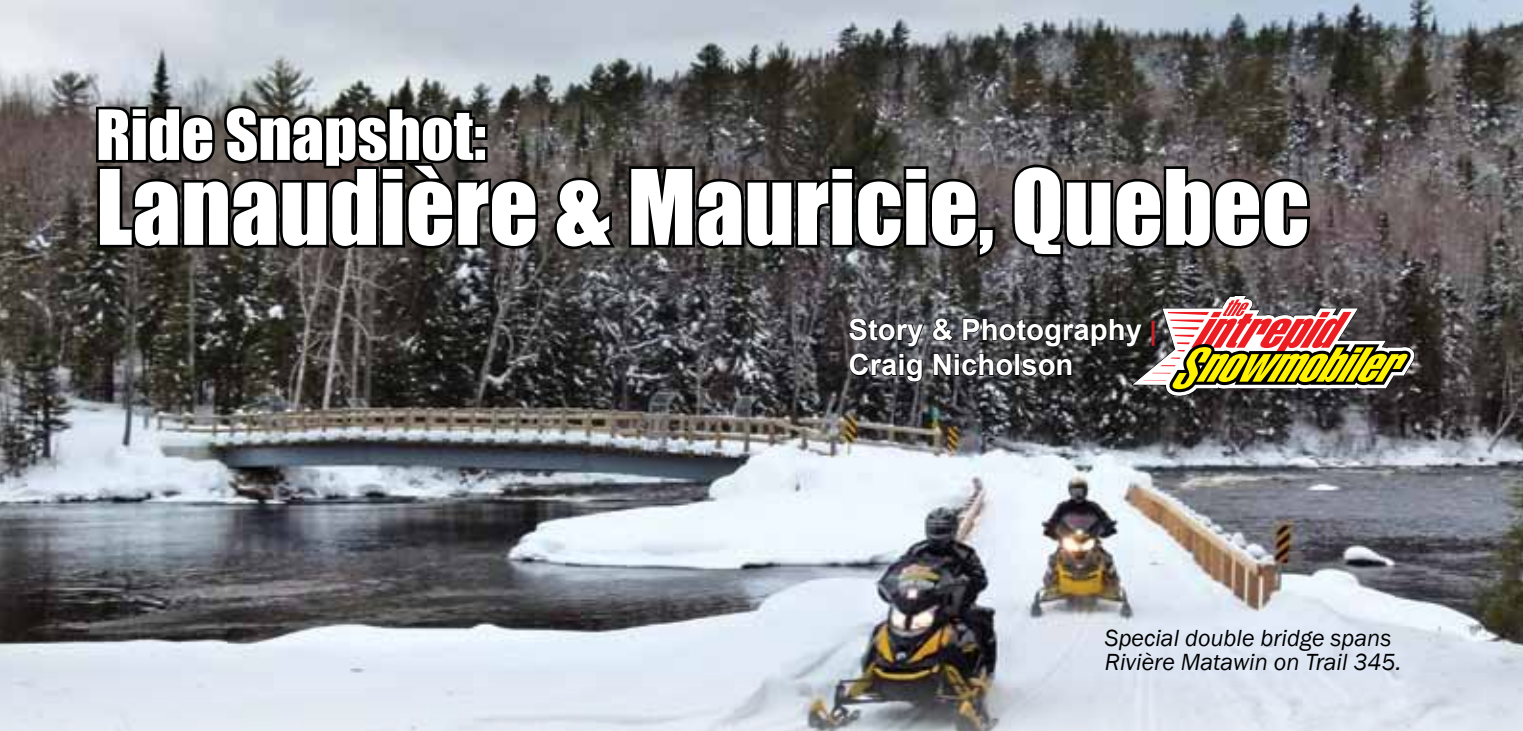


Ride Snapshot: Lanaudière & Mauricie, Quebec

Story & Photography
Craig Nicholson



Special double bridge spans
Rivière Matawin on Trail 345.

It's never too early to start planning the destination for your first trail ride next winter and you'll do no better for a staging hotel than Auberge Le Cabanon in Quebec's Lanaudière & Mauricie Region. For many years, "Le Cabanon" as it's popularly known, has been a top pick for snowmobilers from Eastern Canada and the United States looking for their first great trail ride of the season. They just keep coming back for more all winter long, even well into March, and here's why...

