



# The NorthStar Chronicle

November/December 2018

\* Winter \*

# EDITOR'S NOTE

By Levi Patterson

- Winter is a big part of Canadian life. Although the official beginning of winter is still a month away, the tangible signs of winter have announced winter's arrival much more effectively than man ever could. In the words of French-Canadian songwriter Gilles Vigneault, "Mon pays, ce n'est pas un pays, c'est l'hiver" – "My country is not a country, it is winter."
- I took a poll on the Student Café concerning students' favorite seasons. Ten people responded with their answers. Some respondents couldn't make the decision between two favorites, but counting those answers, too, three out of ten selected winter. If they are an accurate sample of average Canadians, that would be only 30% of Canadians who have winter as a favorite season.
- Hopefully, this edition of the Chronicle will help take the edge off of winter for you!

# Tears From Above

By Emily MacDougall

The leaves of Autumn have fallen, brittle from the cold

Ground into dust as they are trodden over by animals returning to their dens

The air falls silent as the harmonies of birds are lost, and the flower fades and withers away

The sun hides for a longer time leaving the stars to watch as the world turns grey

They watch the changes silently and mourn the seasons gone, the colors of nature and songs of birds

The blooming of the flowers and lumbering of animals, the sun that used to stay out in the day

The trees with their vivid green leaves that had turned into orange, red, brown, and yellow,

They now stand cold and bare to face the winter wind

Watching from above, the stars shed their tears

Tears of tiny white crystals that blanket the ground, that turn the raging river still, and command the trees to bend.

As tears are shed for the lost seasons, the sun slowly climbs up to its throne in the sky,

Touching the blanket, the raging river still, and trees frozen in place, casting its rosy glow to glimmer and to shine

The stars no longer cry for the beauty that is lost

They cry for the beauty that has been gained

They cry for winter.

# COFFEE SHOP

By Hadassah Houben

The frigid snow crunches underneath her weight, though her feet remain safely warm within their boots. Chilly air nips at her nose, as she slowly ambles downtown. Though there isn't a cloud in the sky, snow gently falls down upon the town. The packed snow underfoot shines with the sun's reflection, nearly blinding her as she makes her way to the small coffee shop. Her breath catches in the air and creates the illusion of smoke wafting from her mouth and nose. She smiles as she walks, passing an older couple holding hands as they take their Sunday walk. Inhaling deeply, she enters the coffee shop.

The scent of milk, hot chocolate, and gingerbread reach her nose, instantly gaining her attention. Her smile widens as she looks at the cute gingerbread house decorated with icing and various candies that sits by the window for display. Grinning, she makes her way to the counter and orders a hot chocolate with whipped cream. She hums a pretty tune and sits by the window.

The interior of the shop is cozy, with various paintings of old buildings and coffee mugs. The walls themselves are painted a light brown, and the ceiling is faded white. Worn-down, the counter is in need of replacement as it is terribly stained and scratched. The tall table she sits in is also well-used, and so are the seats, each colored a different shade of brown. Steam from freshly made coffee rises in the sweet-smelling air, as another customer enters.

His tall frame barely fits through the door, but he manages to enter and walk to the counter with surprising grace. He is lean and wears a spiffy-looking black coat, with black jeans to match. His head is covered with short black hair, which still has snowflakes in it from his walk here. He grins and orders from the barista, and goes to sit beside her.

She smiles tentatively at him while sipping her chocolate drink. The whipped cream leaves a white mustache on her lip, but she swiftly wipes it off. He chuckles and takes a draught of his own drink.

"What're you drinking?" She questions him, still licking the cream from her mouth.

"Pumpkin Spice Latte. How 'bout you?"

"Hot chocolate." She replies before taking another drink.

"I haven't seen you around for a while." It isn't a question, but more like a sad statement.

“Well, I guess we should make up for lost time today.” Her green eyes twinkle at the prospect.

He grins immediately, “Sure, I don’t have anything going today anyways.”

