

THE WOOD RUNNER TRAIL

Like No Other!

This winter I will be in my 53rd year of riding snowmobiles and I love this sport as much today as I did back in the 1960's! Actually, it's even better now as I can't remember the last time I changed a spark plug or a drive belt like we used to do a lot back in the day.

STORY & PHOTOS BY JOHN ARKWRIGHT

Over the years one of my favorite riding regions has been the Upper Laurentians of Quebec. I first rode here with my buddy, Richard Hiley, in the winter of 1990. He told me I was in for a surprise and I wasn't disappointed. I was hooked!

Hardly a winter went by I did not visit this region for a ride. In the winter of 2000, my wife Donna, Paul and Sue Oshell and I were invited to ride The Wood Runner Trail. To experience the tremendous hospitality and generosity of the gracious hosts at these remote resorts and ride those world-class trails was just amazing. Since those early years, the Wood Runner Trail (now in its 15th year) has become a Bucket List Ride. It has grown and now has three more loops to keep you coming back.

The longest loop is the Wood Runner Loop, a 653-mile (1089-km) run. This ride will take you through three Regions: Laurentides (Upper

Laurentians) Mauricie and Abitibi-Temiscamingue. The options on where to start your ride are numerous. If you live in Southern Ontario, Western New York or Michigan, then the Abitibi Region should be your choice. For me, it's a no-brainer as Temiscaming is an hour and a half drive for me. We chose to start from the **Forestel Motel** in Val d'Or.

If you live in the eastern states or eastern Ontario, then I would suggest starting from the city of Mont Laurier straight North of Ottawa.

Last February, on a Monday morning, the sun was bright and it was only 39 below zero! After breakfast it had warmed up to a balmy minus 38. If the sleds had started we were definitely good to go. Yeah... they did, and we were off, heading south with

a short run on Trail 83 and then onto Trail 386. We experienced typical Quebec Monday morning freshly groomed trails. Amazing!

Our overnight destination was **Pavillon La Verendrye Lodge** and on this day we rode a little over 120 miles. Not a long day by Quebec standards but as the daytime high was minus -26, it was just enough. I might add for the first time ever I brought handlebar muffs and I was glad I had them. Who says they're not for men?

Our second day was a repeat of day one. It was clear and cold and at least half the sleds wouldn't start. With a little coaxing ours did and we headed east on Trans Quebec Trail 63 (winding logging roads groomed to perfection) to Le Domaine where we met up with Christine Labrecque of the area's Tourism Development Department and Sebastien Lambert, owner of Theo Recreo Yamaha, who rode with us to **Resort La Pointe a**

David (a 135-mile day). This beautiful resort is located on the Baskatong Reservoir. Again, we had a full day of riding perfectly groomed wooded trails.

On our third day out we pointed our sleds north with stops at Windigo Chutes and up to the summit of Devil's Mountain. Both of these are must-see destinations when snowmobiling in the Mont Laurier area. We finished our day riding on Trans-Quebec Trail 13 and arrived late afternoon at **Pouvoirie Fer A Cheval** after 230 miles of stellar riding.

Next day, we parted company with Christine and Sebastien and headed for **Pouvoirie le Balbuzard Sauvage** - a 200-plus mile day. For the most part this particular route was all new for me and we decided to take a side trip into the town of Parent just because we had never been there. For the next 120-miles we headed west on Trans Quebec 83 with a lunch and gas



stop in Clova (another first). This day's trails consisted of logging roads and we discovered it is remote, to say the least.

Frankly, what really blows my mind is how they keep these remote trails so smooth. At this point of the trip we had only seen two groomers:

A new Pisten Bully at Pouvoir La Verendrye and a second one near Parent. That one was an old Massey tractor conversion (and I mean old) but, man, did that operator do a job on those trails! Late in the afternoon we came into a forest fire burn area and shortly afterward we crested a hill to see a

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beautiful lodge sitting on the edge of a lake in the middle of nowhere. Amazing (seriously, I'm laughing as I write this!) Only in Quebec will you find these hidden gems. Google it and you'll see what I mean! What a night of hospitality!

Our fifth and last day was quite a day of riding. Why? Our first stop after leaving Balbuzard Sauvage is a 100-mile run to either Senneterre or Louvicourt (your choice). For the first hour or so you ride this massive forest fire burn that consumed 50,000 hectares (12,500 acres). It is unbelievable. What made this experience extra special is that it was a clear, sunny day and you could easily see a mile ahead. I'd never experienced that before!

We chose Senneterre and yes, it added more miles to our ride but we just didn't want to cut the riding short. We rolled into Val-d'Or in the early afternoon with a little over 800 miles on the sleds. I always ask myself: "Would I do this ride again?" Most certainly I would but I think next time I'll change 'er up and ride the **Wood Runner Loop** clockwise.

Every night's stay on this ride was unique and with the hospitality extended to us it was *simply the best!* I never get tired of riding in Quebec and I hope I never do! ■

For information on this loop of the Wood Runner trail call: 1-888-560-9988 or visit: woodrunnertrail.ca

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