

NUMERO UNO

Sledding in Eastern Ontario



ONTARIO
Yours to discover

Story & Photos
by Craig Nicholson



My apologies to local riders in Eastern Ontario, but it's time to share your secret with everyone – you have some mighty fine trail riding. I guess they call your area District 1 for a reason, 'cause it's certainly a numero uno destination for premier sledding!

Dan Carty, Frank Mazzuca, Jim Reavell and Don Webb, joined my wife, Marsha, and I to tow our Triton trailers to Eastern Ontario farm country for a planned six-day swing through their 3,900 kilometres of groomed trails. That's the corner of the province that abuts the Ottawa River to the north, the St. Lawrence River to the south and Quebec to the east. (see *highlighted area on sketch map*). Its proximity to La Belle

Province gives much of Eastern Ontario a distinctive francophone flair that's both charming and intriguing.

We staged from the Aquarius Motel in Perth and pointed our Ski-Doo snowmobiles eastward on TOP Trail E right behind our lodgings. Over the next several days, we made many interesting discoveries...

District 1 Clubs Know How to Groom a Trail.

With snow a scarce commodity across most of North America last winter, Eastern Ontario got just enough for its clubs and volunteers to lay out a smooth product during our visit. We hardly hit a bump during our ride and couldn't believe the consistent trail quality achieved from so little to work

with. All of us agreed that we had never snowmobiled any better trails.

Eastern Ontario trails offer a good variety of riding.

Anchored by some of the best field-trail riding in the province, the District 1 network also boasts a good mix of bush, woodland and swamp riding to break up the farmlands, plus some utility corridors and unopened road allowances. Their extensive network of club trails means there are always different ways to go and rides that can be as short or long as time allows.

The Trail Riding is Exceptional.

About half way through our tour, I suddenly realized that I was really



Riding through Eastern Ontario farm country.

enjoying being able to see all around me. Unlike many other areas, where the trails (and my vision) always seem to be bounded on both sides by dense forests, Eastern Ontario provides riders with wide-open sightlines for much of the time. Combined with many long, unbroken stretches across many of these open fields, the experience is exhilarating and imparts an exciting new rush of freedom to your ride.

Roads Are a Fact of Life.

With so many farms and small communities, Eastern Ontario is crisscrossed by roads, which inevitably interface with snowmobile trails. The good news is that more than any other place I've ridden recently, District 1 has successfully integrated these roadsides and ditches into their trail system with as little disruption as possible. For our trip, the places where trails followed roads were mostly ice



District 1 has installed map boards at most intersections.

or snow covered, and usually also well marked and groomed. I expect that this would be the case any time Old Man Winter provides enough snow and cold for good trails. Also, District 1 places a sign with the road name at most trail crossings, which makes navigation easier for visitors who carry a local road map along with their trail map.

Speaking of roads, two major Ontario 400 series highways cut through Eastern Ontario, 416 and 417. Their construction certainly had the potential to seriously disrupt the existing District 1 trail system, but full points to the clubs for arranging sufficient places for sleds to get from one side of each highway to the other, either by overpass or tunnel.

You're Never far From Services or Help.

Another function of the plethora of farms and communities is that riding in Eastern Ontario never feels remote. Mostly, you can see several farms nearby, and towns and villages pop up all over the place. The trails are laid out to go to these places, so food and fuel are easy to come by (and many are marked with generic icons on the District 1 Trail Guide). Lodging is a little less available, but there are enough places to stay, just check the Trail Guide's advertisers and icons. But be forewarned: five of our six accommodations did not have an on site restaurant for dinner, so plan

to ride your sled or budget for a few taxis. With the notable exception of Cornwall (see sidebar), most towns on our tour provided good trail access.

Always follow the stakes.

Most of Eastern Ontario's snowmobile trails cross private property and remain in place thanks to the goodwill and generosity of the landowners. The clubs lay out an agreed upon route across the fields and mark it clearly with lots of orange stakes. All we snowmobilers have to do is stay on the marked trail and everyone will be happy, but too often we spotted places where ignorant riders had cut corners or simply run along beside the trail, outside of the stakes - both sure ways to put a permanent end to the privilege of riding that trail.

Navigation is Pretty Good.