They finish their drinks and make their way out into the cold again. The snow has stopped coming down by this time, and other townsfolk are out decorating. Mistletoe, wreaths, Christmas lights, inflatable reindeer and other such decor are soon lining the whole town. Some children begin to make snowmen in the town square, and they make their way to them.

He bends down and helps a smaller child lift a heavy piece of snow on top of two other pieces, and thus creates the first snowman. She smiles and starts building her own snowman, and soon there are many snowmen all gathered around.

“You’re quite the artist,” he teases her and smirks, flinging some loose snow in her direction. She rolls her eyes and chucks some snow back at him, “Thank you, I try.”

He looks up to where the sun is beginning to set, “We should probably go now…”

“Yeah, I guess…”

“May I walk you home?” He asks with a brilliant smile as he holds his hand towards her. She looks down bashfully before slipping her hand into his.

“I’ll take that as a yes.”

“Yes, of course, you dummy!” She sticks her tongue at him, and he sticks his right back at her. They chuckle and continue joking for a while longer, slowly making their way to her house.

It starts to snow again. The big fluffy flakes of frozen water falling to the ground make such a beautiful sight. They reach her house just as the sun starts to completely disappear, slipping beneath the housetops.

Their breath mingles into one cloud as they say goodbye.

“I hope I’ll see you again soon.”

“So do I. I’ll probably see you again tomorrow.”

“You think? Why’s that?”

“Well, I’m gonna be getting a hot chocolate at the coffee shop again tomorrow at two pm. I expect we’ll run into each other there.”

“Yes, we probably will. See you then.” He bids farewell, and she stands in the doorway watching him walk away, before shutting the door with a smile on her face.

# DIY SNOWBALLS

By Sesame Perry

Making snowballs requires finesse - any fourth grader can tell you that. But how do you actually make one? Although your little brother will laugh and say it's simple, we learn through life that not all simple things are easy.

Four steps are what it takes to end up with a nearly perfect snowball.

First, you must make a decision. Gloves or no gloves? Mittens are out of the question, because it's hard to form a snowball and really hard to throw it, and for some reason, the snowball just isn't as perfect with mittens. Gloves that are fuzzy on the outside are also rather hard to make snowballs with. Using gloves will keep your hands warm and, during frigid snowball fights, are likely required by mothers. Bare hands, however, usually give you a firmer, smoother snowball and a more accurate throw. Please note that after two or three snowballs your hands will be *very* cold.

Once you've acquired what you wish to wear outside, you troop out, your breath usually freezing into frosty clouds (that part's easy). Now you select some good sticky snow. The best time to find nice snow is early afternoon on an unusually warm day after a recent snow.

When making snowballs, we have to keep in mind what we are using them for. A large one isn't as likely to hit its target, and a small one doesn't have as much snow to hit the target with. Here's how you judge: if you want a snowball to throw at your brother, you'll probably want a medium one, so that there is plenty of weight, but it has a reasonable chance of hitting its target (your brother). If you're practicing your throw and are throwing at trees or something then you can start out with small ones (they are great for target practice!).

Now, you pack the snowball. Although there are several ways to do this, probably the most favoured one is the hot potato technique. This one is especially speedy for snowball fights.

All you have to do is take your selected portion of snow and pack it between two hands (too bad you don't have three), one over the other, and then you reverse, with the opposite hand on top.

Finally, you're ready to take aim and throw! Avoid the 'girly' style - holding onto your ammunition too long. If so, your beautifully crafted snowball will veer sharply to the ground.

If you pay diligence to learn this method, snowballs will yield to your trained hand.

# FUN FACTS

By Naomi Kitchen

- Did you know that the earth is closest to the sun during winter? This actually has nothing to do with the temperature drop, what really affects the temperature is the way the earth's axis is tilted.
- The word winter originated from the Proto-Indo-European word “wend” meaning water. This makes sense because snow is water!
- Even though they are all unique did you know that there are 35 different kinds of snow flakes? No snow flake is the same but according to scientists there are 35 general shapes that these pretty pieces of ice come in.
- For Australia its coldest months are June, July, and August but December January and February are the hottest months. That's probably why you notice a lot of Australian accents in the summer; it's the perfect vacation time for them!
- Did you know the tallest snowman ever made was almost as tall as the Statue of liberty! That's right, on February 26, 2008, a snow**woman** with a height of 122 feet 1 inch was built.

