

Double Hitter

Quebec Sledding in Centre-du-Quebec & Chaudière-Appalaches



Must be my lucky place. We'd stopped at the lookout on top of Mont-Saint-Magloire (off Trail 549) in the park called Massif du Sud. Ready to saddle up, Marsha noticed coolant on the snow under her Ski-Doo Renegade. But it wasn't a leak; the rad cap was missing! Unable to find it anywhere, we jerry-rigged a piece of plastic over the open neck, held in place with duck tape and a zip tie. I crossed my fingers, but didn't like our odds given that a rad is pressurized and a baggie isn't.

A thousand metres down the trail, two Quebec riders standing beside a lone Ski-Doo flagged us down. They'd been riding two-up on a one-person sled without adjusting the suspension. The extra weight had sagged the back end so much that a stud had holed the heat exchanger. Boy, talk about coolant on the snow!

They were looking for a tow to the nearest road, so I thought – let's make a deal! Their sled wasn't going to function again without a heat exchanger repair. Until then, it wouldn't need a rad cap. So we'd tow their sled in exchange for their rad cap. What are the odds of any two sleds of the same make having coolant problems at the same time and place, or one's cap fitting another's sled? Or of my being able to cut that deal when I don't speak French and they didn't speak English? Despite our good luck, Day Four was shorter than intended because we hightailed it direct to Performance G.P., the Ski-Doo dealer in Montmagny to double check that Marsha's sled was okay.

Plenty of Snow

But Lady Luck has always been with me in Chaudière-Appalaches. This region is located due south of the City of Quebec and east of the Chaudière River, while its partner-in-snowmobiling, the Centre-du-Quebec Region, is positioned south of the City of Trois Rivières and on the west side of the Chaudière. These neighbouring regions are sandwiched between the St. Lawrence River and the U. S. border. Not where most sledders expect to find good snow and remarkable trails, but they'd be surprised...

The interior of these regions has plenty of the white stuff. Why? Because



Covered bridge at Notre-Dame-des-Pain.

as the Chaudière-Appalaches name implies, offshoots of the Appalachian Mountains are their primary terrain feature. This elevation is a serious snow generator, with the highlands of Chaudière-Appalaches getting the lion's share. In fact on a previous visit there, I ran into so much snow that impassable drifts blocked a few trails, much like what I've also encountered in Gaspésie. For most of this tour, a good dusting of fresh snow fell overnight. Just right for great riding, except for Day Three, when the new snow was so heavy and wet that the going was much harder than expected. Slow day!

Lots of Trails

It was early March when our Snow Goer Canada crew – Dan Carty, Frank Crocco, Glenn King, Don Webb, my wife Marsha and I – loaded up our Triton Trailers from Gateway Powersports in Peterborough, Ontario. We trailered eight hours and staged from Manoir du Lac William near Thetford Mines.

Story and Photos By Craig Nicholson,
The Intrepid Snowmobiler



Over the next five days, we rode 1,415 kilometres in the adjacent regions. Our overnight stays included Le Manoir Lac Etchemin, Villégiature & Pourvoirie Daaquam, Econo Lodge & Suites, and Motel Invitation (see Itinerary).

This was not set up as a destination tour, where we ride linearly over a long distance to arrive at one location after another. Rather, our exploration of Centre-du-Quebec & Chaudière-Appalaches was more like a series of day trip loops with saddlebags. We stayed at different places each night, but our mission wasn't to pass through either region on our way to some place else. Instead, we wanted to ride as many of their trails as we possibly could, preferably with as little duplication as possible. Having about 4,000 kilometres of groomed trails, this was an easy accomplishment. Our tour also occurred within what is normally their best window of opportunity snow-wise...