Why Go There

Positioned between the St. Lawrence River and the Laurentian Mountains, the central and northern areas of the region are blessed by altitude. The town of Saint-Zénon, about a 90-minute drive north of Montreal, is at an elevation of almost 800 metres (2,600'), which normally attracts lots of snow, both early season and late. And that's one reason riders flock to Le Cabanon – it's located just east of Saint-Zénon.

Besides altitude, Le Cabanon has the advantage of providing snowmobilers with plenty of trail riding choices thanks to its location near the intersection of Trans Quebec Trails 23 & 63. From Le Cabanon, you can do day loops in every direction. Whatever your choice, all trails lead back to Le Cabanon and the best reason of all for making it your home base for all your Lanaudière and Mauricie snowmobiling...

Auberge Le Cabanon is as snowmobiler friendly as it gets. With 58 rooms, it has everything a snowmobiler needs on site – fuel, restaurant, bar, secure sled parking, secure vehicle parking, hot tub and indoor pool. And when you want to ride, or when you return after a satisfying day on the trails, your sled is easily accessible just outside the front door in the secure area. Best of all, Le Cabanon is also a groomer base for the local snowmobile club, Club Royaume de la Motoneige, which operates almost 700 kilometres of trail with eight grooming tractors – so you always head out from the hotel on freshly groomed trails each morning!

Where We Rode

Put it all together and you'll quickly understand why my Snow Goer Canada crew picked Le Cabanon this past January for our own first ride – and to test ride some of our 2013 fleet sleds in real world conditions. The first day, we snowmobiled a 300-kilometre southern loop into the populated St. Lawrence River lowlands, one of three main geographical features that define the area. We rode towards Berthierville, then circled up into the Laurentian Mountains through Saint-Come and Saint-Zénon and back to Le Cabanon. This excursion took us down out of



Laurentian Mountain riding
features many great views.

RIDE CONTACTS

Tourisme Lanaudière & Mauricie
www.snowmobilecountry.ca
Auberge Le Cabanon
www.aubergelecabanon.com
Tourisme Quebec
www.bonjourquebec.com
Quebec Federation of Snowmobile Clubs
www.fcmq.qc.ca

the highlands and back up again, with some great panoramic views. In between, we zipped across countless fields and through many small villages and towns. Standout Trails: 23, 3.

Day two was just the opposite. We sledged north for lunch and fuel at Pourvoirie du Lac du Repos near the intersection of Trans Quebec 33 and Regional Trail 345. This 270-kilometre route led us onto the remote Laurentian Plateau, a massive wilderness that stays at altitude, but is less mountainous than the area around Le Cabanon. If you're into riding endless logging roads groomed to perfection and far from civilization, this will be your cup of tea! Standout Trails: 63, 345.

We snowmobiled eastwards on day three, sledging over hill and dale in the Laurentian Mountains into Réserve faunique Mastigouche. Then we dipped south through Saint-Alexis-des-Monts on to the lowlands (more great scenery), west through Sainte-Émélie-de-l'Énergie and back to our lodgings after 283 kilometres. Standout trails: 349, 63.



Plenty of snow at Auberge Le Cabanon.

Day four, we returned to the Laurentian Plateau with a stellar, 287-kilometre ride in a couple of inches of fresh powder, travelling west to east across 360, 345 and M20 before looping west on 360/345. Be warned that even though we gassed up at Auberge du Lac Taureau on Trail 33 during the outbound leg, there is no other gas stop on this route. I rode the last 20 minutes back to Le Cabanon with the empty light flashing and pumped 39.85 litres into my 40-litre Ski-Doo Renegade E-TEC 600 tank. Too close for comfort!

Odds & Ends

Two important notes: bring cash to pay for fill ups at backcountry gas pumps, and be warned that due to

unexpected logging operations, a few changes may have occurred with the trails after the annual Lanaudière & Mauricie trail map is published in the early fall. I should also say that while new map signboards at many intersections are a big help, I still find there aren't as many trail number signs on the trails we rode as a first-time visitor might need for complete peace of mind.

Part of my objective on this ride was to test and set my new rMotion suspension. That was a bust because we almost literally didn't hit a bump in over 1,100 clicks. Nightly grooming and frequent snow keeps these trails in fantastic shape – and that sets the grooming bar so high that most other destinations I ride this winter may have trouble measuring up. So if they still have snow on their trails when you read this, Le Cabanon is as good a place as you'll find for your last ride of the season – and it's a must for your first ride next winter! ❄️

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At the base of Barrage Taureau on Trail 360.