# JOKES

By Jacob Brown

1. What do you call ten rabbits hopping backwards through the snow together?

A receding hare line.

2. What often falls in the winter but never gets hurt?

Snow.

3. What do snowmen eat for breakfast?

Frosted snowflakes.

4. Where do snowmen keep their money?

In a snow bank.

5. What do you get when you cross a vampire with a snowman?

Frostbite.

6. What's white and goes up?

A confused snowflake.

7. When are your eyes not your eyes?

When the winter wind makes them water.

8. What did the icy road say to the truck?

Wanna' go for a spin?

9. Knock, knock.

Who's there?

Snow.

Snow who?

Snowbody.

10. Why is it always so cold and windy in a sports area?

All those fans.

11. There's a cop on the side of the road, checking for speeders. A car flies by, and the cop sees 12 penguins in the back of the car. The cop hits his sirens and pulls the guy over.

He runs up to the window, "What are you doing with 12 penguins in the back of your car!?"

The guy says, "...I dunno'..."

Cop replies, "Well, I think you should take those penguins to the zoo!!!"

"OK," the guy replies.

Next day, there's a cop on the side of the road again. The same car flies by, 12 PENGUINS in the back of the car!! The cop hits the sirens, pulls the guy over, and runs up to his window.

"I THOUGHT I TOLD YOU TO TAKE THOSE PENGUINS TO THE ZOO!"

Guy replies, "I ALREADY DID! AND NOW WE'RE GOING TO THE MOVIES!"



# *FROST FAIRIES*

By Rachel Smith

One frosty, snowy night, seven-year-old Bryanna sat on her couch staring at the large, frosty bay window.

“Daddy, what makes frost?” she asked, tearing her gaze from the window.

“Well, at nighttime, the frost fairies creep out of the snowbanks and paint the frost on the windows, Bryanna Banana,” her dad replied, sitting next to his daughter.

Bryanna wrinkled her forehead. “There’s no such thing as fairies,” she said.

Her dad shrugged, “Okay, I guess you don’t want to know.” He pretended to walk away.

Bryanna sat up. “Well... I guess you can tell me,” she said.

Her dad pretended to consider this, “No. You don’t believe in fairies.” He started to walk away, but then he heard, “I do too! I want to hear!”

“Well...okay, then,” her dad said and sat back down beside her.

“Tell me about the fairies, daddy!” Bryanna said excitedly.

“Well, whenever it snows, the fairies are sent down by the Snow Queen to paint the windows in snowflakes.” Her dad began smiling. Bryanna’s eyes were wide, and she looked in awe. “What do they wear daddy?” she asked.

“Well, they wear silver tunics, black pants, and boots. Unlike normal fairies, they have no wings. They also wear silvery gray toques, and they carry a leather bag full of icicle paintbrushes to paint the windows,” her dad explained.

“Really? But how come I never see them at night or in the snowbank?” Bryanna asked.

“Well, they can hide themselves from human eyes. They have a special built-in ability to alert them when humans are near, and they turn invisible,” her dad explained.

“Really? Really and truly???” Bryanna said in excitement.

“Why, of course, sweetie. Can I continue?” her dad asked.

“Okay!” Bryanna said, smiling widely.

“Okay, so like I said, they wear those kinds of clothes, right?” her dad asked. Bryanna nodded. “Okay, so at night, they sneak up to the windows, and they paint good luck on the windows of the houses; they dance while they do it, and their dances are always magical,” her dad explained. Bryanna’s eyes widened.

“Oh really????!!!!” she cried excitedly, climbing onto her dad’s knee.

