRAHAM

Herman "Jackrabbit" Smith-Johannsen is synonymous with cross-country skiing in Quebec. In the early 1930s, he began to promote and cut the famous trans-Laurentian Maple Leaf Trail, uniting the ski centers of dozens of hotel resorts. His log shows that he covered close to 1,000 miles every winter during

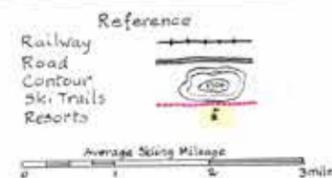
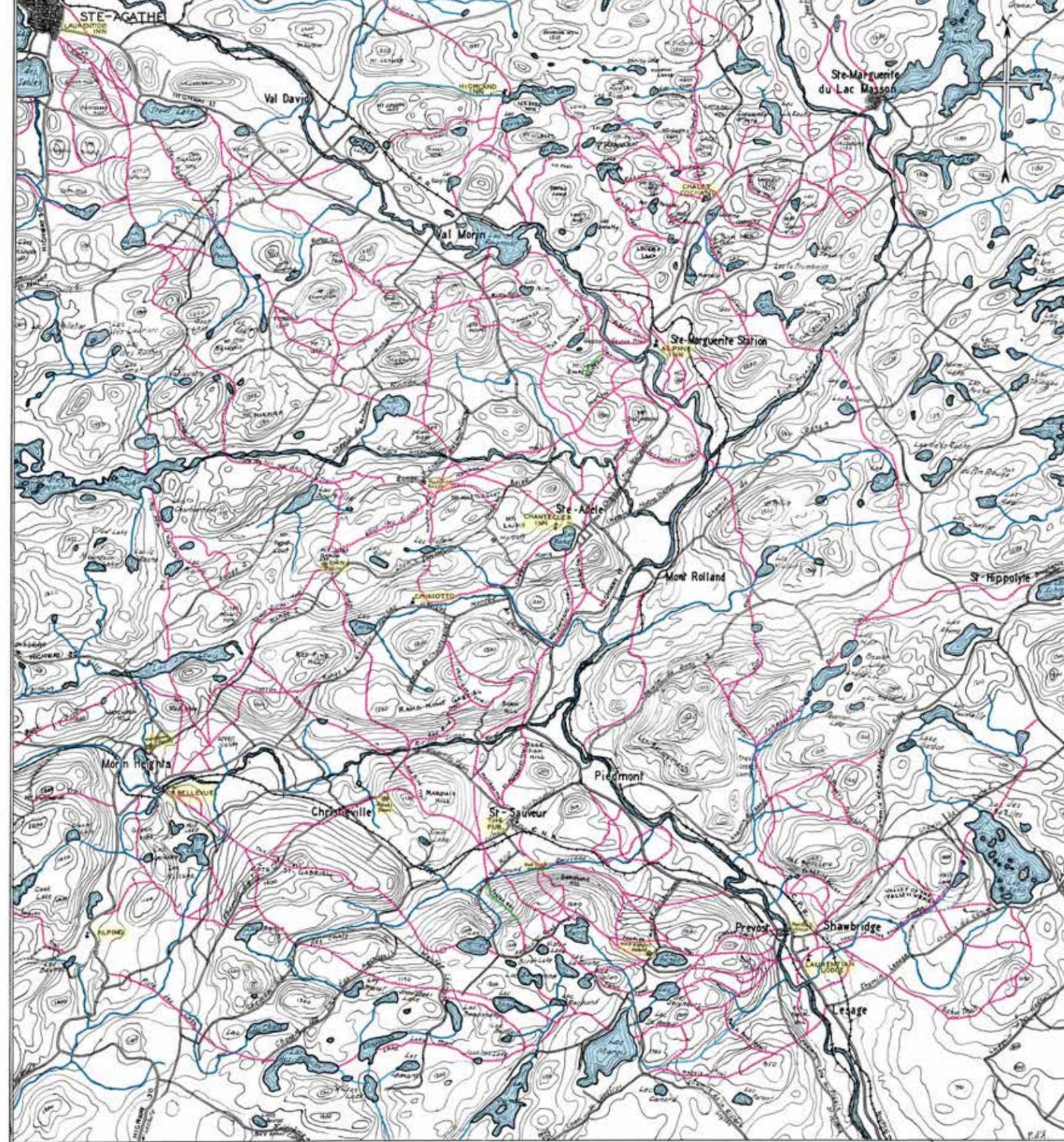
the first three years of the 1940s. Jackrabbit was also the expert behind the ubiquitous *Skiers' Book*, a trail guide funded by Sweet Caporal cigarettes. He died in 1987 at the age of 111, hailed as a national ski legend.

