

CMG ROUTES, DISCOVER YOUR ROADS, TOURING

## DYR: THE GASPESIE

JUNE 26, 2015 | EDITOR 'ARRIS | [LEAVE A COMMENT](#) | [EDIT](#)

*I know quite a few English speakers who get a little nervous about riding in Quebec. Most do not even have a marginal command of French and the thought of making an arse of themselves is enough to see them stick to the tedious highways and get through the province as quickly as possible.*

I can understand this, but if you are one of these riders, then let me implore you to take a chance. Grab a French phrase book, be prepared to ask for sautéed bull's testicles when you really meant meatballs, but making this effort will generally see you greeted with a smile, some broken English and access to some of the best riding roads in eastern Canada.





*The Gaspésie Peninsula does not have many roads, but what it does have are pretty damn good. Courtesy Google maps.*

A prime example of a bucket-list worthy Quebec ride, is the Gaspésie peninsula. Situated on the south shore of the St Lawrence river where it merges into the Gulf of St Lawrence, the Gaspésie boasts some of Quebec's best roads – both paved and gravel. It's the size of Belgium but with a mere 140,000 inhabitants, mostly around the perimeter and on the south shore, it's sparsely populated.

The peninsula is the final thrust of the Appalachian Mountain chain, that extends all the way from Georgia. Sadly, few roads cut through the spectacularly hilly middle section, though adventurers can explore it via the extensive network of logging and ATV trails, as we did back in **2012**.

Instead, the main road (Route 132) circumnavigates the peninsula, and for many sections literally sits between the St Lawrence and sheer cliffs, giving the rider a very rare experience of a genuine coastal road.



*A few years back we did a ride through the middle bit on the trails. It was truly spectacular. Photo; Rob Harris*

For this DYR, we'll take you around the circumference, starting and stopping in the town of Matane – the gateway to the Gaspésie circuit.

## The Ride





*The Matapedia River Valley makes for a great road. Photo: Rob Harris*

Heading south out of Matane on the 195 and you find yourself following a wide river valley before zigzagging across rolling farmland. It's all pleasant enough, but the real fun starts when you get to the town of Amqui and onto the 132.

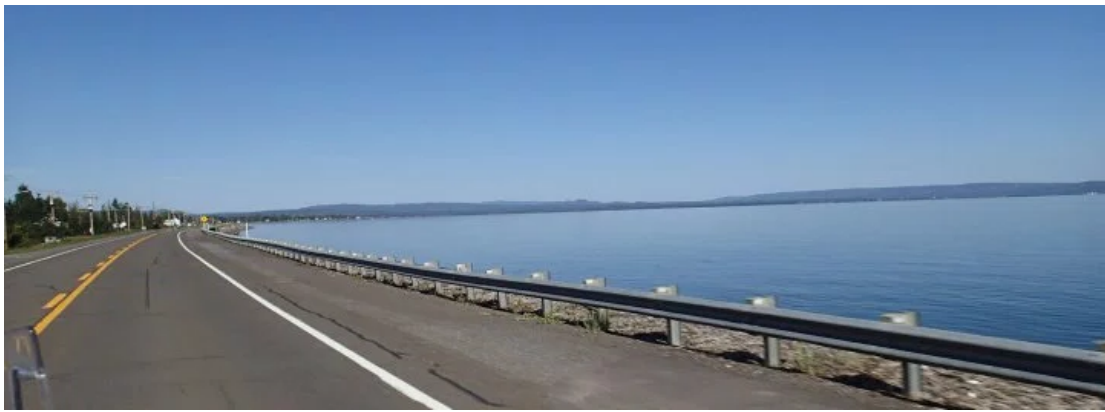
This is the Matapedia Valley – a steep-sided affair that forces the road to follow its tune, winding above a picture postcard stone-clad river that invites the thirsty traveller to pull over, strip off and take a refreshing plunge.

The fun carries on till close to the New Brunswick border where it opens up but is peppered with small towns that sadly serve to break up the flow.



*The countryside south of Matane is pretty but lacks the drama of the coast. Photo: Rob Harris*

At the town of Matapedia, the 132 swings east and hugs the shores of the Bay of Chaleur (warm waters), which also sees the most urban section of the loop. Ideally there would be another road option to bypass this stretch, but the 132 is *THE* road and it's not until the town of Paspébiac that it sheds the speckled suburbia and the road speeds up, getting better and better as you narrow in on the town of Percé.



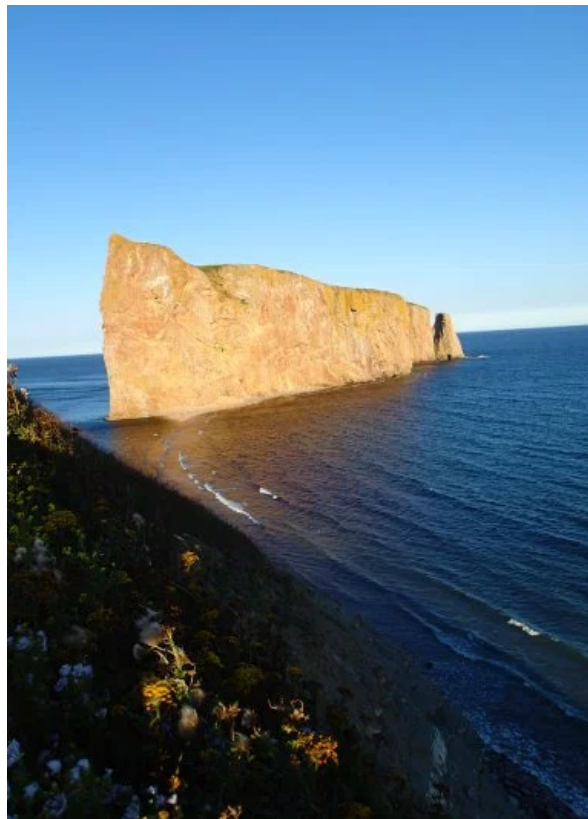
*The south shore is not missing some good views but is quite urban and slow going. Photo: Rob Harris*