“Oh, yes, they paint good luck on all the windows. In frost fairy language, of course, and it takes a very special dance to paint the words of luck.” Her dad replied knowingly, bouncing her up and down on his knee.

“Frost fairy language??? Why do they give us luck, and what do they eat, and what do they...” Bryanna started, but her dad interrupted. He held up his hand to Bryanna’s mouth.

“Woah, woah, woah. Slow down, sport. Too many questions. So, I’ll start with the first one; I don’t know exactly why they give us luck. Maybe their queen makes them, or maybe they like to bless us. To answer your second question, they eat ice cream cake,” her dad explained.

Bryanna’s eyes grew wide. “Ice cream cake? All day, every day? Wow!!! That sounds like fun!” she cried excitedly.

Her dad just chuckled. “Okay, and what was your last question honey?” her dad asked.

“Where do they live, and how old is the queen? Are they immortal?” Bryanna started off again.

Her dad laughed. “Well, they live in the cloud cities. Way above the clouds where no human could ever possibly reach them. And how old is the queen? Well, no one entirely knows. They just know that she is extremely powerful and such. Are frost fairies immortal? No, they have their lives as we all do but one day they die. Where do you think snow comes from?” her dad asked.

“All the snow is just dead frost fairies?” Bryanna asked worriedly.

“No, some of them are still alive, sent to paint the windows, but some are just snowflakes. Jack Frost himself was based on them you know,” her dad said.

Bryanna leaned forward eagerly. “I didn’t know that,” she admitted.

“Well, Jack Frost was based on people who actually saw frost fairies and created their own ideas about what they had seen,” her dad said.

“I though humans couldn’t see them,” Bryanna said, wrinkling her forehead.

“Some are born with the immunity. Special people,” her dad said.

“Bedtime, Bryanna,” said her mother.

“Can’t I stay up longer? I want to hear more!” Bryanna said excitedly.

“Tomorrow, honey,” said her dad, and Bryanna reluctantly went to bed, but all night she left her window the tiniest bit open, hoping to catch a glimpse of a flying person painting the window with frost, dancing to and fro.

Over the years, Bryanna and her father had many talks like that. Bryanna would always leave her window open, hoping and hoping. She never saw one, but at night she dreamed of the magical fairies, who had icicle paintbrushes to paint good luck, and ate ice cream cake, and lived with their mysterious queen above the clouds. Her father taught her a song about them that he sang to her at night.

*Sleep tight,*

*Sleep tight, for the fairies come tonight.*

*To dance around, to paint the glass  
While you are sleeping little one.  
Sleep tight,  
Sleep tight, for the fairies' dance tonight,  
If you are quick of eyes and mind,  
Their presence you shall find  
They're never far away dear one, now close your eyes tonight.  
Sleep tight,  
Sleep tight, for the fairies' dance tonight.*

Bryanna never got tired of the story. When she was nine, her birthday party was frost fairy themed, she begged her father to tell her and her guests, once again of the wonderful fairies who danced and painted the windows. For Halloween when she was eleven, she went as a frost fairy, like all the years before that. People would tease her and ask, "What are you supposed to be? A female Jack Frost?" But Bryanna would smile sweetly, and if they listened long enough she'd tell them about the amazing fairies. All her friends thought she was crazy.

"You're almost twelve, Bryanna, you can't be believing in fairies," said her friend Sophia. "This is ridiculous!" was all her friend Mary had to say about it.

Whenever they teased her, or doubted her, she would run away. Often, she was lonely, searching the snow for fairies and tracing the frost on the windows with her finger; she would spend countless hours in the library, looking for any information on the Frost Fairies. The kids called her names and teased her relentlessly. Every time that happened, she held her head up high and would sing the song and ignore it. Then she'd run home to her dad, and he'd comfort her and tell her the story of the amazing fairies. The teasing and bullying unfortunately happened all through junior high, but in high school she stopped caring and forgot about it all and started to focus more on school.

"Glad to see you're focusing," said her grade ten teacher, Ms. Brown.

