



Amy Patenaude

Amy Patenaude splits her time between living in Henniker & Franconia, NH, and skiing/racing on fat & skinny skis. She is a columnist for a NH weekly, The Weirs Times. Amy is a National Master Cross-Country Champion.

The Canadian Ski Marathon

A Two Day, 100 Mile Celebration of Classic Cross-Country Skiing

Not far from the banks of the Ottawa River is the Fairmont Chateau Montebello, and here is where you'll find the headquarters of the Canadian Ski Marathon. The CSM is a two day, 100 mile celebration of classic cross-country skiing. On February 9th & 10th, thousands of skiers of all ages and abilities will participate in the 42nd annual edition of this grand event!

Last year, my husband Charlie and I drove from southern New Hampshire to the Chateau—six hours of driving that included going right through the middle of Montreal (it is a big city) and a Mapquest goof (one wrong exit—it doesn't always know the way). We only stopped for gasoline and then for sandwiches at a cute little bistro right in Montebello.

When we arrived there was a long line of cars waiting to reach the door to the lobby. The Chateau Montebello is a wonder—an incredibly

large, beautiful log cabin painted brown, with each log's end painted bright red. It is very believable that this is the largest log structure in all of Quebec. Although it was built in the early 1900's it has been upgraded with all the amenities you would expect at a Fairmont. To reach the entrance, all cars pass through a huge log carport that was filled with porters and people checking in. All were rushing around carrying luggage, ski bags and wax boxes of all sizes.

I could easily see that there were two kinds of people here—newbies and old-hands. Charlie and I were newbies. I made the arrangements but really didn't know what to expect or what to do. We discovered that you are permitted to bring equipment into your room, but, beware: there is a large fine for making a wax mess. There is a wax room, a building, actually, but we didn't use it. Charlie had checked snow conditions on-line and waxed at home. Don't be shy asking for advice; I'm glad we did. We learned it was smart to carry a small backpack with extra socks and a warm coat.

The grand lobby has the largest stone fireplaces and chimney I have ever seen. Much like a tall stone tower, it fills the middle of the open space. The chimney is surrounded by four stories of balconies that are not just walkways but are lined with comfy chairs and game

Charlie Gunn (Left) and John Chaffee



The point to point course is divided into 15 kilometer sections with checkpoints

tables for guest to relax in and watch the business in the lobby below. The lobby was packed tight and we waited in line to check in, make dinner reservations, and then again to register for the event.

We met many skiers from the States; many come year after year to enjoy the camaraderie on the trails and in the hotel. The hotel was almost bursting at its seams; there are several seatings for dinner to accommodate all the hungry cross-country skiers. The atmosphere is festive and radiates energy. Feeding skiers is a daunting task and I could only imagine that in 24 hours we would be as exhausted as the workers in the kitchen must have been.

I could go on and on about how terrific the experience is staying at the hotel during the CSM. I bet there are some who prefer it over the skiing, but the skiing is wildly fun too!

The point to point course is divided into 15 kilometer sections with checkpoints. An individual's start time is determined by the level they are: gold, silver, bronze or tourer. Skiers must complete the event at the each level before being permitted to move onto the next the following year. The Gold skiers are the highest level and these skiers start first and board the buses as early as 3:30 am. They carry all that they need for the weekend on their backs as they traverse the course, and they sleep outside on Saturday night, too. Only hot water and hay for bedding is provided for the Gold skiers.

Silver skiers wear heavy backpacks and carry the knowledge that when they complete the course they will be permitted to wear the Gold. Bronze skiers ski the course working for their silver status.

Tourers do whatever they please. There is an amazing shuttle service between checkpoints and tourers can choose to ski only the sections they want. But if a tourer does complete the entire course they do not earn silver status.

Charlie and I were tourers and skied the full distance the first day. We were the last to start and it was amazing how many people we skied past during our five hour adventure. We had never before seen so many wood skis on people's feet. Smiles and laughter surrounded us at every checkpoint, where hot drinks and high-energy food are provided. The third section was very crowded because many people take the shuttle and begin their skiing at this point. I never saw anyone racing; only people skiing for good fun, and who cares if you don't make it to the next checkpoint before the cutoff time. There is always a warm bus ride back to the Chateau waiting for you.

Make the Canadian Ski Marathon your next adventure and do it your way. Charlie and I hope to be wearing our bronze bibs next year! ❄️

For more information about the Canadian Ski Marathon visit: www.cms-mcs.com



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