A couple of years ago, District 1 embarked on a major project to install map boards at most intersections. These, combined with good signs indicating the direction to various towns en route, make getting around fairly easy for visitors. In addition, TOP Trail numbers are plentiful, although some clubs are farther along with their own local trail numbers than others. In some cases, a club trail number is on the trail, but not on the guide, or on the guide, but not on the trail. In any case, if you're unsure, you never have to go far before getting re-oriented at the next intersection.



Clubhouse of the world's #1 snowmobile club, Osgoode Carleton.

One major navigation tool is missing in Eastern Ontario: nothing to indicate point-to-point distances on their District 1 Trail Guide. This deficiency makes it difficult for visitors to plan their tour or get a true perspective of distances. There are kilometre markings on many trail signs, but that's no help with advance planning. Point-to-point distances on the trail guide would be especially useful given so many club trail alternatives.

Tucked off in its own corner of the province, Eastern Ontario may not be as top of mind as it should be as a snowmobiling destination. But it's easily accessible for Ontarians by Highway 401, close for Quebecers out of the Montreal area, and the entry point to Canada for American riders crossing the border at Gananoque, Prescott or Cornwall. So make sure it's on your radar when you're next looking for some great trail riding.

Every tour I did last winter was like riding on borrowed time. Conditions could be A-1 on one day, then unrideable the next. That's what happened in Eastern Ontario. A province-wide melt and flash freeze turned decent snow rock hard and icy for our ride into Smiths Falls on Day Five. By next morning, there was no lube anywhere for our sliders, so we packed up a day early to head home, missing our journey into the northern part of District 1 and our scheduled overnigher in Calabogie. But we didn't feel the least bit gypped by this minor setback. After all, we'd just had four incredible days of primo riding in a numero uno Ontario destination. Besides, their trails were back up and running again within a week or so after another snowfall. And now that we've enjoyed Eastern Ontario so much, it's your turn to sample their wares!



Most creeks and ditches have bridges or culverts.

Cornwall is missing the boat on snowmobiling tourism. This Eastern Ontario town has the opportunity to benefit from spending by visiting snowmobilers, but isn't. Although the local Riverside Snowmobile Club maintain a local trail, RS12, on the west side of town, it kind of peters out after the Village of Long Sault, where it becomes an "unofficial" trail. Apparently, a lot of sledders ride it anyway but I understand that all or most of the land belongs to the Cornwall Parks Department who have not encouraged or approved any trail.

To get to our Cornwall lodgings, we simply followed the tracks of other sleds into the west end of town (see Day Two, Where We Stayed for detailed directions), but there were no signs. Several hotels and restaurants are located there, which could service snowmobilers and increase their winter business if an official trail was in place. The route's being used anyway, so why not make it official, Cornwall?



Special thanks to Marie White, Linda Wilson, Annie Grenier, Chantal Nadeau and John Boals for assistance with this tour. Craig's tours are made possible by BRP (Ski-Doo), Gateway Powersports, FXR Racing, Murphy Insurance, Launch Helmet Cams, Triton Trailers, Woody's and Unica Insurance.

Craig Nicholson is the author of "Canada's Best Snowmobiling - Your Ultimate Ride Guide". His snowmobile writing also appears in many newspapers, magazines and websites. He also hosts "The Intrepid Snowmobiler on Radio" and appears on Snowmobile Television. For more info, visit www.intrepidsnowmobiler.com



SGC Vacation Guide - Craig's Tour

Who To Contact

- **Lanark County Tourism**
lanarkcountytourism.com
- **OFSC District 1**
www.district1ofsc.ca
- **Cornwall & Seaway Valley Tourism**
www.visit.cornwall.on.ca
- **Prescott Russell Tourism**
www.prescott-russell.on.ca
- **Ontario Tourism**
gorideontario.ca

Maps Needed

- OFSC District 1
- OFSC District 6
- OFSC Provincial Trail Guide

Our Tour Itinerary

1,021 kilometres in 4 days of riding

Notes

1. TOP = Trans Ontario Provincial; CT = Club Trail.

DAY ONE

Trailer to Perth (drive time from Greater Toronto Area: approx. 4 hours)

Where To Stay: Aquarius Motel (613) 267 4261 or www.aquariusmotel.ca. TOP Trail E runs right behind this clean roadside motel located on north side of Highway 7 at west end of town. Parking for trucks & trailers. Convenience stores and fuel nearby.