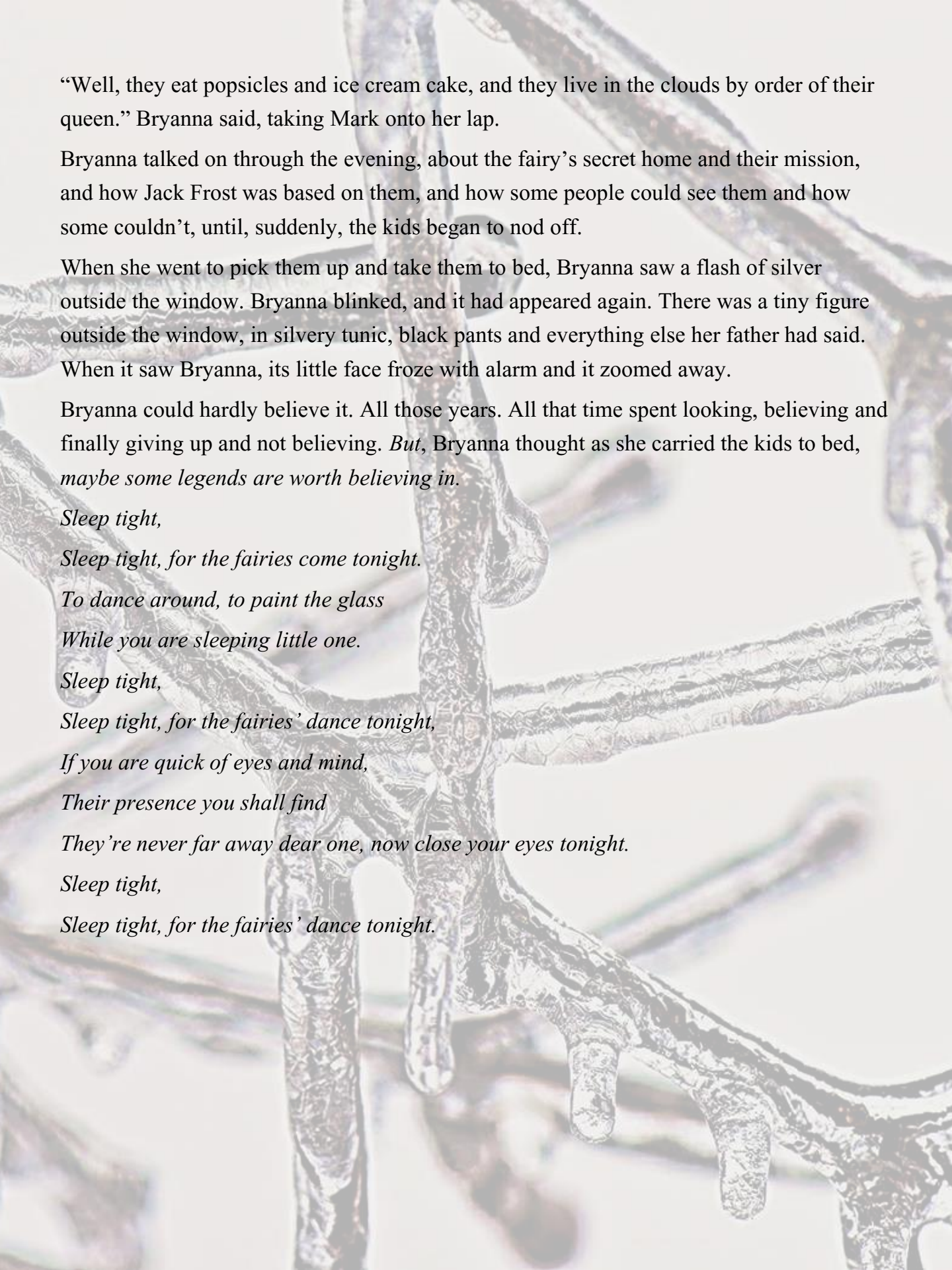
It had been fifteen years, and Bryanna, now an adult, was married and had a daughter and a son. It was November, and the snow was falling outside the window. Her daughter, 5-year-old Ellery Dawn, and her 3-year old son, Mark, were sitting on the couch.