But another pioneer, the Swiss immigrant Paul Von Allmen, also cut, marked and mapped many trails in the Laurentians during the same time period—and he started before

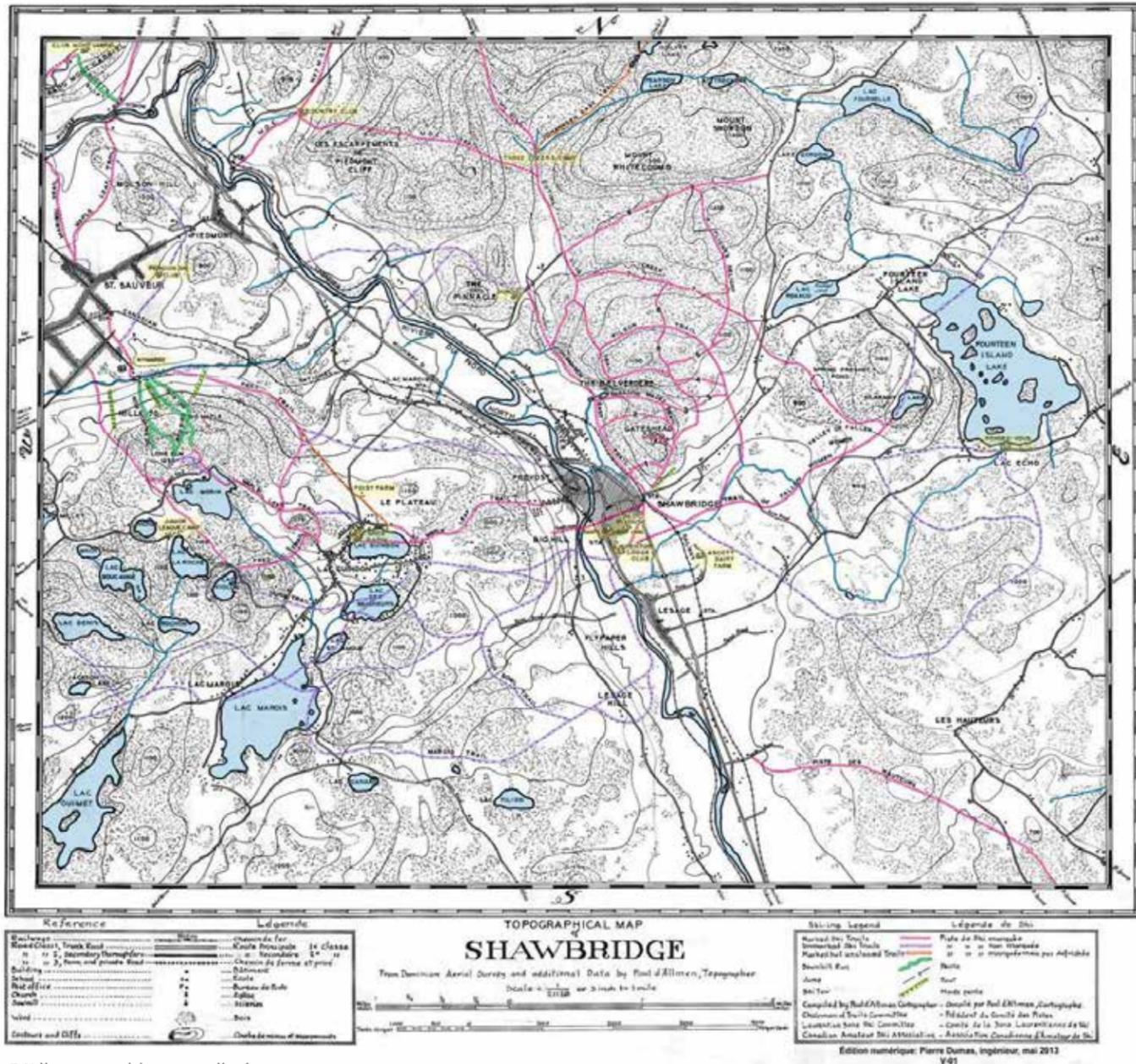
Johannsen conceived the Maple Leaf Trail in 1932. Von Allmen's maps survive, but for the most part his trails have disappeared beneath the developing communities between Ste. Anne des Lacs and St. Sauveur, or have been absorbed into other trail systems and lost their identity.