Percé is the tourist centre of the Gaspésie – mainly because it has a rather large and striking rock just off its shores, that even comes complete with a hole through it. But it's more than that, and with the surge of tourists, come amenities such as fine dining, bars, hotels and, well, civilization. It is, for all intents and purposes, the start of the really fun roads. Here the Appalachian Mountains come right up to the sea, so the road has no choice but to either roller coaster over them or cling between cliff and shore.

Having said that, there is a section up to the town of Gaspé that is a little flat but with plenty of ocean views it's perfectly acceptable. You have to be careful to not leave the 132 (it turns off) as it sweeps around Parc National Forillon. When I was there in 2014 the road was all ripped up, which wasn't much fun, but it means it'll be all new asphalt now and it is a twisty mother too.

Once past the park you are now riding the north shore – the gem of the ride. It reminds me of the Cabot Trail and is well worthy of the comparison, the steep cliffs and rugged climate keeping the towns small and uncommon – often nestled in river exits where the land offers a ribbon of flat to build on.

Sadly, the fun ends when you hit Sante-Anne-des-Monts as the increasing number of towns and villages break up the flow. For the more adventurous, you can slip down the Cascapedia road (hwy 299) to just beyond the park and take some easy gravel roads through Réserve Faunique de Matane (read about our adventures there, [here](#)).



*Percé rock! Photo: Rob Harris*



*Lovely. Photo: Rob Harris*

## The Options

The main tourist trail is to circumnavigate Gaspésie, but there are a couple of roads that dissect through the middle:

### 1) Highway 299

The Cascapédia road (hwy 299) cuts right through the middle and is a dramatic ride along the Cascapédia river and through Parc National de la Gaspésie. Although from the southern end it starts out a little dull, it gets better as the Cascapédia valley narrows and twists.



*The Chic Choc hills are some of the highest in eastern Canada. Photo: Rob Harris*

Toward the northern end you hit the park, situated in the spectacular Chic Choc mountains with their steep scree sides and rounded tops – some of the highest peaks in eastern Canada. If you have time, take a moment to visit the park's HQ and/or the very fancy Gîte du Mont-Albert nearby.

The road ends rather abruptly in Sainte-Annes-des-Monts. From here you can head left and back to Matane, but you're missing the glory of the peninsula if you don't head right and ride the ocean hugging road.

### 2) Highway 198

The Murdochville road is pretty remote but hilly and quite twisty. The town of Murdochville is an old mining town and is struggling to find a reason to exist but I did have a very, very good pizza there in a restaurant on the main street, which might tempt some.



*Murdochville. A bit of a hard sell unless you like pizza. Photo: Rob Harris*

Of course, that may not be enough to warrant using this road though, especially since it bypasses some of the most striking coastal section to



the north, but it isn't boring by any stretch of the imagination. Oh, and if you do, be sure to have a full tank of gas as there is literally nothing between Gaspé and Murdochville.

## Good to know

**Hazards** – There are a lot of moose in the Gaspésie! So the usual warnings apply – be careful at dawn, dusk and if you get stuck on the roads at night. Moose are big and tall so although your bike may go under, you, sadly, will not.

**Police** – They do seem to be light on the ground – especially in the off-season, but beware, the Quebec police have a bit of a reputation for not being ... accommodating.

**Timing** – Because it's a bit of a tourist destination, it's always best if you can avoid the peak summer times. Personally, I find that the early summer can still be pretty cool but September is just perfect, especially after Labour Day (just dress for cool starts). The hordes are gone, prices come down and the trees are just starting to change colour.



**Direction** – After several trips and going round in both directions, I find that counter-clockwise is by far the best way. For some reason the hoards tend to go the other way around and it also means that end with the glorious northern section and are traveling on the sea's side of the road.

## The Google Map

Here's the whole route with options. Once you open in full screen it you should have the option to download the KML file which can then be loaded up into a GPS or smartphone. Enjoy!



## Thank Yous

[QuebecMaritime.ca](http://QuebecMaritime.ca) – for helping make the several expeditions to the Gaspésie region possible.

[La Belle Plage](#), Matane – A motel set up with a very good restaurant attached, it's situated close to the ferry terminal and ideal if you are planning to get that early ferry to the north shore.

[Le Mirage](#), Percé – you can't throw a rock without hitting a hotel in the touristy town of Percé, but Le Mirage is well situated up on the hill to give you a great view of the famous rock. Rooms are motel set up and as seems common in the area, there is a restaurant attached which served a simply amazing breakfast – well recommended.

## GALLERY

Check out all the pics that go with this story! Click on the main sized pic to transition to the next or just press play to show in a slideshow.

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Beach. Photo by Rob Harris