



Story, Photos | Craig Nicholson,  
The Intrepid Snowmobiler



I rode four days in the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region with a huge grin. Each night my notes for this article used superlatives like “awesome”, “incredible” or “fantastic” to describe our day’s ride. I went to bed each night with that good-tired feeling that follows a remarkable day’s ride, wondering how the next one could possibly measure up. But it did - over and over again - four days in a row!

Abitibi-Témiscamingue is an outstanding place to ride. This also makes it an ideal destination for your first ride in Quebec. I’ve been back many times and this snowbelt region consistently delivers top notch sledding every time, reminding me again and again just how exhilarating snowmobiling can be. With 3,700 kilometres of mostly excellent snowmobile trails, Abitibi-Témiscamingue borders along Ontario’s northeast region, and so is located just east of New Liskeard, Kirkland Lake and Cochrane, with trail connections to each. Because of its position, in many respects it’s easier to access Abitibi-Témiscamingue (English: Abitibi-Temiskaming) from Ontario than it is from the rest of Quebec.

**Staging Options**

Our Snow Goer Canada crew, consisting of Johnny Biasi, Dan Carty, Jim Heintzman, Tony Robinson, Don Webb and myself, towed our Triton trailers about 420 kilometres from the Greater Toronto Area through North Bay to Ville Marie, QC on the east shore of Lake Temiskaming. It’s a shorter drive than from the GTA to Montreal and many other regions of La Belle Province. Abitibi-Témiscamingue is even more convenient for Ontario residents living north of Barrie.

# Get Yer Ya-Ya’s Out!



Exploring Quebec’s Abitibi-Témiscamigue



View from dam at Rapide-Sept.



Many snowmobilers heading to Abitibi-Témiscamingue opt for the shorter, 340-kilometre drive to the Town of Témiscaming where a large staging area provides parking for their tour. From there, Trans Quebec 63 is an abandoned rail line arrowing straight north into the heart of the region. Having snowmobiled more than our share of rail trails over the years (fast but boring!), we decided to stage farther north, out of La Bannik near Ville Marie, which is positioned on the circle loop we were undertaking.

I should also note that a third staging option for Abitibi-Témiscamingue is to ride from hotels in either New Liskeard (Waterfront Inn), Kirkland Lake (Comfort Inn) or Kearns (Cheminis Lodge), all of which I've done on previous tours. My only reservation

for launching from Ontario is that sometimes the consistency of trail connections between the two provinces can be unpredictable – even to the point that on one ride, the link was not there yet! Besides, La Bannik is as secure as possible for parking your tow vehicles, and its lodging and food are both exceptional.

#### Ride the Rectangle

The core area for Abitibi-Témiscamingue snowmobiling is rectangle-shaped, anchored by its five major towns – Rouyn-Noranda (southwest), La Sarre (northwest), Amos (north central), Senneterre (northeast) and Val d'Or (southeast). They are linked by Trans Quebec Trails 83 and 93. Basically, the area bounded by these towns and trails is relatively populated,

while the areas beyond their fringe become progressively more remote. The tour described in this article (see Our Itinerary) focuses on the area bounded by these core towns and trails, which offers a solid three to four days of great riding without much repetition. If you want to add days or distance, there's a 418-kilometre northern route via Regional Trail 396 and Trans Quebec 93 from Amos to Mattagami that comes back into Senneterre.. It's pretty remote most of the way, but has enough fuel available en route to make it doable.

Our plan was to do a four-day loop

riding north from Ville Marie to overnight at La Sarre. From there, we'd ride the long way around to Val d'Or for our second night, and then spend our third night in Amos after a convoluted series of loops on connector trails. On our final day, we beelined south back past Val d'Or and south on Regional Trail 309 through Rapide-Sept back to Ville Marie. I picked La Sarre, Val d'Or and Amos for overnights because from past experience, the hotels we stayed at there are easy to reach by snow and very snowmobile-friendly (not that others aren't, I just like these ones).

#### Brass Monkey Time

Each day, we could have added more distance if we choose to by simply riding several longer local loops en route. But we didn't on this early February trip because it started to get dark by 4 PM and it was too frigging cold – consistently -30° C or lower! We were dressed for it in our FXR snowmobile suits, and for the most part remained reasonably warm (thank goodness for high windshields), but several of us suffered spots of frostbite on our faces where we didn't quite have everything perfectly covered. I rode several days with florescent or-

ange duck tape on the cheeks of my face and that stopped more frostbite – although I got some strange looks at restaurants and gas stations! Nevertheless, after riding briskly all day long, we were quite happy to get into a warm shower each afternoon after about 300 clicks of sledding.

#### Consistent Quality

So what's snowmobiling like in Abitibi-Témiscamingue? The terrain's not as mountainous as it can be in other regions of Quebec like the Laurentians, Chaudière-Appalaches or Gaspésie. But Abitibi-Témiscamingue

does offer a good variety of up and down, straight and meandering, plus forest and farmland. Most trails are laid out on old logging, mining or utility corridors, so overall they're nice and wide with long straightaways and sweeping corners. With only a few exceptions, trails are mostly land based.

Best of all, the snowmobile clubs of the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region do an exceptional job of keeping their trails well groomed. Everyone must groom at the same time, because it's rare to find any club that isn't up to par on smoothness with their neighbours. Some of my favourite sections of trail include the field riding on TQ 93 east of Amos, TQ 83 from Rivière-Héva to Preissac, and all of Regional Trails 307 and 309.

