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THE GREAT WHITE NORTHEAST

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So, where are you from?" the friendly Canadian says, staring inquisitively at my telemark equipment.

"Colorado," I say.

"So...what brings you to Tremblant then?" he asks with a chuckle.

"Avoiding avalanches," I say. Having spent the last 20 years of my ski bum career planning my days around avalanche safety, I'd come to Quebec because I could tour here without worrying about the dangers of Colorado's big open bowls and terrain traps. It was refreshing to know none of the slopes around me would slide—my biggest worry here in Quebec was whether or not I would freeze to death. So I just kept skinning.



Arriving in the small, tailored resort village of Mont Tremblant almost felt as if I had pulled up in Vail. But no, this is very much Canada, replete with ice skating rinks, sled dogs and world-class Nordic skiing. Long a favorite summer training ground and competition site for U.S. triathletes, Mont Tremblant, nestled in the sprawling winter oasis of the Laurentian Mountains in Quebec, is now making a reputation for itself as an uphill skiing mecca.

That should not sound so odd: The resort's founders fancied themselves uphill skiers—a tradition that dates back to 1938, when Joseph Bondurant Ryan, a wealthy Philadelphian, and his radio personality pal Lowell Thomas, climbed to the summit of 2,871-foot Mont Tremblant using wooden skis and seal-fur skins.

Legend has it that Ryan was so smitten with the views and the golden glow of the sun hitting the mountainside, he decided it was more valuable than the gold ore that lured him to the region, and he vowed to open a ski area with a Euro-style mountain village. A year later, he installed a single-chair lift and broke ground on what would become the first large-scale ski lodge in the area. Apparently having a radio journalist as a ski buddy paid off, as news of the resort spread quickly.



The low-key vibe and good nature of the Canadian tourists and locals who call Mont Tremblant home take the sting out of the fact that the place feels a little bit like a company town, owned and operated by Intrawest with a high-end, car-less village. At least the French signage lends a European flavor to a tiny town featuring high-end hotels, retail and a casino that are only a quarter century old.

Today, the ski hill itself, which is also the highest peak in the Laurentians, boasts 96 groomed trails and 14 lifts spread across 665 acres with 2,100 vert. And while these stats may not sound overwhelming by big-Western-resort standards, the smaller scale makes the resort ideal for touring. The area embraces uphill skiing: Well-marked AT routes wind through the trees around the mountain, and due to the slope angle, the low elevation, and the fact that they get consistent—but not massive—dumps of snow, it stays entirely avalanche free.

The mountain has capitalized on these favorable conditions, gorgeous woodlands, and the growing skimo trend to attract more uphill skiers from the States and beyond. Tremblant's annual Festival Rando Alpine (Alpine Touring Festival) celebrates the high-cardio-output pursuit with three days of organized tours, clinics, races and more. On my visit, we toured up to the rustic Refuge de Trappeurs cabin in the Versant Soleil area of the mountain for an authentic fireside fondue dinner and headlamp descent.

"Tremblant's first intention was to support and regulate the sport, which has steadily been gaining in popularity on-mountain," said Jean-Francois Gour, marketing director of Station Mont Tremblant. "Supporting the practice of alpine touring has in fact drawn a number of new and passionate skiers to Tremblant and led to the creation of the Alpine Touring Festival, which this February will be celebrating its fourth edition."

Need more convincing? An uphill day pass only costs \$10 bucks CDN, and once you reach the top, you are welcome to ski down any of the groomed runs and off-piste trees. I recommend heading for the top of the Edge Lift and hitting the gladed and less-skied Sensation Haut routes back down.



Under a backdrop of some of the most breathtaking mountainscapes and alpenglow you'll experience anywhere in the world, the freezing temps also keep the snow in a perpetual, crystalized state, ideal for both up- and down-hill laps. And, as I discovered, it pays to leave your Colorado backcountry snobbery behind and head east to one of the great up-and-coming ski touring destinations in North America.

For more info on uphill skiing at mont Tremblant head to tremblant.ca/things-to-do/activities/alpine-touring.

-Aaron H. Bible is an adventure travel writer and gear abuser based in Nederland, Colorado. Follow his journey on Instagram.