

# Day-Trippin' in Lanaudière

## Sledding Quebec's Laurentian Mountains



Have you experienced snowmobiling nirvana? It's a sublime state of being that a few lucky snowmobilers reach maybe once a ride when a section of trail can only be described as "heavenly". The symptoms of nirvana include spine tingling, pulse racing, goose bumps, ear-to-ear grins — and the certainty that it doesn't get any better than this. We achieved snowmobiling nirvana multiple times on our three-day early January ride and you can too, by heading to Quebec's Lanaudière-Mauricie Region. It's one of a few destinations that can virtually guarantee decent snow and trails in the first week of any New Year.

Here, in the heart of the Laurentian Mountains just north of Montreal, we found trail after heart-stopping trail that took our breathe away. I'd keep expecting an amazing trail to end around the next corner or over the hill ahead, but more often than not it would simply get better. That's because most trails in the central and northern parts of Lanaudière are on forest access roads, old logging roads and utility corridors. Many of these provide long, wide straightaways with good sightlines, gentle curves and rolling topography — perfect for easy, effortless riding.

Our Snow Goer Canada crew, consisting of myself and Craig Irwin, Brent Murphy, Dan Carty, Don Webb, Jim Heintzman and Frank Crocco, teamed up with Marty Convery from Snowmobiler TV for this ride, staging out of Auberge du Vieux Moulin, near Saint-Émélie-de-l'Énergie. The occasion was our annual start of season break-in ride, where we check and tweak some of the new media sleds provided to the magazine and STV before putting them through their real world paces over the season. But when we heard that about 10% the region's 4,800 kilometres of snowmobile trails had benefitted from a more than \$3 million investment recently, we also made it our mission to ride as many of these newly improved corridors as possible. With the support of the Quebec government and the land management agency SÉPAQ, this project re-routed snowmobile trails around Mont Tremblant National (read: provincial) Park, located just north and west of the Lanaudière snowmobiling meccas of Saint-Donat and Saint-Michel-des-Saints.

Riders who have been to this mountainous area of Lanaudière previously will know that one of its attractions was snowmobiling the network of trails on the roads in the park. So when sledding there closed, it was important for Lanaudière to continue to deliver an alternative that still provided a great ride experience — and that's what happened with those millions of dollars. As one of those who have thrilled to Lanaudière trails many times over the years, I can attest that snowmobiling there in 2014 is as good as ever. Kudos to the Lanaudière snowmobile clubs that did most of the trail work!

A great example of a trail that benefitted is Trans Quebec 33, which now skirts the east side of the park boundary. Forty-four kilometres of it, from Pouvoirie Coin Lavigne to Relais Rouge-Matawin, is as good as trail riding ever gets, period. We had other truly not-to-be-missed experiences on Regional Trails 345 and 360, and were knocked out by the hill and dale scenery on Trans Quebec 63 between Saint-Zenon and Auberge La Glacière, and again on Regional Trail 349 between Saint-Come and Notre-Dame-de-la-Mercie. Other must-sees on the region's trails include the Lake Taureau Dam (Regional Trail 360) and the scenic lookouts at Mont des Cenelles and Montagne Noir (both trail accessible just west of Saint-Donat). Try Lanaudière for yourself, I'm sure you'll discover many other favourites of your own!

As a snowmobiling destination, Lanaudière is among the best, but it's not perfect. I've always been underwhelmed by their trail signage. Too many confusingly or under marked intersections. Too few trail numbers on main trails. Many club trails (orange on trail map) with no identification at all. As two of the veteran riders in our group commented as first timers to Lanaudière: "If we



Lanaudière offers many forest trails through the Laurentians.

were here on our own, without you guys that know your way around, we would have had difficulty finding our way several times." With ample services and towns in the Lanaudière heartland, getting misdirected is never an issue for long, but really, there's no excuse for signage not being top notch in a region that relies so heavily on tourism. I kept wondering why those millions invested didn't include a major signage facelift. Oh by the way, here's one other important tip for Lanaudière snowmobiling: while many of the auberges, relais and outfitters have fuel, many don't accept credit cards, so bring cash.

Despite these reservations, Lanaudière is still on my list of recommended snowmobiling destinations at any time of the season, but especially for your first ride or last ride (trails are probably still open now for spring riding), when many other regions are closed. It's tough to beat the Laurentian Mountains as a backdrop for superb trail riding and there are plenty of very snowmobile-friendly places to stay, eat and gas up. One of the best is Auberge du Vieux Moulin, where we stayed (see sidebar) – and it's not too soon to start planning your Lanaudière trip for next winter either, so enjoy!

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*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

**Tourisme Lanaudière-Mauricie**

- [www.snowmobilecountry.ca](http://www.snowmobilecountry.ca)

**Tourisme Quebec**

- [www.bonjourquebec.com](http://www.bonjourquebec.com)

**FCMQ (for permits and trail info)**

- [www.fcmq.qc.ca](http://www.fcmq.qc.ca)



Trail break on Regional Trail 345.



Crossing suspension bridge west of Saint-Come.

## Auberge du Vieux Moulin

Located on Highway 131 less than 90 minutes north of Montreal, the Auberge du Vieux Moulin has everything necessary to make your snowmobiling getaway enjoyable and special. This rustic looking, all-log inn with contemporary amenities is owned and operated by a family of snowmobilers (husband Yves is president of the local snowmobile club), so everyone on their bilingual staff knows, understands and caters to us. The auberge consists of two, multi-floor, joined buildings with 20 modern and well-appointed rooms or suites. There are also two, four-

bedroom chalets.

By way of amenities, Auberge du Vieux Moulin offers home-cooked gourmet meals, several cosy lounge areas, an indoor pool, dry sauna and steam room, plus both indoor and outdoor hot tubs. Massages are also available. Other on site winter activities such as ice skating, snow tubing and cross-country skiing also make Auberge du Vieux Moulin a great winter destination for the entire family. Did I mention a couple of very friendly dogs to pat?

For day-tripping snowmobilers, Auberge du Vieux Moulin provides a

groomed trail right to the property. There's secure parking for both tow vehicles and sleds, and on site fuel available for inn guests. Its location is central to the Lanaudière heartland, so you can choose different day rides in every direction. Sled rentals and guided tours can also be arranged, so why wait? Book your stay at Auberge du Vieux Moulin for this spring or next winter and tell 'em Snow Goer Canada sent ya!!

[www.auberge-lanaudiere.com](http://www.auberge-lanaudiere.com) or  
1-866-884-0211.

Auberge du Vieux Moulin.

