

Senior Vikings ski hut to hut in the Chic-Chocs

By Derek Wills

See our trip in pictures, thanks to Jarmila,

<https://www.picasaweb.google.com/jarmilaphilipp/ChicChoc>

First off, you may wonder what are the Chic-Chocs, where are they, and how did they acquire a name like that? It would seem that SÉPAQ (who look after Quebec's national parks) savvy winter outdoors folks like to keep them a secret!

Sometimes anglicized as Shick Shocks, they are a range of mountains forming the tail end of the Appalachians located in the central Gaspé Peninsula. This mountain cluster has some 25 peaks over a kilometre high and is set back about 30 km from the south shore of the St. Lawrence River. The name "Chic-Choc" allegedly comes from the Mi'kmaq word sigsôg, meaning "craggs" or "rocky mountains"...which is certainly confirmed at one's first sight of them!

Challenge programs need not be limited to the younger Viking set. However, besides age, the major difference is that in our Seniors Challenge Program there was no guiding coach....so planning and execution of our Chic-Choc cabin-to-cabin ski trip was more shaped by anarchy than by central leadership!

Our Viking seniors Challenge group for this venture, by separate vehicle loadings, were:

1. Howard and Ceilia Bussey and Hans & Wilma Wiemer
2. Jarmila Philipp and Judy Rogers
3. Richard L'Heureux, Chris Lyle, & Derek Wills

The 750 km drive to the starting point – Village Grande Nature Chic-Choc – from Montreal can, with shared driving and synchronized toilet stops, be accomplished in a day.

Actually getting to this somewhat isolated Village Grande Nature Chic-Chocs entails a 17 km drive inland from the St. Lawrence community of Cap-Chat. Night had fallen by the time we (Chris, Richard and Derek) had reached here and were at this critical stage fully dependant on the Aussie-accented GPS navigating voice of Karen...who, alas, led us completely astray! We should have suspected that a dirt road linking us from one hydro transmission pylon to another was not quite right! Only after an enquiry at a cul de sac resident, and silencing Karen, did we get our correct bearings! She is probably still muttering "re-calculating, re-calculating.....!"

This is the Readers Digest version of our adventure, the so-called "Circuit Logan":

Day 1

Dropped off our 10 bags for transportation to the cabin by pre-arranged snowmobile service. In the rain, and using half-skins on our skis to tackle some steep sloppy inclines, skied the 13 km to the first cabin Le Huard (The Loon) set by Lac Thibault. The cabin wood stove efficiently dries out all our strung out sodden clothing overnight!

Day 2

Welcome colder weather sets in as we cover the 19 km ski to the second cabin La Nyctale (type of Owl) at elevation 1,000 m where we settle in for a 2 night stay.

Day 3

Following a failed morning attempt to assail Mt. Logan (1,150 m), only a 3 km ski away from the cabin, we were successful in the afternoon when the fierce winds dropped and clear blue skies emerged. From this 1 km high summit, the St. Lawrence River could clearly be seen, flanked by numerous Hydro wind generators.... Don Quixote would have felt at home!

Day 4

We leave alpine scenes of stunted growth trees encapsulated in ice and snow easily leading you to ponder if you were on another planet and ski 11 km to the third cabin Le Carouge (Blackbird) set by Lac Choc.....which leads to, yes, Lac Chic!

Day 5

We skied 20 km back to the start at Village Grande Nature Chic-Chocs. Prudently, we took skis off and walked down some of the steep icy sections. Hans, who had "roughed it" at the hotel, greeted us on the final incoming section of trail.

In general, the cabins were surprisingly modern and clean and an adjoining room had an ample supply of stacked logs to maintain the woodstove. The 4 bunk bed aside configuration matched our gender division exactly, 4 ladies to the left, 4 gents to the right, no exceptions for married couples.

There being no running water, snow had to be stove-melted in the large pots provided, or opportunistically caught directly from the dripping roof! Toilet matters were attended to at a nearby outhouse, with caution required for nocturnal visits! For grey water disposal, there was an outside facility to pour it down. Being devoid of electricity, personal headlamps and suspended LED battery-powered lighting over the kitchen and dining areas were needed once the sun had set. For cooking we had brought a dual burner stove and several propane gas canisters..... all of which served us well for the nightly gourmet meals prepared by "paired chefs" in rotation!

A historical diversion here as it was interesting to ponder why there was an impressive church amid the tourist accommodations, but not a single "village" resident. Well, during the depression era of the 1930's, church and state encouraged a "return to the land" initiative and formed several villages in hinterland Gaspésie. This was one such village and was named, rather optimistically, Saint-Octave-de-l'Avenir (St. Octave of the Future) in 1932. It proved agriculturally unsustainable in the long run and was formally "disbanded" in 1971. Following this, the Canadian Armed Forces became involved and Saint-Octave-de-l'Avenir became Camp Cadet Cap-Chat.....a training facility for cadets. Alas, that activity was terminated when the Minister of National Defence decided to transfer all such cadet activities to Valcartier!

Now, under the name of Relais Chic-Chocs Inc. attention is focused solely on outdoors activities and recreational tourism.....e.g. skiing folks like us!

One wonders what depression-era folk would think of a business plan where people pay for the privilege of skiing up into the mountains and stay at back-to-basics cabins; who knew the future...Saint-Octave maybe?