Where To Eat: Dinner at Maximilian's Restaurant (downtown), 613-267-2536 or www.maximiliansrestaurant.ca.

DAY TWO

Ride from Perth to Cornwall. 255 km (8 hrs) via TOP E east/TOP E103 north/TOP E104A east/TOP A east/TOP A212 south/TOP A104 south/CT east through Chesterville to CT-RS10 east/RS14 east/TOP104 south/CT-RS12 east. Fuel: Metcalfe; Long Sault. Lunch: Osgoode.

Where To Stay: First Canada Inns (613) 936-0400 or www.firstcanadainns.ca. Clean roadside motel located on south side of Vincent Massey Drive (Cty Road 2) at west end of town. Not well signed. Motel is trail accessible via unofficial trail that continues after RS 12 ends. It's 15 km east of the intersection of TOP A104 & RS12 and 10 km from the McEwan gas station. Follow unofficial trail to Power Dam Rd. where it turns right along the roadside toward the St. Lawrence River, then turn left at the hydrdo line, crossing the road to go past 6 towers and take next left, which comes out at Cty Rd 2. The motel is about 500 metres to the east (right) on the same side.

Where To Eat: Breakfast (Perth) - Penny's Place (east of motel on Hgy 7) (613) 267-639. Trail access from TOP E into Carson's Marine. Dinner - Brook Valley Grill (Ramada Inn, Cornwall) (613) 933-8000 or www.cornwallramada.com/resto.htm

DAY THREE

Ride from Cornwall to Hawkesbury. 255 km (8.5 hrs) via CT-RS12/TOP 104 west/CT-RS6/CT-K42/TOP 104 east/TOP212 north/TOP A east/CT-CR820 north/CT-E058 east/CT-E055 north/TOP213Q south/CT-E030 east/TOP A east/CT-E050 north/CT-E020 east. Fuel: Casselman; Hawkesbury. Lunch: Metcalfe

Where To Stay: Best Western l'Heritage Plus (613) 632-5941 or bestwesternontario.com/hotels/best-western-plus-lheritage. Located across the road from Club Trail EO20, with fuel just east on trail.

Where To Eat: Breakfast (Cornwall) - Tim Horton's on CT-RS12 (Long Sault). Dinner - various local options.

DAY FOUR

Ride from Hawkesbury to Morrisburg. 287 km (8 hrs.) via various club trail loops to TOP A104 at Morrisburg. Fuel: St. Isadore; Morrisburg. Lunch: St. Isadore.

Where To Stay: McIntosh Inn (613) 543-3788 or www.mcintoshcountryinn.com. Located on TOP A104, this snowmobile-friendly hotel offers on site restaurant, pub, hot tub and plenty of parking. Fuel and convenience store across the road.

Where To Eat: Breakfast (Hawkesbury) - Best Western. Dinner - Mac's Tavern, McIntosh Inn.

DAY FIVE

Ride from Morrisburg to Smiths Falls. 224 km (7.5 hrs) via TOP 104 north, Club trails to TOP A west/CT-CR101 west/KOC Trail south becomes CT-K43/TOP A104 west/CT-RSC53 west/TOP E south.

Where To Stay: Rogers Motel 613 283-5200 or www.rogersmotel.ca. Roadside motel located ½ block across road from trail at south end of town. Fuel nearby. Not well signed through town.

Where To Eat: Breakfast (Morrisburg) - McIntosh Inn. Dinner - Gerbo's Restaurant (downtown Smiths Falls) (613) 283-4940.

DAY SIX

Note - this day was cancelled due to icy conditions. We were supposed to loop north into the Ottawa Valley and stay overnight in Calabogie, then on Day Seven, ride back to Perth and trailer home.

Proposed: Calabogie Lodging: Jocko's Beach Resort (613) 752-2107 or www.jockosbeach.com

Proposed Restaurants: Breakfast (Smiths Falls) - The Roosterant. Dinner - Shooter's Bar & Grill (Calabogie) (613) 752-1383. Breakfast on Day Seven - Pinky's (Calabogie) (613) 752-1444. Lunch on Day Seven: Wheeler's Pancake House www.wheelersmaple.com.

DAY SEVEN

Trailer home.