



KARI J. BODNARCHUK FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Howard Wright of Portland, Maine, left, and John Willard, owner of The Birches Resort in Rockwood, Maine, savor one of the property's groomed trails.

Yurt-to-yurt trails in wooded quietude

By **Kari J. Bodnarchuk**

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

ROCKWOOD, Maine — Our skis whispered underfoot as we glided through five inches of freshly fallen snow. The forecast had called for 15 to 20 inches, but even in the deep forests of northern Maine, far from much civilization, we were reminded that we were still in New England: The weather was unpredictable.

We'd been swooshing along Baker Trail at The Birches Resort for more than an hour and my breathing had fallen in with the rhythm of my skis. We occasionally stopped for a snack, a swig of water, or to admire the scratches left on trees by deer rubbing their velvet antlers.

"The deer rub the velvet off because

it irritates them," said John Willard, owner of the rustic resort, which sits just feet from Moosehead Lake, overlooking majestic Mount Kineo and 11,000 acres of protected land. "They actually eat it," he said. "It's supposed to be high in protein."

The resort is a draw for cross-country skiers and snowmobilers, who come here as soon as the snow flies to explore this vast wilderness. It has more than 35 miles of groomed ski trails and endless miles of terrain for snowmobilers.

Visitors can stay in the four-bedroom main lodge or one of 15 cabins that also overlook the lake. Skiers also can sleep in three Mongolian-style yurts. That was our choice.

Staying in a yurt is like blending a

cabin experience with high-class camping. Each yurt has a wooden circular platform, and a lattice framework and conical roof covered with a heavy, wind- and weatherproof canvas. Inside are a wood stove, picnic table, bunk bed, futon that sleeps two, Coleman stove for cooking, plenty of candles, gas lanterns, and even a little mirror. The roof has a plastic skylight through which you can see the trees or watch snow falling or the moon rising. A typical trailside outhouse is nearby.

My husband and I had planned to spend three nights at the resort, on a yurt-to-yurt, cross-country skiing adventure. Since we arrived after dark, we spent the first night at the lodge, looking over a trail map, talking to guides

THE BIRCHES, Page M7

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