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Guided Maine Canoe Trips

Fully Guided Wilderness Canoe Trips "Best Vacation You Could Ask For!"



by Peter Hines
Editor

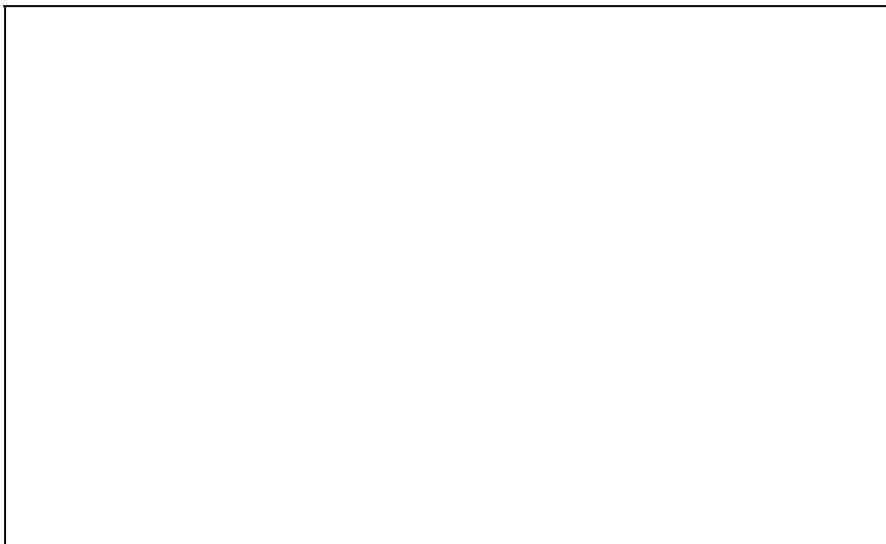
Quebec City Winter Canoe Race

A stiff and bitterly cold 25 MPH Northeast wind ripped up the mighty St. Lawrence River, while a six-knot current carried the massive chunks of ice the other way.

Thousands of spectators milled about the shore, kicking and stamping in an effort to stay warm. Virtually all of them are bundled up from head to toe with their warmest winter clothing with only the smallest parts of their faces exposes. Local families brought their children bundled and stuffed into snowsuits so tight they could barely move. Some traveled great distances to view the spectacle that was about to begin. Most of the hearty were from closer by and seized this opportunity to celebrate their toughness against the Canadian winter.

They are here to watch the canoe race and it's Carnaval in Quebec City at its best.

Suddenly a horn blew and the crowd began to shuffle about some craning their muffled necks to look over the crowd for the competitors on the ice below.

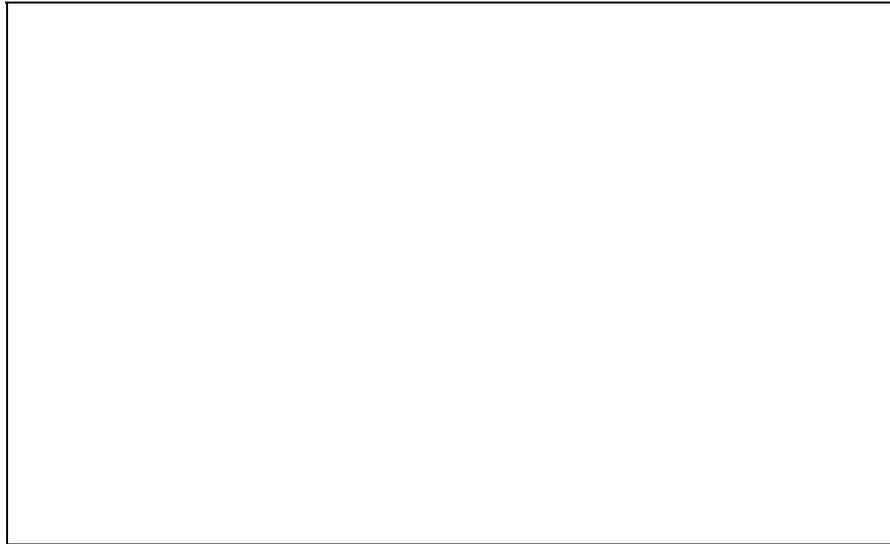


Slowly they came out of the Basin Louise. Five to a team, two on the right, two on the left and the captain at the stern. They pushed and pulled their canoe navigating the large boulders of ice, to the left and to the right looking for the right path, the one that would take them forward. They called to one another constantly communicating and encouraging. The bundled crowd on the shore cheered with encouragement.



Back in the day, before there were bridges across the St. Lawrence, water taxis ferried people and goods across the river. These taxis were operated by families. Legend has it that one night after a few too many caribous during the winter Carnaval a bet was made regarding which family could get to the other side and back the fastest. The race has been a mainstay of Carnaval ever since.

The teams pushed forward, each looking for the best path. The suits they wear are slimming compared to the puffy spectators on the shore. They looked like teams of gladiators armed with oars in their hands and large spikes on their feet. As they pumped forward looking for open water. Once found they hop into their boat feverishly pulling on their oars moving the boat forward against the current. The captain stays to the rear calling and steering the direction. The pace picked up substantially in the open water while the packs broke apart, each team looking for the best path to the first buoy. They turn to the east and headed for the other bank, sometimes in open water, sometime scampering over the top of it. They are barely visible being almost a mile away on the shore of Levis. The blowing snow and steam rising off the open water cuts to visibility. Huge ice breaking tugs lumber out in the river downstream of the competitors. A massive ocean going freighter waits for the race to conclude.



And then, they turn back to the finish. The teams that had trained and planned the best are out in front. The pace is a little slower now as the frozen and liquid water wears on the muscles.

Fifty-three teams started in five different waves on February 8, 2015.

It's a cross between a marathon and an obstacle/endurance race like Warrior Dash. The top athletes are said to train all year for this and prepare their fluid and caloric intake days in advance to be in peak physical condition. The cold and dry air can wreck havoc on body.

The races goes on for over an hour. Some teams never finish as they get caught up in a down-river ice flow unable to get their boat pointed in the right direction or a team member gets injured by the merciless boat catching a competitor between its gunnels and a chunk of ice.

The Great Ice Canoe race is truly about the sport and not the prize money, as the any winnings probably does not cover the costs of the canoe and getting it to and from the shore.

On thing for sure though, the competition is fierce and fun and everyone enjoys the event.

For more information see: <http://www.quebecregion.com/en/>