

Sleddogging

BY LUIGI DE BERNARDINI | TUE JAN 24 2012

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What an unbelievable experience today! I did one of the things that you normally see in the movies, but you never think you could do. It's because it happens in places far away from where you live and it's hard to imagine that some day you could be there in the right conditions to experience it by yourself.

When my friend Marc, told me that being in Montreal for a couple of days without scheduled meetings, I could go in the sky resorts area and do a snowmobile or a sleddogs tour I had no doubt. Sleddogs! When could it happen again?

I left the hotel in the morning heading the nice resort of Esterel. When I got there I was really surprised... a very nice place with no human beings. I drove for miles without seeing a person, and what was worse... a dog. Nobody along the streets, nobody out of the houses, nobody around what seems to be the only one hotel. At the end I found the start of the sky tracks with a nice lady that told me that there's no more sled dogging in Esterel since a couple of years. What a terrible news! Fortunately she gave me a new hint, Sant-Adele - Mont Gabriel. No wait. I drove immediately there and it was pretty easy to find the sled dog base at the golf club.

A nice guy came to pick me up at the parking with a snowmobile and brought me at the start of the track. The dog team was almost ready and waiting for me. Six nice Huskies with a wonderful team leader: Smoothie.



I had a brief training to learn the sled dogging basis and to try to forget everything you normally see in the

movies. No more than five minutes to be ready to start driving my sled and my dogs team. Do you think dogs really want to run and pull the sled and you? That's not completely true. They are not so committed. They tend to look around, to stop, to play with the dog beside them, to fight, to...



Your role is to keep them concentrated and moving forward, with a combination of incitements ("En avant!", "Hop, Hop...", "Go!") every time they want to do something else than pulling. But you had even to brake, give direction moving your body left or right to change your center of gravity and to help the dogs pushing the sled by yourself going up on the hills. Not so easy I can guarantee! The counterpart is that you are in a amazing environment, going on tracks in the middle of bushes, completely embedded in the nature and in a marvelous landscape.



It was really exciting. A marvelous experience that I never thought I could do.