"Mom, what makes frost?" Ellery asked, as she stared out the window.

Bryanna smiled and sat down next to her kids. "Ell, have I ever told you and Mark about the frost fairies?" she asked. Ellery and Mark shook their heads.

"Well, in the middle of the night while everyone sleeps, the fairies come out of the snowbanks and paint good luck on the windows while they dance. And their dances are said to be magic." Bryanna said, smiling.

"What they eat?" Mark asked, looking interested.



“Well, they eat popsicles and ice cream cake, and they live in the clouds by order of their queen.” Bryanna said, taking Mark onto her lap.

Bryanna talked on through the evening, about the fairy’s secret home and their mission, and how Jack Frost was based on them, and how some people could see them and how some couldn’t, until, suddenly, the kids began to nod off.

When she went to pick them up and take them to bed, Bryanna saw a flash of silver outside the window. Bryanna blinked, and it had appeared again. There was a tiny figure outside the window, in silvery tunic, black pants and everything else her father had said. When it saw Bryanna, its little face froze with alarm and it zoomed away.

Bryanna could hardly believe it. All those years. All that time spent looking, believing and finally giving up and not believing. *But*, Bryanna thought as she carried the kids to bed, *maybe some legends are worth believing in.*

*Sleep tight,*

*Sleep tight, for the fairies come tonight.*

*To dance around, to paint the glass*

*While you are sleeping little one.*

*Sleep tight,*

*Sleep tight, for the fairies’ dance tonight,*

*If you are quick of eyes and mind,*

*Their presence you shall find*

*They’re never far away dear one, now close your eyes tonight.*

*Sleep tight,*

*Sleep tight, for the fairies’ dance tonight.*

# Sub-Zero Ice Cream

## Northeast China and Winter: A Love Story

By Levi Patterson

The subtitle may be somewhat surprising. Since people in Northeast China spend a good portion of the year in winter, their relationship with the season has become more than just life. Indeed, they have loved the cold in imaginative ways for centuries. Here are some Northeastern China winter traditions, new and old.



Being a foodie, I would feel untrue to myself if I didn't start with the culinary side of winter. From the title, ice cream is clearly a central part of winter in Northeastern China. By sub-zero ice cream, I mean sub-zero outside, not in the freezer. In fact, ice cream vendors will sometimes abandon their freezers altogether and set boxes of ice cream out on the icy sidewalk. It's common to see someone walking by in a down filled coat and eating an ice cream bar.

Another frozen treat that is frequently seen on the street is found on a stick. Called *tang hu lu*, they are shish-kebabled hawthorn fruits dipped in syrup. The fruit is quite sour and cold, and the syrup is



sweet and frozen hard. It may break teeth, but it is deliciously worth it. Hawthorn is most commonly used, but you can get a variety of skewered fruits prepared in this fashion.

Mothers, rest at ease! There are healthier options out there, too. All the best foods in life are found on the

street. I am speaking of sweet potatoes, being roasted right along the walk. Ah, the cozy and calming effect hot, caramelized sweet potatoes have on a cold body! Frequent neighbors to the sweet potatoes are chestnuts, being roasted in a large wok, available for the enjoyment of their warming goodness. Be that as it may, these treats all go best with wintery activities.

At the park, you can rent ice skates to skate on the

lake. There are a few temporary structures on the edge of the lake that offer this service, each with their own snow-free rink. Also available on the lake are chairs with blades on the bottom. To propel yourself as you sit on said chair, you are provided with makeshift ski poles. Another similar contraption is the ice-bike (you could call them ice-cycles). Disclaimer: I have never tried the bike. You can also inner tube down a snow hill, though the lines are more often than not pretty long and hectic.



