

Charming Vermont inn offers a taste of Ireland

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE AUGUST 13, 2012



Looking its age adds an air of authenticity to the Inn at Long Trail and its McGrath's Irish Pub.

The Inn at Long Trail transcends St. Patrick's Day. The spirit of Ireland is intense year-round at this Vermont lodge and its McGrath's Irish Pub.

The Inn at Long Trail is a nearly 75-year-old lodge that looks its age, and that's a good thing. Full of vintage charm and built of weathered and darkened pine both outside and inside, it's as cosy and homespun as can be. Rocking chairs crafted of twigs and branches are grouped around a big fireplace in the living room. The walls are decorated with snowshoes and black-and-white photos that recall the old days. The games room is chock full of darling, handmade wooden toys and vintage board games, all blasts from the past like Scrabble and Clue, Etch-a-Sketch, with nary a video screen or mobile device.

"It's country style and family-run," says Patty McGrath, who owns the inn and the pub with her

husband, Murray. "People come here because they feel like it's home.

"And kids love that game room ... it's full of fun things they've never seen."

The Inn has 14 B&B-style guest rooms upstairs in the main lodge, all well-maintained and equipped with private bathrooms, but they're "rustic, a place to sleep," said Patty. As well, Long Trail has an annex of roomier suites, with queen beds and separate living rooms with televisions, mini-refrigerators and gas fireplaces.

"The guests who choose the rooms upstairs are looking for a more sociable time, a chance to meet other people at the inn," said Patty. "They're out-and-about, doing sports and coming back to relax in the living room and spend time in the pub. The people who check into the suites want more of a private getaway."

McGrath's is the life of the inn, a traditional pub festooned with dart boards and wall-to-wall memorabilia from the mother country including a geographical map of Irish family names and tributes to political heroes Bobby Sands and James Connolly. On Fridays and Saturdays, the place is packed for live Irish music. Balladeer Tom O'Carroll from Dublin and Boston will entertain on March 23 and 24. Sebastien McSween and Irina Mangov, part of the Kitchen Party band from Montreal, will play upbeat folk fare on April 6 and 7.

No surprise, specialties at

McGrath's include Irish coffee spiked with Jameson and a connoisseur's selection of fine spirits. Murray McGrath favours Powers Irish whiskey. "That's what I take in a flask for the last climb in back-country skiing, but Redbreast is nice, too, a nice sipping whiskey."

Whiskey aside, Guinness is the favourite libation. McGrath's sells kegs and kegs of it and has made the presentation of beer into an artful ritual. It's served slightly chilled, around 10 degrees C., but never cold, which results in a creamier pour. Add a tall, tulip-shaped glass and a hand-drawn shamrock in the foam, and you have a drink made with TLC.

"It's a good honest pint," says Murray. "An international pint is 20 ounces and we take the time to serve the beer in three steps: we pour, then let it settle, pour again and let it settle and finally top it off. Then we draw the shamrock."

Guinness also is the base of

McGrath's signature dish, Guinness Beef Stew, in which the meat is braised for at least six hours. The menu features more Irish flavours with corned beef and cabbage and the house burger, the Paddy Melt. McGrath's is flexible about exchanging its dining room and pub offerings no matter where you are seated. You can stick with such comfort-food dishes as chicken pot pie, shepherd's pie or oatmeal-

encrusted chicken with maple cream sauce. Or you can go with more refined choices like duck, veal,

salmon, lamb chops or the Saturday night special, roast beef with Yorkshire pudding.

Chef Patrick Boandl graduated from the Culinary Institute of America with a specialty in baking and the pastry arts, so I strongly recommend that you stick around for his fabulous desserts like lemon-blueberry cheesecake, the chocolate waffle sundae with raspberry sauce or the apple crisp with ice cream. Boandl's double-chocolate Irish soda bread pudding, topped with Irish whiskey cream sauce is divine – and he'll give you the recipe.

It's the time of year when outdoor sports start to overlap. Killington, Vermont's largest ski area, has had a challenging snow year, but it traditionally has the longest season in the Eastern U.S. At this writing, it plans to stay open into April.

Hikers also come from near and far to tackle the famed Long Trail. Created between 1910 and 1930, the 440-kilometre backwoods footpath crosses Vermont's deepest valleys and highest mountains. The Long Trail starts at the Vermont-

Massachusetts state line in the south and heads north to the U.S.-Canada border near Mansonville. Running south of Killington for about 160 kilometres, it coincides with the even mightier Appalachian Trail.

Those are serious adventures for well-prepared hikers. For something a little more moderate but still challenging, the Inn at Long Trail sits at the base of Deer Leap, a steep and rocky mountain path with wonderful views.

Local hikers have a saying about Deer Leap: "It's 45 minutes from start to Guinness."

If You Go

Killington, Vt., is a 3½- to four-hour drive from Montreal and a 30-minute drive from Woodstock, Vt.

Inn at Long Trail: 800-325-2540, innatlongtrail.com; 709 Route 4, Killington, Vt. Pet-friendly rooms available with prior notice, (additional \$10 per night).

Inn at Long Trail dining room: Open Thurs.-Sun., until March 24 and reopens for September-October.

The inn and pub will be closed April 14 to May 24.

McGrath's Irish Pub: Until April 13: open Mon.-Fri. from 3 p.m.; and Sat. and Sun. from 11:30 a.m.; after May 25, from 11:30 a.m. daily. Closing time is 11 p.m. or later. Live music every weekend.

Prices: Until April 13, Sun.-Thurs., \$105-\$150 U.S., per night, for two including breakfast; On Fri & Sat., it's \$165- \$270 for two, per night, including breakfast and three-course dinner (two-night minimum). Watch for mid-week specials with a free day at Killington. From May 25-Sept. 20: \$79-\$125 for two, including breakfast. Fall foliage rates are higher after Sept. 20.

Killington Resort: 800-621-6867, 802-422-3333, killington.com; 752 skiable acres, 22 lifts, two half-

pipes and five terrain parks, vertical drop of 930 metres (3,050 ft.). The affiliated Pico Mountain, five kilometres down the road, also will be open into April.

Long Trail Information at Green Mountain Club: 802-244-7037, greenmountainclub.org; 4711 Waterbury-Stowe Rd, Waterbury Centre, Vt.

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