

# High Country Riding in the Maritimes

## Sledding Cape Breton and the Fundy Highlands



*Always in search of noteworthy sledding destinations, our Snow Goer Canada crew – Johnny Biasi, Dan Carty, Frank Mazucca, Trish Robinson, my wife Marsha and I – set out for the Maritimes last winter from Gateway Powersports & Marine in Peterborough, Ontario. We snowmobiled in the Cape Breton region of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick's Fundy Highlands and had two different, but equally remarkable experiences...*

### CAPE BRETON

The late Rita McNeil's ode to Cape Breton "Home I'll Be" blared on my SUV stereo. We were towing our Triton trailers across the famous Canso Causeway from mainland Nova Scotia to the island whose majestic scenery many find reminiscent of Scotland. The terrain rose rapidly from the coast up to the highlands interior of "Zone 1" (to the west of Bras d'Or Lake) so designated by the Snowmobilers Association of Nova Scotia (SANS).

The only thing predictable about Cape Breton's weather is that it won't be the same a moment later. Surrounded by salt water and blessed by the elevation of part of the Appalachian Mountains, it's a snowmak-

ing machine – on average, Baddeck boasts 54.5 snow days with annual accumulations of almost 300 centimetres. There's even more less than half an hour away in the highlands! For snowmobilers, this begets a sledding season that typically runs from November to May. It also means being prepared for a wide variety of conditions, as we quickly discovered...

*Story, Photos | Craig Nicholson,  
The Intrepid Snowmobiler*



### Changing Conditions

Our first riding day, the mercury was hovering near 0°C. The clouds were loaded with precipitation that would fall as snow or rain depending on temperature and elevation. Eager to get started with our guides, Floyd & Cherie Cock and Mike Eddy, we departed in drizzle, climbed to wet snow and later hit steady rain. Visibility reduced to about 30% thanks to rain-spattered visors, so we cut the day short after several of us were soaked to the skin. Fortunately, the trails were well groomed, and at +5°C, we didn't freeze our buns off, but our gear took eight hours to dehydrate in industrial dryers!

In many other places, a wet day could destroy the trails, but not in Cape Breton, where the grooming's good and it seems to snow every night. Led by local club stalwart John Austin, we rode the next overcast morning on decent trails, but the previous day's rainfall had caused some trail flooding. We water-skipped across some low lying patches, and powered through several long stretches of slob (heavy slush), that threatened to suck anyone with a hesitant throttle thumb to a

## Cape Breton



messy standstill. Nevertheless, we experienced some mighty fine trail riding on those highland forest roads!

Another day, a foot of fresh powder covered the trails and drifted over in many places. We had to ride carefully, because it was impossible to differentiate the edges of the packed surface underneath. More than a few burials resulted when sleds slipped off into seemingly bottomless powder, but by our final day, the surface had tightened up enough that we enjoyed normal trail conditions.

### Adventure Trails

Cape Breton is an adventure-riding destination. It has some commonalities with destinations like Western Newfoundland, Saguenay's Monts-Valin, the Chic-Chocs of Gaspésie, and Alberta's foothills. Cape Breton also offers a good trail system with regular grooming operations that are always

challenged to overcome continual dumps of snow and constant drifting. As we found, the same trail can be hard-packed one day and bottomless powder the next. The trails are primarily laid out on existing forest roads, unused for logging during the winter, plus some running on abandoned rail lines. Most trails are land-based, with most water crossings bridged.

The best riding is in the highland interior, so the trails tend to lead up from the shoreline or valley areas. These trails also provide access from the highlands down to services and amenities, many of which are indicated by appropriate symbols on the Zone 1 trail map. Watch your gas carefully, because the next station may be farther than you think. There are three clubhouse/shelters identified on the map in the area we snowmobiled.

Cape Breton trails are numbered and marked both on the snow and on



the map. Most intersections have numbers and destination signs to help point riders in the right direction. The Zone 1 map also includes waypoint coordinates for these intersections, so it makes good sense to use a GPS while snowmobiling here. Relying on the map and GPS is especially necessary given the possibility of making a wrong turn, either inadvertently or during poor visibility conditions, on one of the many unmaintained corridors that crisscross the highlands and the SANS trails. These provide many off-trail riding options if pure powder riding is your thing. But cell service can be spotty in the remote interior, so I relied on my Globalstar Satellite Phone as emergency back up.