There is one other activity at the lake that is more extreme. Older people, especially old men, in order to (apparently) stay fit and healthy, will break a hole in the ice and take polar-bear dips in the frigid water. I can't imagine what good it does, but they dive in, donning swim caps and Speedos, and live to do it the next day. My teeth start chattering just thinking about it.

Speaking of chattering teeth, in a city a few hours north by train from where I live, a very special festival is held every winter. It is a snow and ice festival. Much like a Chinese take on the Quebec Bonhomme festival, the Harbin Ice Festival is the largest ice and snow festival in the world, attracting 10-15 million visitors every year. The



main attraction is open at night, when lights inside the ice structures turn the park into an icy wonderland. It uses some 180,000 cubic metres of ice. Ice slides and  $-30^{\circ}\text{C}$  temperatures add to the fun. Quebec, make way.

I've barely scraped the surface in this introduction to Northeast China's relationship with winter. While winter in and of itself might not be particularly loveable, the inhabitants of Northeast China have surely found things to love about it. Hopefully, you, the reader, are inspired to have fun this winter, too, and also have a better understanding of what it's like here—or at least what the food is like.

# Places to Go - Vents Ridge

By Gabriel Jones

## Overview

Here's a fun hike that you can often do in the middle of winter. Vents Ridge is a small but sharp-summitted hill surrounded by much larger hills and mountains. Nonetheless, it's a great viewpoint than can be climbed in a few hours, and it's only a 40-minute drive from Calgary.

## Access

Vents Ridge is right above Elbow Falls. From Bragg Creek (look up on a map how to get there – it depends where you live) drive south on Hwy 22 to its intersection with Hwy 66 (Elbow Falls Trail). Turn right onto Hwy 66. Drive west down this highway into Kananaskis Country and over the Elbow River bridge. Eventually, the road plunges into the valley of Canyon Creek. Keep going up the other side and down another hill, where you'll see a sign for Elbow Falls. The winter gate is just past the turnoff for Elbow Falls. If it isn't shut yet, turn right into Powderface parking lot, which is just past the Elbow Falls turnoff. If it is shut, just park in front of the gate. There will likely be other cars parked there. The winter gate normally closes on December 1<sup>st</sup>.

## The trail

There are several starts, depending on whether you parked in Powderface parking lot or by the winter gate.

1. From Powderface parking lot, look for a trail leaving the east side of the parking lot, more or less by the picnic table. It's a bit hard to find and isn't signed. Shortly, it crosses the usually dry creekbed of Powderface Creek and climbs a little bit into pine trees. A fainter trail turns left at this point (again, it's hard to spot) and traverses through pine woods onto an aspen-covered hillside. As soon as you leave the pine woods, you see the view of Vents Ridge shown in the photo below. If this is too confusing, or if you can't find it, try start 2, which is simpler but less interesting.



Vents Ridge from the start of the traverse. You more or less climb the left-hand skyline. Who would guess the other side of this ridge is so rocky?



Keep traversing across the hillside. Eventually, the hillside and trail curve around to the left, crossing a bit of a gully. Just keep going until the traversing trail ends at a trail zigging up the hillside. Start 2 comes in from the left at this point. Turn right, up the hill.

2. Again from Powderface parking lot, walk across the parking lot to its northwest end. A wide, obvious trail (Powderface Creek trail) immediately starts climbing from this point. It climbs in three waves to the top of a hill and then drops down to the usually dry bed of Powderface Creek. In a minute, you reach a big wooden bridge. Keep going through a gate in a fence. A short distance beyond the gate, a much smaller but easy to spot trail turns to the right (north) up the hill. In a minute you join start 1 coming in from the right.

3. If you parked by the winter gate, go around it and keep going up the road. In about 10 metres, you cross a culvert over a fairly large creek. This is Prairie Creek. After the culvert, drop into the ditch on the right (north) side of the road. The ditch has a trail at this point. Right away, the wide and obvious Prairie Creek trail turns off to the right. It's not the one you want. Shortly after, another, much smaller trail turns off to the right. Take this one. It leads through pine forest within earshot of the road. Soon it drops down to the dry bed of Powderface Creek. At the top of the drop, turn right on a fainter trail. This is the same spot mentioned in start 1. Now read the second paragraph of start 1.