Raised in Switzerland, Von Allmen moved to Montreal in 1910, at the age of 16, to work as a butler for

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Delineated from Aerial and Geodetic 1927 Survey
Paul d'Allmen
Nov. 1931
Contour and Elevation are not accurate
Edition numérique : Pierre Dumas, oct 2013
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D'Allmen would eventually draw more than 40 maps of the region over four decades, including this detailed map of Shawbridge. It delineates marked cross-country trails in pink and alpine trails in green.

the wealthy Drummond family. In 1915, he enlisted in the 2nd University Company of McGill. He changed his name to d'Allmen—a surname with no connection to Germany—and went to Europe to fight in World War I. Although reported killed on the first day of the Second Battle of Passchendaele on October 30, 1916, he survived with serious disabilities,

including a large metal plate that replaced part of his skull. He made the best of his situation, teaching himself to walk with crutches and finding healing through yoga and the Laurentian woods. He knew his survival was a miracle, and that he had to look after himself with great care. Those who knew him marvelled at his need to meditate, and knew better than to disturb him when he retreated into a trance-like state in order to preserve his health. In 1926, he married, and he and his wife Rhoda soon had two sons.

In the late 1920s, like many Montrealers, the d'Allmen family started spending summers in the Laurentians, renting rooms in rustic farmhouses. Paul would work in the city during the week and take the train to join his family on the weekend. As he advanced in his employment at Montreal Light Heat and Power Consolidated, they found a simple vacation chalet in Ste. Anne des Lacs, and soon came north in the winter also. Having grown up in the mountains of Switzerland, Paul was able to find stability on skis de-

spite his physical challenges, and he found peace while cutting through maple stands or crossing a snow-covered field. He soon began to map the trails he travelled.

In 1931 he produced his first map, calling it simply "Laurentians Ski Map." Carefully drawn in India ink on a sheet a bit shy of four square feet, representing about 300 square miles, it shows Ste. Agathe in the top left corner (northwest limit), Mont Rolland dead center, and encompasses the area south of Lesage in the bottom right (southeast limit). It includes Ste. Marguerite du Lac Masson, Ste. Adèle, St. Sauveur, Morin Heights, Shawbridge, Val Morin, Val David, Ste. Marguerite Station and St. Hippolyte, complete with the roads, railways, contours, miles of ski trails with their names, and

about ten resorts. The names on the map include Lover's Leap, Devil's Jump, Côte du Sac à Dos and Trail of the Fallen Women, a name that seems associated with nothing more than a couple of amusing spills.

Skiers would recognize most of the resort names, including Chalet Cochand, Laurentian Lodge Club, Mont Tremblant and Bellevue. While there is a trail called Johansen [sic], and the trails interconnect right across the territory, there is not yet any trail called the Maple Leaf. That would come later, as d'Allmen would draw more than 40 maps of the region over several decades. His son, Fred, still a resident of Ste. Anne des Lacs, has a total of 46 maps, mostly originals, and a total of 64 maps has been found to date. There are likely others that were

lost or destroyed. Some of the maps were hung in railroad stations to guide skiers, and one was copied and made into a placemat for St. Sauveur's famous Pub. Many of the maps are signed "Paul d'Allmen, Chairman of the Trails Committee of the Laurentian Zone."

D'Allmen used a compass and an altimeter, basing the maps on aerial and geodetic information. He walked and skied trails, marking and cutting, and in the process left documents of a very different time,

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Some of the maps were hung in local railroad stations to guide skiers, while this map of St. Sauveur (below), including the lifts and alpine trails of Hill 70, became the placemat pattern for the Pub.