Snow can blanket the highlands as early as mid-December and can last to the end of March. But for touring riders, the best period to visit Centre-du-Quebec and Chaudière-Appalaches is between the last weeks of January and the first week or so of March. Normally, this is when their entire trail system is open and ready. To view their trails, check out the hard-copy snowmobile trail map that the two regions



Parc Massif du Sud with snow-crammed evergreens.

share. It's accurate and made from the most waterproof paper of any snowmobile map I've used. It's also user-friendly, especially once I realized that the distance numbers shown are miles, not kilometres. This is certainly essential to know before planning your tour to avoid riding marathon distances – like setting out to ride what you think is 250 kilometres, only to discover it's really 250 miles, ouch. Just saying, because of course this couldn't possibly have happened to a so-called touring expert like me!

ATVs and Maple Syrup

Not that it should, but one item the map doesn't show is the regions' extensive and parallel system of ATV trails. Visiting riders need to be careful about these, because the frequent points of intersection of the two trail networks can be confusing if you're not used to it. Sometimes, I started slowing for an upcoming STOP sign only to realize that it was on the ATV trail, not the snowmobile trail. A couple of times, particularly after travelling a stretch of shared trail, I found it dicey

trying to decide quickly which was which when the two trails separated again ahead. There were plenty of ATVs out on their own trails, so it was also important to keep an eye on that traffic. When in doubt, remember that red stakes are for snowmobiles and blue stakes are for ATVs.

Another interesting trail characteristic in Centre-du-Quebec & Chaudière-Appalaches involves maple syrup, and I don't mean on pancakes. Both regions are major producers of the sweet stuff. Many snowmobile trails pass through countless sugar bushes that are criss-crossed with lines carrying the sap from the trees to the sugar shack. Many of these lines cross trails and are propped up well above head height until the sap starts running. Then to allow gravity feed, lines over trails are lowered, effectively closing those corridors to snowmobiling sometime after mid-March.

Our tour occurred before the start of syrup operations, so riding through the sugar bushes was neat. Each looks like a cat's cradle of multi-coloured tubing woven helter-skelter through the forest, as if trying to tie the trees together in one massive web. It was close to start up time, so some of the strands over the trail were low enough that we had to duck to get under. In one case, my ski caught a tube that had fallen down on the trail. I managed to stop before it broke, but stretched it so far forward in a huge "V" that I had visions of my sled being catapulted backwards like a stone out of a slingshot. Or riding off with the tubing from an entire sugar bush hanging from my sled!

Snow and Ice

Just like other high country destinations, snow cover decreases coming down from the hills to the towns and services on the lowlands near the St. Lawrence River. But the flip side is that snow always gets better going up. And as much as I'm familiar with this phenomenon, I never cease to be amazed: climbing to a higher elevation in Centre-du-Quebec or Chaudière-Appalaches put us into a whole new world of snow. For example, the trails (547 & 549) around Parc Massif du Sud reminded me of sledding over hill

Main Towns

Centre-du-Quebec: Bécancour, Drummondville, Nicolet, Plessisville, Victoriaville.
Chaudière-Appalaches: Lac Etchemin, Lévis, Montmagny, Saint-Georges, Sainte-Marie, Thetford Mines.

Must Ride Trails

- All Trail 551
- All Trail 55
- Trails 547 and 549 through Parc Massif du Sud

Must See Sights

- 360' Long covered bridge at Notre-Dame-des-Pain (Trail 55)
- Lookouts at Mont du Midi and Mont Saint Magloire, Parc Massif du Sud (Trails 547 & 549)
- Les Glaciers Ice Caves (Trail 549)
- Deer Yards at Saint-Gédéon (Trail 580) & Armstrong (Trail 75)



Snow covered mountain lookout.

that's another good reason to visit from late January to early March.

Centre-du-Quebec & Chaudière-Appalaches are easy to get to by good roads, but too many snowmobilers miss this great destination by trailering north of the St. Lawrence or continuing east to Gaspésie. So next time you visit La Belle Province, take Highway 20 on the south side of the river, then head south for some of Quebec's best trail riding.

