

Skiing — French, indeed, know how to do it

By Mary Jane Doerr

"The French know how to do it better — with more class."

A Canadian computer programmer from Toronto told me that as we were riding the three-man chair to the summit of the 3,000-foot peak of Mont Tremblant in the Laurentians in Quebec.

Surrounding us was the beauty of the white-laced pine trees protecting us from the windiness of the day. French signs loomed ahead. "Descendez-ici!" and "Tenez les spatules de vos skis!" indicated it was time to disembark.

In all of my ski travels in Colorado, Utah, Michigan and Europe, I have never discovered such an active social life as that revolving around the daily ski school lessons at Mt. Tremblant.

At the peak's 40-year old log cabin "LeRendez-vous", our class convened for a lunch of cheese, bread, sausage, and wine. There was Red, a private trucking firm owner from Toronto; Mark, an international tax lawyer from Montreal; John, a management consultant from Toronto; Ray, a geologist from Sudbury; Jim, a ski-glass factory worker from southern Quebec; and Allen, a ski fanatic from Miami. We all had become friends through our daily four-hour lessons.

SKIING IN the Laurentians has many advantages, besides the social life and the excellent ski instruction. The two-hour plane trip from Windsor to Montreal's Dorval Airport does not cause any jet lag as it is in the same time zone as the eastern part of the United States. The 3,000-foot altitude provides a vertical drop of 2,200 feet.

"That is why we come here. It is perfect for groups of friends who all ski differently. Everyone has someone to ski with."

—Terri, a Pittsburgh nurse

for expert skiing but does not bring on the altitude sickness of high mountain skiing.

The average snow fall in the Laurentians is 130 inches a year, down in the last 15 years from the 200 inches. In 1981, at a cost of \$6 million, Mont Tremblant added a snow-making system on the south face of the mountain, utilizing the recycling advantage of the water from Lac Tremblant. The season was extended from Thanksgiving to May with the added snow.

When you come to French Quebec, you do not stay in modern hotels with outdoor swimming pools, saunas, jacuzzis, and televisions in every room. My room at the Villa Bellevue with its three large windows overlooking Lac Quimet was as charming as I have had anywhere.

Instead you enjoy friendly people who stop on the street in the nearby village of St. Jovite to take your picture when you cannot take one of yourself. You enjoy intricate ice sculptures on the streets of the village, night time horse-drawn sleigh rides and four course gourmet meals by award-winning chefs.



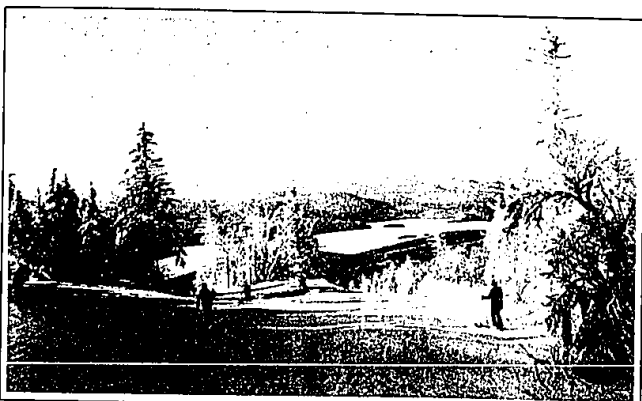
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Trails overlooking Lac Tremblant in the Laurentians in Quebec.

YOU WATCH the Super Bowl in French on wide screen TV in the bar with everyone else. If you don't speak French, you can try German with the Polish family or Spanish with the couple from Venezuela.

The ski week began at many of the some 36 lodges surrounding Mont Tremblant on Sunday evening. Accommodations varied widely in these lodges from dormer rooms and private rooms with bathrooms-down-the-hill to luxurious new two-story condominiums that overlook Lac Tremblant and the ski area (or as the French call it "ski field").

Rates at these various combinations of motels, hotels, lodges and condominiums usually include many attractions. Daily bus shuttles to the ski area are free. Meals, lift tickets, and ski lessons are usually included in the rates. There is nightly entertainment in the bars and lounges.

