

Thursday Tour, 11th March 2010

By Derek Wills

Rendezvous: 10:30 a.m. at parking lot of Sucrerie de la Montagne, Rigaud

Trails skied: L'escapade – Les Sentiers du Mont Rigaud

Round trip skied ~ 16 km On-trail duration ~ 4-1/2 hours

Conditions: +7°C, bright sun, ~10 cm firm snow coverage left

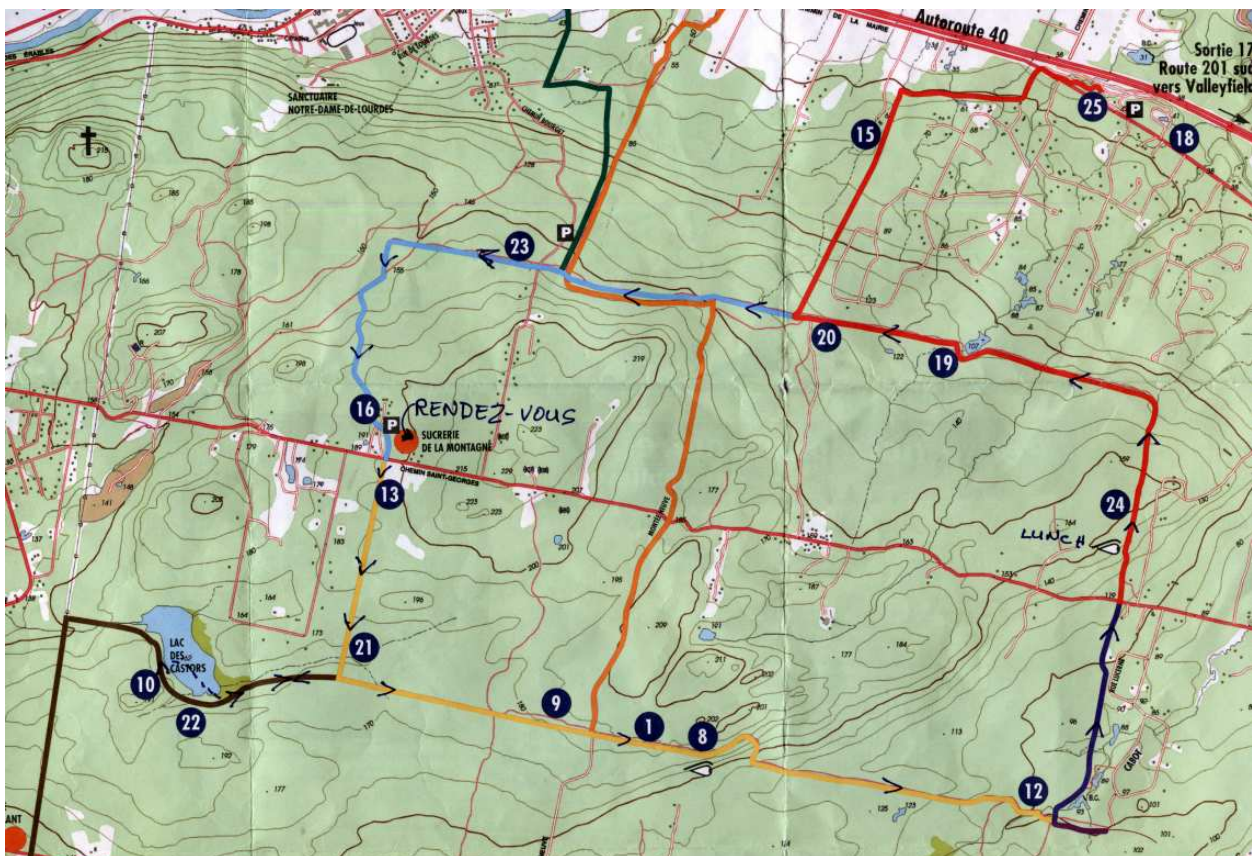
Largely track-set by horses' hooves!

Info/map at www.trailpeak.com/trail-l'Escapade-near-Rigaud-PQ-3957

Municipal Trail chap: Duane at Off. 450-451-4608 or Cell 514-833-6019

OK....so we skipped a Thursday tour on 4th March; put it down to being in post Loppet recovery mode by event participants and volunteers, plus upcoming preparation for our Viking Spring Getaway weekend to Mt. Tremblant. Fast forward a week and while contemplating the re-appearance of suburban lawns under brilliant sunny skies, with the thoughts of another Thursday tour remotest from mind.....until Wednesday afternoon, when Gordon phones me to enquire..."well, where are we skiing tomorrow?" Fumbled response: "Errrrrrr.....well, what about.....errrr.....that place not too far out near Rigaud?!" Following some convoluted phone calls to the Rigaud municipality to track down someone who could confirm an OK state of the trails, it was somewhat late Wednesday before the invite message went out to the Thursday touring troops, who were either incredulous that snow still existed, or had made other arrangements to entertain themselves! Notwithstanding, we managed to rustle up the following 5 spring ski keeners: Gordon Cohen, Chris Lyle, Howard Bussey, Sheila Mason & Derek Wills.

This unique "free and open to the public" forested trail network seems to be a joint venture sponsored by the municipality of Rigaud and Quebec Govt. Ressources naturelles et Faune. Some 25 detailed nature interpretation panels are placed en route, plus clear trail maps at intersections showing where you are.



This shows our counter-clockwise routing around the L'escapade trail network, with an exploratory side venture where beaver and heron inhabit Lac des Castors. We kick off at 200 m elevation, with our lowest elevation at 100 m



This was our generously appointed rendezvous: the Sucrerie de la Montagne car park, no doubt more crowded when the sugaring-off parties are in full operation.



Does not get more bucolic than this with Rigaud icons of work horses, syrup collecting buckets on maple trees and weathered log habitations.





Setting off on the trail, we see that horse riding, hiking and skiing on the trails are free, but this sign would seem to imply that snowmobiling, ATV-ing or cycling could cost you \$300 !!!

Although we did not encounter any of the equestrian folk on the trails, their "business cards" were in clear evidence!!



Gordon just manages to hold his horses before encountering a pick up of "equestrian klister!"



We take an exploratory side trail called L'Envolée du Castor and discover a high-rise of herons' nests, plus further on discover their astonishing evolution with the use of plastic for nesting!





With endless plastic piping, pumps and shacks with purring machines, this was clearly the Trans Canada Pipeline for maple syrup!!



On a steep twisting slope with exposed rocks and gravel, we wisely take off our skis for the descent.

All just typical for spring skiing hazards from on-trail twiggy debris, to tree deadfalls and open streams across the trail.



Excellent illustrated maps are provided trail-side.

Along Le Haut-Lieu section of trail, an expansive southerly view comes into sight





Following some exertive climbing, we come across some convenient nature provided “seating” arrangement, and tuck into our packsack lunches.



This section of trail (The Sweet Adventure) sums up both our first-time skiing experiences in the area, and that of the ones who built this exotic woodland retreat residence!



And so these are the last sweet scenes to be seen as La Virée gourmande trail brings one back to the Sucrierie de la Montagne car park concluding a skied circuit of some 16 km.

Before hitting the Autoroute 40 for the return trip home, we convene for a coffee, some reluctantly for ethical reasons, at a local McDonalds.

Turns out the coffee was free on special promotion, skiing was free, and gas 5c/l cheaper than in town....all befitting the thrifty x-c mentality!!

Rigaud certainly has a wonderful natural gem in its domain and a visit for a hike to take in the woods woven with rock formations, rivulets and little lakes to picnic by should be on summer outing agendas!!