Special thanks to Louis Chamberland for assistance with this tour. Craig's tours are made possible by BRP (Ski-Doo), Gateway Powersports, FXR Racing, Triton Trailers, Woody's 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



Miles of trails through the highlands.

and dale in West Yellowstone. They were replete with snow-crammed evergreens, high snow banks along the trails, and off trail powder deep enough to bury anyone that strays from the groomed surface. The highest elevations even had snow ghosts – evergreens completely encased in frozen snow sheathes, as were the lookout towers atop both mountains.

Another good reason to visit during peak snow time is that sometime in March, the ice falls away from the banks in many of the rivers as temper-

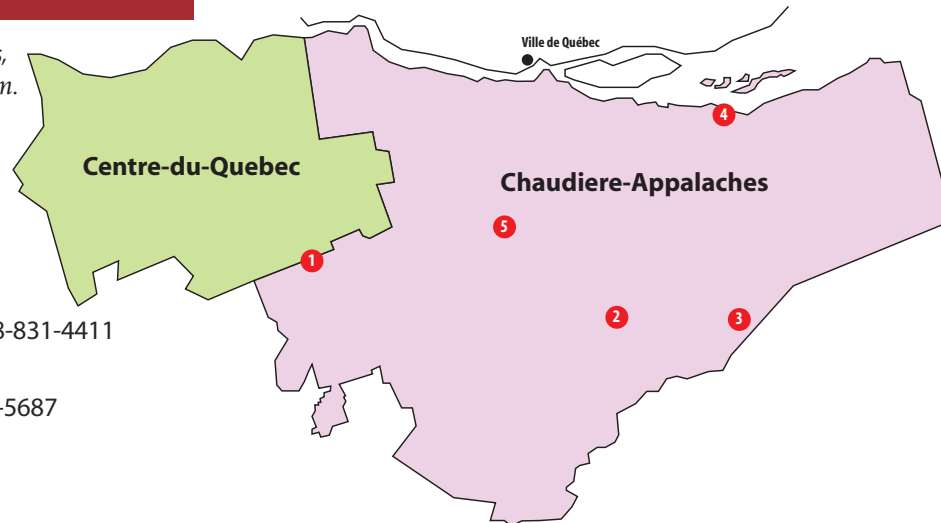
atures moderate. While many rivers are bridged, crossing on those without can become impossible after the ice falls. We came to one such crossing on Trail 35 at Saint-Matachie with a closed sign at the river. Fortunately, a detour on town streets took us across the highway bridge, but involved some road running. Speaking of which, near some of the populated areas there was a little too much road running for my liking. While most roadsides had sufficient snow coverage, these would be the first to go when snow melts, so

Tour Info

For Craig's full tour itinerary, including trails, fuel and food, visit www.snowgoercanada.com.

Who To Contact

- Tourism Centre-du-Quebec
- www.tourismecentreduquebec.com
or 1-888-816-4007
- Tourisme Chaudière-Appalaches
- www.chaudiereappalaches.com or 1-888-831-4411
- Tourisme Quebec
- www.bonjourquebec.com or 1-877-266-5687
- FCMQ (for maps, permits and trail info)
- www.fcmq.qc.ca



WHERE WE STAYED

1. Manoir du Lac William, Saint-Ferdinand
1-800-428-9188 or www.manoirdulac.com.
Winter friendly lakeside resort is set up for snowmobilers with secure parking for trailers and heated garage for sleds. On site restaurant and bar, plus indoor pool, and indoor and outdoor hot tubs. Newly renovated rooms are classy and comfortable. Direct trail access either from stake line on lake or trail on road shoulder.



2. Le Manoir Lac Etchemin, Lac Etchemin
1-800-463-8489 or www.manoirlacetchemin.com.
Lakeside hotel with onsite restaurant and bar, plus secure sled parking. Direct trail access from stake line on lake.