Cape Breton isn't a long distance riding destination. It's more of an exploration kind of place, with high hills and windswept plateaus interspersed with glacial valleys. There are many ups and downs, with some exceptional views entering or exiting the valleys. It's a very unique place to ride, made even more appealing by the down-home warmth and hospitality of everyone you'll meet. Definitely worth a visit!



# Fundy Highlands



## FUNDY HIGHLANDS

The Fundy Highlands are a large snow pocket located in southern New Brunswick along the west shore of the Bay of Fundy, between Saint John to the southwest and Moncton to the northeast. The Highlands benefits from good snow generated by maritime weather and terrain elevation. It is part of the same Appalachian Mountain range that thrusts up again in Cape Breton. This high country is interspersed with a multitude of forestry roads that serve as wide, smooth trails each winter – and snowmobilers searching for some of Atlantic Canada’s best riding need look no farther than this.

### Getting There

When snow’s good everywhere, riders can choose to trailer (or snowmobile) to the periphery of the Fundy Highlands area, then ride in from such locations as the Hampton Inn, Moncton

(east) or the Queen’s County Inn, Chipman (north) for two to four days of great sledding without much repetition. You can also ride in by trail from the Fredericton (west) or Miramichi areas (north) or from Nova Scotia through the Sackville area as part of a saddlebag tour.

I’ve visited the Fundy Highlands twice now and never run out of snow. However, while there can be oodles of it in the heart of the highlands, depending on the season or time of winter coverage can be skimpy north towards Poley Mountain or Sussex, southwest towards Saint John, or even northeast towards Moncton. When these periphery areas are uncertain, there’s likely still great snow in the Fundy Highlands proper. You can find it by trailering to stay over at Adair’s Wilderness Lodge (in the west - Local Trail 814) or on day trips to the SENBSA (Southeast New Brunswick Snowmobile Association) clubhouse

(in the east - Local Trail 864), while overnighing in Moncton. Both these locations have gas, food and parking (Adair’s has lodgings too). This way, you can do your entire ride within the Highlands.

### Visiting the Bay

The Bay of Fundy is not only a major weather factor for the Highlands, it’s also one of New Brunswick’s primary tourist attractions. So part of our mission on this tour was to ride down to its shore. We accomplished this at the Broadleaf Guest Ranch near Riverside Albert (Local Trail 864), which overlooks the bay. We also snowmobiled right on to a fishing wharf at Alma (Local Trail 871) and onto the beach itself at Martin Head (Local Trail 819). We would have made the bay a fourth time at Saint Martins (Local Trail 808) if the snow hadn’t melted off the side of a final section of road down to the water. Each of these scenic local trails

is worth a ride for its own sake, even if the tide’s out when you reach the Bay of Fundy.

### Our Route

Our Snow Goer Canada crew staged out of Moncton’s Hampton Inn. To get to the Fundy Highlands from this location, you either ride a circuitous northern loop or head west toward Magnetic Hill, following a decently marked but unofficial route that at one point travels the centre median of the Trans Canada Highway. We departed by the former and returned by the latter, so both work okay for Highlands access.

For our three-day tour, we rode clockwise out of Moncton to Caledonia Mountain and down to the Bay of Fundy. We skirted the north side of Fundy National Park on trails running roughly parallel to the coast, and finally looped north through the Highlands interior to Chipman on New Brunswick trail 15, from where we deadheaded back to Moncton on new Local Trail 704.

Trails 15 and 704 are interesting examples of old and new. Trail 15 is the old, and it appears on the Saint John & Moncton South Zone 8 trail map in blue. This colour indicates a fully functional provincial trail, but it’s not, at least from the junction of Local Trail 852 and north to Chipman. To start, it has a confusing mishmash of old trail numbers as well as “15’s” along its length. It’s comprised mostly of haul roads, but with a few goat paths thrown into the mix just to keep us on our toes. That said, I’ve snowmobiled it twice without getting lost; this old trail is just not up to New Brunswick’s usual high standards, unlike the new Local Trail 704. Officially opened in last winter as a shortcut from Chipman to Moncton, 704 is as good as trail riding gets (with the exception of one dipsy-doodle around a railway track). The crew that put in 704 needs to spend some time on 15!