Lauberger Cuttle's is an intimate 80-year-old lodge with hand-hewn log walls. The guests who stay in the 32 newly-renovated rooms eat the AAA-winning food each evening with Mr. and Mrs. Cuttle. Their 20 new condominiums have increased the capacity. All are sold.

Le Manoir Pitoulet, Cuttle's neighbor on the nine-mile-long spring fed Lac Tremblant, is an English-style building with a variety of 72 different accommodations. The walls of the turn-of-the-century lodge are covered with historic scenes of St. Jovite done in hand-painted rugs. All of their newly built condominiums have also been sold.

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Tremblant, an old timer, Charlie Duncan, charms his 1,000 guests with his stories of the early days of skiing, when Joseph Ryan came to St. Jovite in 1938 to build Mont Tremblant. The expert run on the north face reminds young skiers of those times of abseils, reverse shoulders, and bear trap bindings.

Unlike the Normandy Frenchmen who settled the region, Duncan is Scotch and his 46-year old pine wood office is in one of the region's newer lodges. His son Peter has joined his staff in public relations who markets his own line of ski clothing.

Each lodge has its own ski school. Luc Dubois, one of Canada's famous skiers was head coach of the Canadian National ski team when Kathy Dreiner won her Olympic Gold Medal. He is now a member of the Canadian Ski Instructor's Alliance (CSIA) national technical committee.

As part owner with his father, sister, and two brothers, and ski school director at the Villa Bellevue, he welcomed everyone with a video of Mont Tremblant. Skiers were asked to place their skis in classes where they would feel comfortable after the video description.

"Will I look like that after a week of lessons?" asked Jean-Gig. Marie's French Canadian husband when he saw pictures of Luc skiing.

LUC WARNED us of the sub-zero temperatures predicted for the next day, advising us to wear face masks, boot warmers, extra layers of clothing, and to fill our gloves with handheaters.

The — 20 degrees Centigrade temperatures validated what many skiers had told me about the arctic conditions in the Laurentians — except that on that Monday the subzero weather cancelled the inaugural parades in Washington D.C. and closed schools in Detroit. The rest of the weeks the temperatures rose to 20 degrees Fahrenheit with lots of sunshine.

The French method of instruction made skiing more enjoyable for couples, families, and groups of singles. Marie was preparing for the CSIA instructor's exam while her husband was in intermediate skier. Terri, a nurse from Pittsburgh, was with her boyfriend, a rank beginner. "That is why we come here," said Terri. "It is perfect for groups of friends who all ski differently. Everyone has someone to ski with."

Behind us was a German-speaking Polish family with a grade-school-age child in the beginner's class, a married daughter who wanted to free ski with her husband, and parents who joined the cross-country ski school classes.

MONT TREMBLANT is a center for the development of the Canadian ski technique. Besides Dubois, the ski school directors at Cuttle's, Pitoulet, and Station Mont Tremblant are all members of the Canadian demonstration team, the technical committee, and the international association instructor. The mountain boasts the highest

number of Level 4 instructors (highest ranking possible) of any ski area in Canada.

"These are full time jobs," said ski instructor Francois, a 24-year-old



Writer Mary Jane Doerr handles the slopes

travel

graduate in social work trained in teaching special education. "We spend much time in clinics, developing and analyzing our teaching method, to learn what really happens when we ski."

The Canadian ski technique is a more natural body position which allows the skier relaxed skiing on the long runs (remontees in French). They call this "inclination," or "a more squared body position" over the skis. Their teaching method arrives at this comfortable position without the difficult maneuvers of edge setting, angulation, and pretensions that American skiers are taught in the American ski technique.

No matter how good the instruction was, our lesson did not end on the hill each day at 4 p.m. Instead, by 5 p.m. we were all gathered in the bar drinking the special hot drink of the day and laughing at the video tapes of ourselves skiing that day. Some afternoons we played "Name that Tune" with the band, other days we dreamed up skis with the ski instructors.

Lots of fun, good skiing, and friendly people are what makes up a good vacation — that is just what I found in the Laurentians.

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