3. Villégiature & Pourvoirie Daaquam, Saint-Just-de-Bretenières
1-888-558-3442 or www.daaquam.qc.ca.
Tucked away near the U.S. border, this adventure outfitter offers rooms in the main lodge and rustic housekeeping cabins of various sizes. Home-cooked meals in licenced main lodge, plus outdoor hot tub and indoor swim spa. Direct access by private trail from RT547.



4. Econo Lodge & Suites, Montmagny
1-866-604-4515 or www.econolodgemontmagny.com.
Decent roadside motel is the only one in town right on TQ5. Sled parking in front of rooms and ample truck parking beside motel. Continental breakfast provided.



5. Motel Invitation, Sainte-Marie
1-888-213-7800 or www.motelinvitation.com.
Clean roadside motel located on main road of Saint-Marie and with direct access from TQ35.

Globalstar GSP-1700 Handheld Satellite Phone

By Craig Nicholson, *The Intrepid Snowmobiler*

I was on tour when a sled broke down on a trail with no cell service. Before we made a beeline for the nearest dealer, I called ahead on my Globalstar GSP-1700 Handheld Satellite Phone to request service to avoid a layover that would lose the next day's riding. Fortunately, I never had any other urgent need to use my sat phone last winter, but this is why I always carry it with me snowmobiling.

I figure that more than 70% of the places I ride are out of cell service, so the reliability of the Globalstar GSP-1700 Handheld unit gives me great peace of mind. Best of all, using my sat phone in an emergency means no uncertainty – I can call multiple responders, know who I've reached and when they're coming, give them all the pertinent information they need, and they can even call me back. I can also call any family or friends to let them know what's up. What's more, I can use my live unit to provide my location to first responders or provide additional information regarding an emergency situation. And in the rare case when we're staying overnight at remote outfitter with no land or cell service, I can also call home to confirm we're okay.

Not so long ago, a satellite phone was expensive – costly to buy and pricey to operate. But my GSP-1700 unit retails at only \$499 and a basic plan can be had for as little as \$40 per month, with no extra charges if you never use the phone except for urgencies and emergencies. And if regular riding buddies share the cost of having one Globalstar satellite phone with them on tour, you're really looking at peanuts dollar wise, especially compared to the alternative of being totally out of touch and having to ride a long way for help when timing may be critical.

Cell phone service is still typically located in high population areas and along main highway corridors with limited coverage. So relying on cell service while snowmobiling could be a crapshoot. On the other hand, Globalstar sat phones use a second-generation constellation consisting of 32 Low Earth Orbit satellites. They provide comprehensive coverage throughout snowbelt North America, so your Globalstar satellite phone will work virtually anywhere you ride. There's no perceptible voice delay, excellent clarity, and thanks to multiple satellites, minimal call interruption.

The Globalstar GSP-1700 sat phone is a little bigger than a cell phone, but is still highly portable – pretty stylish too, with no more of that bulky industrial look

Tested on Tour



satellite phones were once know for. This is good news for snowmobilers when space is at a premium. It isn't even necessary to carry the sat phone in an inside pocket; instead, place the battery inside to stay warm, while keeping the phone elsewhere. Each battery is rated for four hours talk time and 36 hours in standby mode, but these times will likely be reduced when used in the freezing cold. So if a couple of riders carry fully charged extra batteries, your sat phone will have plenty of juice in the cold to make multiple calls and be left on in an emergency. Just remember to keep the batteries charged every night as needed.

There's no rocket science to operating a sat phone. Find an outdoor location with an unobstructed view of the sky. Raise the antenna and point it up. Turn the unit on. Wait for connection and dial just like on any other kind of phone. To maintain optimum connection, don't be moving around while talking; keep the antenna pointed in the same direction and at the same angle. There's only one challenge no phone maker has yet overcome – how to hold a unit up to your mouth and ear with a helmet on, so keep a warm tuque handy! To learn more about Globalstar Satellite Phones, visit www.globalstar.com or call your local Globalstar dealer.