In fairness, I should note that neither 15 nor 704 are in the Fundy Highlands proper – and that every trail we

rode in the Highlands was outstanding. So from whatever direction you choose to enter New Brunswick’s Fundy Highlands, once there you’ll discover a real sledding gem that will keep your heart pounding for every minute of every ride – and that will keep you coming back for more!

*Special thanks to Ross Antworth, Alison Aiton, Mike Eddy, Floyd Cock and Pam Wamback for assistance with this tour. Craig’s tours are made possible by BRP (Ski-Doo), Gateway Powersports, FXR Racing, Triton Trailers, and Woody’s.*

*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](http://www.intrepidsnowmobiler.com)*





## Who to Contact

**Tourism Nova Scotia** – www.nova.scotia.com or 1-800-565-0000

**Tourism New Brunswick**  
– www.tourismnewbrunswick.ca  
or 1-800-561-0123

**Snowmobilers Association of Nova Scotia (SANS)** - www.snowmobilersns.com

**New Brunswick Federation of Snowmobile Clubs (NBFSC)** -www.nbfsc.com

## Maps Needed

**Nova Scotia** – Zone 1

**New Brunswick** – Saint John & Moncton South

## Cape Breton Itinerary

(For complete itinerary, with road and trail directions, visit [www.snowgoercanada.com](http://www.snowgoercanada.com))

**Cape Breton** – 582 km in 4 riding days

**DAY ONE:** Trailer 1,050 km to Edmundston, NB (drive time from Greater Toronto Area: approx. 11 hours)



**Where To Stay: Quality Inn** (506) 735-5525 or [www.choicehotels.ca/cn529](http://www.choicehotels.ca/cn529). Clean and comfortable roadside motel located beside the Trans Canada Highway at Exit 13B. Ample parking for trucks & trailers. On site restaurant, sports bar, indoor pool and hot tub.

**DAY TWO:** Trailer 704 km from Edmundston to Whycomomagh, Cape Breton.



**Where To Stay: Keltic Quay Bayfront Lodge & Cottages.** 1-877-350-1122 or [www.keltic-quay.com](http://www.keltic-quay.com). Your host Rennie welcomes you to this classy lakeside resort with main lodge with lounge & bar, plus six superbly appointed chalets, each with an upper and lower suite complete with kitchen, living room, bathroom and separate bedroom(s). Ample trailer parking with

sled parking beside chalets.

No onsite restaurant, but Vi's and the Farmer's Daughter are an easy walk (fuel nearby), and Charlene's Bayside Café & Restaurant (amazing seafood chowder!) is just a short drive.

**DAY THREE:** 125 km from Keltic Quay. Lunch: Dancing Goat Café & Bakery, North East Margaree. Fuel: Whycomomagh.

**DAY FOUR:** 177 km from Keltic Quay. Lunch: Miner's Café, Inverness. Fuel: Inverness, Whycomomagh.

**DAY FIVE:** Trailer 30 km to Baddeck. Breakfast & fuel at Tim's Horton's service stop. Check in to lodgings and 100 km around Baddeck. Lunch: trail lunch at warm up shelter on Trail 104. Fuel: Baddeck



**Where To Stay: Auld Farm Inn B&B.** (902) 295-1977 or [www.auldfarminn.ca](http://www.auldfarminn.ca). Fully restored classic farmhouse with eight tastefully decorated bedrooms with their own bathrooms. Great hospitality from hosts Jan and Glen, plus fantastic home-cooked meals (dinner can be pre-arranged). For winter, one of the guest rooms is converted to a drying room for snowmobile gear. Parking for at least 4 trucks & trailers. Trail access out the back of the property to Trail 710.