For snowmobilers, trails of this caliber and consistency mean that riding big kilometres each day is easy. Trail conditions normally stay good well into the end of March, so Abitibi-Témiscamingue is also a great season-extending destination – and closer to 400 clicks a day can be more the norm when there are more hours of sunlight and warmer temperatures as spring nears.

My tour notes didn't recall any untoward incidents or unexpected surprises. Reading them, one might be tempted to think that our ride was en-



Trail break.

tirely predictable – and it was: if excitement, thrills and exhilaration are what you're after, then Abitibi-Témiscamingue is definitely the place to get yer ya-ya's out!

*Special thanks to Tourisme Abitibi-Témiscamingue for assistance with this tour. Craig's tours are made possible by BRP (Ski-Doo), Gateway Powersport, FXR Racing, Triton Trailers, and Woody's Traction Products.*

*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)*



## Riders Comments



**Don Webb** – "Every day of sledding in Abitibi-Témiscamingue is a snowmobiler's dream – each trail is as good as or better than the next."



**Tony Robinson** – "With just the right mix of trails, towns and services Abitibi-Témiscamingue is great for a guys ride, but with its easy trails and good hotels, it's also an exceptional couples destination."



**Jim Heintzman** – "Abitibi-Témiscamingue is one of those places where you can ride for days without getting beat up by rough trails or have any concern about being lost or running out of gas."

## Who to Contact

**Tourisme Abitibi-Témiscamingue** - [snowwild.com](http://snowwild.com) or 1-800-808-0706

**Tourisme Quebec** – [www.bonjourquebec.com](http://www.bonjourquebec.com) or 1-877-266-5687

**FCMQ** (for maps, permits and trail info) – [www.fcmq.qc.ca](http://www.fcmq.qc.ca)

## Maps Needed

Abitibi-Témiscamingue

## Our Itinerary

**Our Tour Itinerary** - 1,220 kilometres in 4 days of riding

### Notes

1. TQ = Trans Quebec; RT = Regional Trail; LT = Local Trail 3.

**DAY ONE:** Trailer 430 km to Ville Marie (drive time from Greater Toronto Area: approx. 5 hours)



**Where To Stay: La Bannik** (#9 on 2014 Abitibi-Témiscamingue region map) 1-877-322-0922 or [bannik.ca](http://bannik.ca). Located just south of the Town of Ville Marie, La Bannik boasts magnificent views from its overlook position on the shore of Lake Témiscamingue. Offering a variety of comfortable and luxurious cottages in various configurations, plus on site restaurant and heated sled garage, La Bannik is an excellent staging location for an Abitibi-Témiscamingue tour. Direct trail access from TQ63. Fuel nearby on Highway 101.

**DAY TWO:** Ride 278 km from Ville Marie to La Sarre via TQ 63 & 83. Fuel & Lunch: Arntfield or Rouyn-Noranda (TQ93).



**Where To Stay: Motel Villa Mon Repos** (#31 on 2014 Abitibi-Témiscamingue region map) 1-888-417-3767 or [www.motelvillamonrepos.qc.ca](http://www.motelvillamonrepos.qc.ca). This classy motel offers a restaurant and bar, plus a heated garage across the road or sled parking in front of your room, plus ample parking for trucks and trailers. Fuel 2 blocks down the road. To get to motel by sled, follow trail signs into town (they start 40 kms out of town), then motel signs several blocks along snow and ice covered streets.

**DAY THREE:** Ride 308 km from La Sarre to Val d'Or via TQ 93 & 83. Lunch: Amos. Fuel: Louvre court, Amos



**Where To Stay: Hôtel Forestel** (#28 on 2014 Abitibi-Témiscamingue region map) 1-800-567-6599 or [www.forestel.ca](http://www.forestel.ca). Large, newly renovated, full service hotel with on site restaurant and bar, plus new spa. Sled parking in front of main lobby with 24 hr. surveillance. Direct trail access off TQ83 at east end of town. Fuel closer to west end of town just off TQ83.

**DAY FOUR:** Ride 314 km from Val d'Or to Amos via RT313/TQ93/RT309/TQ83/LT east from Preissac/RT307/TQ93. Fuel: Val d'Or, Amos. Lunch: Val d'Or.



**Where To Stay: Atmosphere**, complexe hôtelier (#22 on 2014 Abitibi-Témiscamingue region map) 1-800-567-7777 or [www.atmosphere.com](http://www.atmosphere.com). An exceptional family-run facility with many extras such as recliner lounge chairs and heated bathroom floors, this full service hotel has an on site restaurant, plus bar, exercise room and two outdoor whirlpools. Ample parking for trucks & trailers, plus two heated sled garages or park your sleds right outside your room. Direct trail access just north off TQ93. Fuel & convenience store about two clicks west of hotel just south of TQ93.

**DAY FIVE:** Ride 320 km from Amos to Ville Marie via TQ93/RT307/TQ83/LT shortcut/RT309/RT303/TQ63. Fuel: Malartic. Lunch: Rapide-Sept  
**Where To Stay: La Bannik** 1-877-322-0922 or [bannik.ca](http://bannik.ca).

**DAY SIX:** Trailer home.