

GOING ALL THE WAY IN THE HIGHLANDS

Algoma Country Snowmobiling for Adventure Seekers

STORY & PHOTOS BY CRAIG NICHOLSON,
THE INTREPID SNOWMOBILER

Algoma's wide trails, typically covered with fresh snow, wind through majestic highlands scenery.

Fed up with crowded trails? Looking for someplace new to ride? Yearning for a ride experience that will really blow your mind? In Ontario's Algoma Country, avid snowmobilers can ride for days on super wide, superbly groomed trails without the annoying traffic you're used to at many other destinations. You'll find great scenery, plenty of services, warm hospitality, discover the scrumptious grub at Halfway Haven Lodge – and maybe even meet The Groomer Guy in the man cave at the Magpie Relais in Dubreuilville.

Many Riding Options

What's more, you have various riding options in Algoma Country. Staging from Sault Ste Marie, Ontario, you can snowmobile east towards Elliot Lake for a 2-day snow tour on the 413-mile North Shore Loop. Alternatively, you can stage from nearby Searchmont to ride the 842-mile "All The Way There" wilderness ride through the Algoma Highlands to Hearst and back.

Either choice can be shorter or longer depending on your time. Rack

up 93 miles more and two treeline ice crossings on your North Shore Loop by visiting St Joseph Island. Or add a 100 miles more to your All The Way There ride by exploring the Missinaibi Expedition Loop north of Hearst. Meanwhile as part of your All The Way There ride, powder hounds can also plan to spend a play day backcountry riding at Wawa's Top Secret Boondocking Location. You can easily go online to check all your options (including complete lists of services) by Googling "Sled Algoma" or visit the Algoma Country booth at the Novi Show every November.



This impressive lumber mill greets snowmobilers arriving in Hearst.

Quebec-Style Trails

Our Supertrax crew snowmobiled the All The Way There ride last winter and re-discovered just how top notch these northern Algoma Country trails really are. In fact, we'd go so far as to say the entire wilderness route from Searchmont to Hearst is better than most other linear rides in Ontario.

The Quebec-style trails of the All The Way There ride are generally wide and sweeping. They wind through this remote high country, mostly on logging roads, cut lines and utility corridors. The Algoma Highlands aren't mountains as such, but their hilly terrain and the primo trails make snowmobiling here exceptionally exhilarating, interesting and invigorating for been-there-done-that adventure seekers. One great example is the hydro line trail just north of Half Way Haven, which may well be the most enjoyable utility corridor riding we've experienced.

Fuel Factors

We opted to stage from Searchmont because we only had four riding days. Before arriving at Driftwood Valley Chalets, we filled up our sleds in Sault Ste Marie because there is no commercially available fuel in Searchmont at this time. Topping up meant that we had no fuel concerns from Searchmont on as there is fuel available at Halfway Haven (97 miles ahead) and every town thereafter.

Staging out of Sault Ste. Marie is also an option if you want to add a total of 90 miles to your tour. But to make it from Sault Ste Marie to the next fuel at Halfway Haven, you'll have to either carry extra gas or go by way of Goulais River to fuel up there for the 142-mile ride from Goulais River through Searchmont to Halfway Haven.

Getting There From The USA

Whatever your Algoma Country riding choice, you need to trailer to your staging location first. For snowmobilers residing in Michigan and neighbouring states, trailering to Algoma Country isn't much different than getting to the Upper Peninsula. All you have to do is



Wide open and sweeping trails make Algoma Country an exhilarating ride experience.



Half Way Haven is a must-stop for down-home grub and unique overnighiting.

head due north on I-75 from Saint Ignace, Michigan to Sault Ste Marie, Canada. This 53-miles drive is less than half the distance of trailering to the central UP. Sure you have to cross the international border, but that's a breeze if you carry your passport, driver's license and vehicle, trailer & sled registrations. That's a small inconvenience considering your pay-off is some of the best and least crowded trail riding you'll ever experience. And as many American riders have already discovered, you can save about 30% on lodging, food, trail permits and many other items purchasing with US dollars.

Getting There From Within Ontario

For snowmobilers trailering north from Southern Ontario, trailering to Sault Ste Marie is as simple as a left turn at Sudbury onto Highway 17. At 699 kilometres (420 miles), the distance from Toronto to the Sault is actually shorter than the 728 kilometres from Toronto to Cochrane. So it's a no brainer to try something different this winter for a change, especially for early and late season riding...

Reliable Snow & Trails

Which brings me to the other great reason to try northern Algoma Country – plenty of snow. Besides lake effect snow coming off Lake Superior, the more northerly latitude and higher elevation of the Algoma Highlands generates good snow. And most importantly, normally keeps it throughout the winter. This longevity not only means that northern Algoma Country typically has snow when other areas don't. It also means their groomers have all season to pack a deep, durable snow base that lasts and lasts, often well into April.

At a time when snow consistency and reliability can make planning a sledding getaway a bit of a crapshoot elsewhere, you can count on the All The Way There ride to deliver superb snowmobiling. That's

why so many American riders come here year after year. So why not expand your own riding horizons this winter with an Ontario sledding adventure through the highlands of the northern Algoma Country wilderness? ■

PLANNING WEBSITES

- Algoma Country:** algomacountry.com/sledalgoma
- Ontario Tourism:** ontariotravel.net/en/home
- North Shore Loop:** algomatrails.com/trails/north-shore-loop
- Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs (OFSC):** ofsc.on.ca
- Algoma Sno-Plan Affiliation:** algomatrails.com
- Top Secret Boondocking Location:** topsecretboondocking.com

MAPS NEEDED

Algoma Sno-Plan Affiliation (OFSC District 13)

WHERE WE STAYED

- Driftwood Valley Chalets, Searchmont:** driftwoodvalleychalets.com
- Magpie Relais, Dubreuilville:** magpiereley.ca
- Companion Hotel, Hearst:** companion-hotel-motel.com
- Wawa Motor Inn, Wawa:** wawamotorinn.ca
- Fairfield Inn & Suites, Sault Ste. Marie:** marriott.com/hotels/travel/yamfi-fairfield-inn-and-suites-sault-ste-marie