**DAY SIX:** 180 km from Auld Farm Inn. Lunch: Dancing Goat. Fuel: Margaree Centre, Baddeck.

## Fundy Highlands Itinerary

**New Brunswick** – 827 km in 3 riding days

Notes: NB = New Brunswick Provincial Trail (blue); LT = New Brunswick Local Trail (green)

**DAY SEVEN:** Trailer 330 km to Moncton.



**Where To Stay: Hampton Inn** (506) 855-4819. Premium hotel offers exceptional continental breakfast in lounge area. Indoor pool & gym. 10% off dinner at Montana's Restaurant (\$7 cab fare). Plenty of trailer parking.

**DAY EIGHT:** Ride 220 km to Riverside Albert. Lunch & Fuel: South Eastern New Brunswick Snowmobile Association club house on LT864.



**Where To Stay: Broadleaf Guest Ranch.** 1-800-226-5405 or [www.broadleafranch.com](http://www.broadleafranch.com). Cozy country log housekeeping cabins overlook the Bay of Fundy and the Ranch Kitchen Restaurant with home-cooked meals.

**DAY NINE:** Ride 220 km to Shepody Sussex area. Fuel: Alma, Elgin Market, Adair's. Lunch: Elgin Market.



**Where To Stay: Adair's Wilderness Lodge.** 1-888-895-9233 or [www.adairswlodge.com](http://www.adairswlodge.com). Located in the heart of the Fundy Highlands snowbelt, these rustic log chalets offer all the comforts of home, while hosts Ida and Larry offer up tasty home cooking in the onsite restaurant. Fuel on site plus plenty of parking and direct access access from LT811.

**DAY TEN:** Ride 253 km with morning loop back to Adair's and then on to Chipman. Lunch: Adair's. Fuel: Adair's, Chipman.



**Where To Stay: Queen's County Inn.** (506) 339-6677 or [www.queenscountyinn.ca](http://www.queenscountyinn.ca). Roadside motel with 12 comfortable rooms and onsite licenced restaurant and bakery. Ample parking and direct trail access with fuel on trail just south of motel.

**DAY ELEVEN:** Ride 134 km back to Hampton Inn, Moncton. Lunch & Fuel: Moncton. Start trailering home.

**DAY TWELVE:** Trailer home.

## Tested on Tour

# 4 Winners from Ski-Doo

Story | Craig Nicholson, *The Intrepid Snowmobiler*

I'm always looking for new accessories that work to review for Snow Goer Canada readers. Ski-Doo came up with four winners last season that I tested over almost 10,000 kilometres of trail riding.



**Store It:** The LinQ™ system includes tunnel bag(s), fuel caddy and new-for-2014 saddlebags that lock into a LinQ mounting system installed on the tunnel behind your seat (fits most Ski-Doo model years and many other snowmobiles). Quick attach and release, this versatile system is rock solid and secure, eliminating any need for bungees or straps. Available at [store.ski-doo.com](http://store.ski-doo.com). Components sold separately.



I can never get enough storage space, so I liked the glove box built into Ski-Doo's new Rev-XS platform. But I made that space even bigger for keeping necessities handy by adding their new Glovebox Extension. Not only does it keep snow dust out, it also provides a tight space between the extension and the inside of the windshield that's perfect for holding my map. Available at [store.ski-doo.com](http://store.ski-doo.com) for \$79.99.



**Light It:** Ski-Doo's Auxiliary LED Light will impress anyone who rides after dark. When installed below my sled's regular headlight (Ski-Doo snowmobiles only) and used in tandem with my high beam, this accessory almost makes the trail ahead look like daylight. Yes, it improved night-time visibility that much – highly recommended, especially for the lead sled in a night riding group. Available at [store.ski-doo.com](http://store.ski-doo.com) for \$344.99.



**Warm It:** On tour, I normally ride with handlebar muffs and Ski-Doo has delivered the best yet. Their fleece-lined muffs have an inner skeleton to hold their shape and being attached to the end of the handgrips, they don't flop around. They have storm cuffs to keep snow out and a clear viewing panel so I can see to work my handlebar mounted controls. My only caution is that because these muffs aren't as deep as some others, so they don't cover as much of your wrist area. So it's best to wear gloves (or mitts) with gauntlets that cover your wrists and overlap the lower sleeve of your jacket. Available at [store.ski-doo.com](http://store.ski-doo.com) for \$64.99.