

## Cross-country delights

*From Alberta's Skoki Lodge to Gatineau Park's trails, Ottawans love cross-country skiing*



By Katharine Fletcher

Cross-country skiers love swishing through freshly fallen snow as they glide through forested paths and swoosh down hills. Talk to any keener here in the National Capital Region and you'll quickly detect a mystical look in their eyes as they talk cross-country skiing...

Where to go for a fabulous experience, near and far?

**Gatineau Park:** Although Gatineau Park's trails – not to mention its rustic refuges – get a bit crowded during full moon, this is one of nature's most magical times in which to enjoy the outdoors. This winter, get a group of friends and ski while the moon illuminates pathways and woods.

Which trails are best? The answer to that is personal, depending on your skill level and mood. However, one of my favourites is Pine Road trail, near Wakefield. Access is from parking lot 16 (P16 in Park map nomenclature). Although there's a hill at the beginning of trail 50, it soon becomes an undulating path through a mixed hardwood forest. (Note: Although marked green on trail maps, note that it is hilly, though not arduously so.)

Another excellent attraction is two chalets directly on #50, both of which make ideal destinations – so if one is crowded, try the other! First is Healey Lodge, then after another half kilometre or so you find Herridge. Both were homes of Irish settlers prior to the park's creation and in fact, a large Irish community thrived for years here, at the turn of the previous century.

Want to stay overnight in Gatineau Park? Choose from several cabins and even a yurt – modeled after a traditional Mongolian tent. For information and rates (and also for ski trail maps and ski passes) browse: [www.canadacapital.gc.ca](http://www.canadacapital.gc.ca) and click on Gatineau Park.

Tip: These are rustic chalets and you must reserve in advance; you also need to take bedding, food, water... Contact the Park Visitor's Centre for all details at 819-827-2020.

**Algonquin Park:** Algonquin is a legendary Canadian park made famous at the turn of the last century by painter Tom Thomson. His evocative paintings of its rugged landscape greatly influenced the famous Group of Seven artists.

I first visited Algonquin when I was seven, while cottaging with my family at a former warden's cabin on Tea Lake. I've loved Algonquin ever since, I suppose because it represented mysterious Canadian wilderness to me and my immigrant family.

Skiing here is gorgeous: choose from three trails: Leaf Lake (this is the most easily accessible for Ottawa residents), Fan Lake, or the Minnesing Wilderness trail. (To orient yourself properly, go to the website [algonquinpark.on.ca](http://algonquinpark.on.ca).)

For information about trail conditions, fees and other details, check: [algonquinpark.on.ca](http://algonquinpark.on.ca); e-mail Algonquin Park: [info@algonquinpark.on.ca](mailto:info@algonquinpark.on.ca); or, telephone the Park Information Office: (705) 633-5572.

**Alberta's Skoki Lodge:** Skoki evokes almost reverential memories from those who have skied the eleven or so kilometres to this National Historic Site from Lake Louise. After having visited, I understand why.

First, the picturesque lodge tucked into the Skoki Valley is the quintessential Canadian mountain cabin. Built in 1930-31 as a backcountry lodge from lodgepole pines growing nearby, moose antlers grace its doorway. Now, how more Canadian could Skoki be, eh?

And, after arriving after skiing through the spectacular Rockies, the curl – and smell – of wood smoke from its chimney was overwhelmingly welcoming, As was the fragrance of homemade bread which just about did me in when I opened the front door! After dropping my backpack off at my cabin's bunk bed, I curled up in front of a crackling fire, wine glass in hand, and relaxed while reading old journals dating from the thirties.

Dinner and breakfast are homemade delights, and you build your own lunch from a giant buffet of foods spread out for visitors after the morning's meal.

Skoki is awesome for an overnight. I long to return for a few days' visit, so I can ski the mountain bowls and dig deeper into the lodge's old diaries.

Is it worth it? Yes. Skoki challenged me in every way and I absolutely loved it.

Information: Visit [skoki.com](http://skoki.com) and be sure to look at the FAQs.

*This article originally appeared in the February 2010 issue of Forever Young Newspaper.*