



Snow Rollers

Before the snowplow we had horse-drawn snow rollers! In 1886, legislation was passed in Vermont that gave state control of major roads and funding for road maintenance. : The origins of snow rollers can be traced back to the early 19th century when communities needed innovative ways to manage snow-covered roads during the long winter months.

Before the advent of snow rollers, snow was often left untouched, creating uneven surfaces that could hinder travel. In rural areas, residents relied on natural compaction from travelers and livestock. However, these methods were inefficient and inconsistent. Early snow rollers were simple but effective: large wooden cylinders mounted on axles, pulled by teams of horses or oxen. The rollers would compress fresh snow into a dense, smooth layer, making it easier for sleighs to navigate without sinking or becoming stuck. In 1888 the first snow roller teams and "swampers," the boys and men hired to support the snow rollers, got to work. "Never was there invented a colder and more miserable job than driving a team while sitting on top of the roller exposed to wind, snow and cold." While the driver sat their freezing and struggling to keep control of the team of horses that pulled the roller, the swampers job was to run ahead of or with the roller, or ride on the back of the roller. When the roller came to a section of drifted snow too high for the team to push through and pack down, the swampers shoveled the drift down to a packable height.

While the exact origin of snow rollers is unclear, they gained popularity in the northeastern United States and other snow-prone regions by the mid-1800s. Communities adopted them as a practical and cost-effective solution for maintaining roads, especially in areas where sleighs were the primary mode of winter transportation. Hurray for the invention of the snowplow!