

KESKINADA, Canada

(report from the British Expedition 2007 - Steve Elliot)

Location

In practical terms, the Keski is in a suburb about 6 miles from the centre of Ottawa, Canada's National Capital. Technically, and to avoid upsetting Quebecers, its in Hull, a suburb of the city of Gatineau, province of Quebec, right across the river from the city of Ottawa, province of Ontario. So that's cleared that up.

Access

Apart from the long flight, it's the most accessible of the World Loppets.

Fly to Ottawa, then choose an option that minimises walking time, as it can be bitterly cold:

- Taxi, the most popular mode, so wrap up well for the wait in the miserable wind-tunnel-taxi queue. Journey time to downtown approx 20 mins, price \$25 to 30.
- YOW Airport Bus *(Kathy/ Nigel details ?*
- Local Bus, see www.octranspo.com

Accommodation

There are many business-type hotels, and a few B&Bs. There is nowhere very near the tracks. See www.Outaouais-tourism.ca or www.canadacapital.gc.ca, and they will also send you brochures.

We used these "Keski partner hotels", which doesn't mean much except you may get a slightly better price.

Holiday Inn Plaza La Chaudiere (HIPLC). At Montcalm and Portage, on the Gatineau side of the river, approx 5m from the tracks and 1.5m from downtown Ottawa. Needs a taxi from the airport. Good quality hotel with twin-bedded rooms, pool, sauna, fitness room, wax tables appear in the underground garage on the Friday (take your own clamps, and I'm sure they would set the tables up earlier if asked). Excellent Continental or Full breakfast buffets, including porridge ("hot oatmeal") on Race days, when they open at 0600. Good evening meals, a la carte or table d'hote options, with buffet Fri/Sat.

Their website says there are tracks right outside, but we weren't sure where they went and even if they went to the race area it's too far

To get to Mont Bleu (see below), turn left and left again and take buses 35,36, 37 (about 20 minutes) from outside the Government Buildings. Or you are allowed to walk through the Government Buildings from Floor 2 of the hotel.

There are some small grocery stores up Eddy.

Taxi to Mont Bleu \$15, to airport \$28.

Ramada Plaza Manoir Du Casino (Nigel/Kathy)

Race details

- **Location**—the Race is in the giant Gatineau Park, which extends from the north bank of the river near downtown Ottawa, northwest in a wedge about 30m long. In the winter, the wide park roads are closed and used as ski tracks, in addition to trails through the forests, total about 200km.
- **Entry process**—its one of the smallest loppets, so there is no need to enter far in advance. Efficient web site entry process.
- **Registration, Start/Finish**---in the Ecole Secondaire Mont Bleu Secondary School, at junction of Cite des Jeunes and Blvd Mont Bleu, on the edge of Gatineau park (just off the detailed tourist maps). There are WCs, changing, baggage reclaim (underneath the football stand at the finish), exhibition, post race meal, massage, (no ski security), plenty of room to keep warm inside before the race start 100m away on the sports field.
- **Travel**—note on Race Days there are **no** special buses, so use taxi (the ladies on the race Info desk will order a return taxi for you, advised as limited bus service at w/e), or bus 11,17, 31, 33, 35,36, 37, 49 to the Terminus Gabrielle Roy, which is at the CEGAP College. Facing the College, walk about 200m to your right to the school, and to reach the **Relais Plein Air** (see below), go beyond the school, turn left and the RPA is at the end of the road.
- **Course**—in normal years we believe much of the course is on forest trails, but in 2007 due to snow shortage it was mostly on the wide parkways, which was good in providing lots of room, but produced a very tough race of medium steepness but very long and numerous climbs. It was basically an out-and-back with loops at beginning and end.
- **Feed stations**—about six, the last about 12km from the end, with warm Gatorade or honey water, cookies, chocolate raisins, bananas. Try to be especially nice to the volunteers, as they are in the middle of nowhere in brutally cold weather!

- **Weather**—yes it was very cold, down to about –15C, but on some days with a vicious cold wind, so do bring appropriate kit and wax. There is a local TV weather station
- **Goody bag**—pretty poor, no goodies at all, although we did get woolly hats at the finish

Pre race Training

The lady at the RPA told us we were exempt from the \$9.90 daily track fee as we were doing the Keski

There are various access points to the race tracks :

- **Relais Plein Air** (see above)—contains WCs, large wax room, café
- *Others----Kathy/ Nigel*

Non-skiing activities

As Canada's capital, there are numerous museums, art galleries etc (note many are closed Mondays). Some must-sees are:

- **Canadian Museum of Civilisation**—a superb story of mankind's involvement with Canada, from the totem poles and artefacts of the First Nation peoples, to reconstructions of fur trading posts. A stunningly presented world class museum. Free after 1600 on Thursdays!
- **Ice sculptures**—the Keski coincides with the last w/e of the Winterlude, a highlight of which is around 50 breathtaking ice sculptures of amazing beauty and detail e.g. life size Mountie on a horse. Outdoors at Confederation Park, between Elgin and the Rideau canal. Note—they destroy them on Sunday night, so make sure you visit before the race!
- **Ice skating** on Rideau canal, the worlds longest ice rink at 4.8m! Various access points, starts right next to Confederation Park. Skates for hire—we didn't dare risk injury, but it's a very Ottawa thing to do
- **Houses of Parliament tour**—not quite in the same class as the above, but surprisingly interesting free tours of about 30 minutes (plus its nice and warm inside!). Just turn up.

There are **Tourist Info Offices** at Wellington in downtown, and in Gatineau at the north end of the Alexandra Bridge.

Miscellaneous Tips

- **Immigration Officers** are likely to ask where you're staying, for how long etc, and then engage you in a long discussion once they know you're a skier—they're not trying to trap you, they're just amazed that Britishers can ski !
- **Importing food**—there are fierce signs forbidding food import. It's not totally clear what this covers. There's probably a website somewhere, but ditch stuff to be on the safe side
- **Language**—for many Ottwans/ Gatineaus, French is the first language. Everybody in service industries speaks English, but some struggle a bit
- **Bus Tickets**—cost \$3 flat rate per journey (no change given) or \$2.50, or a one day ticket for \$6 if bought from newsagents, Tourist Info etc
- **Friendliness and Equality**—Canadians are pretty straightforward people who will chat to you, and are polite and courteous. It's an equitable multi cultural society where any dubious jokes or comments are a complete no-no
- **Prices and Tips**—all prices are net of tax, so it comes as a shock that a \$6.99 ticket actually costs \$7.99. There's a huge Tipping culture for Waiting staff—as the menus says “ prices exclude 15% Gratuity” which is probably technically optional but as close as compulsory as you can get
- **Tax Refunds**—you can claim back part of the tax on accommodation (room only) and goods over \$50. Fill in a form at the Customs desk at the airport—we didn't find it but believe it to be in the Arrivals Hall—they will send a cheque to your home