Again, if this is too confusing, just keep going to Powderface Creek parking lot, either via the trail paralleling the highway in the trees or via the trail in the ditch. It's about 500 metres past the winter gate.

### **The rest of the trail**

Having reached the aforementioned junction where starts 1 and 2 join, follow the zigzagging trail up the steep open hillside of aspen and kinikinnik. Pines and spruce increase in number as you climb higher, and suddenly you reach the bottom of a large cliff. This cliff is a popular climber's crag, and you can see the bolts they have screwed into the rock for clipping ropes into. The trail follows the base of this cliff, sometimes under tremendous overhangs, for most of the rest of the route up to the summit.



The spectacular cliff you traverse under.

Just below the crest of the ridge, it traverses out to the right, crossing several very steep scree slopes. Just as it is about to end, scramble up to the ridge crest just to the left of a pinnacle. Note that this stretch can be very slippery in winter.

You come out just to the left of the summit, which is a pointy rock pinnacle. The loftiness of the ridge catches you by surprise. The south slope is all rocks and scree, dropping away incredibly steeply into the gorge of Prairie Creek below. To the northeast, you can look up Prairie Creek to the Fisher Range. The big hill to the north is Prairie Mountain (described in the December 2015 Places to Go).



The summit in late February of 2016.

Climb the pinnacle to your right, and don't kill yourself trying to balance on top (there's a significant drop on the northeast side). Now you can see the Elbow Valley winding away to the prairies, not to mention downtown Calgary.



The view northwest from the summit in early March 2017, looking toward the Fisher Range.



Looking down the north slope!

There is a trail continuing down the north slope (it's in the forest to the left of the rocky part of the slope) but don't follow it in winter as it's extremely steep and it holds the snow.

### **Tips for winter hiking**

Around here, there isn't really such a thing as a "hiking season" because snow cover is so variable and there are lots of nice warm chinooks. And, of course, if it is snowy we rejoice because snow sports are so awesome. But if you are hiking in the winter (and I hike in the winter all the time), these tips should make it a lot more pleasant.

My first tip is to be aware of avalanche hazard. There are a lot of misconceptions about avalanches and avalanche terrain out there, but it is important to understand the risks and what actually constitutes avalanche terrain. Probably the best resource for backcountry recreationists is Tony Daffern's book *Backcountry Avalanche Safety*, published by Rocky Mountain Books. I recommend you read this book before venturing into snow-covered backcountry. It's in the Calgary public library system.

My second tip is to use winter traction devices designed specifically for hiking. These make a tremendous difference, especially on steep slopes like Vents Ridge. A good winter traction device for hiking should have sizeable metal spikes and a strong, durable way of holding them onto your foot. The only ones I recommend are Kahtoola MicroSpikes, which cost about \$75. They are available at Mountain Equipment Co-op. Hiking poles are another handy thing year round.

My third tip is to dress warm! Many people don't realize that it is entirely possible, in fact quite easy, to be eminently warm in winter even when it's sub -20. The trick is to wear wool, and to wear it in layers. Technical clothing made of merino wool is the best for mountain weather because it breathes well and still keeps you warm when it's wet, although technical clothing made of other materials also works well as long as it's intended for cold weather. Down parkas are the warmest coats but they're useless when wet. Cotton is unsuitable for winter. If you feel rich, winter hiking boots are a big plus for keeping warm, and they make great winter boots for everyday wear. In any case, wear wool socks.

(Speaking of hiking boots, footwear is really important year round. Good-quality hiking boots or hiking shoes make such a difference. If like me you wear hiking boots all the time, those should work. Runners are not good for hiking, especially not in rough terrain like Vents Ridge)

Even if there's a chinook and it's +15 out, you should still bring warm layers along because it may suddenly get cold. But don't overdress, either. I recommend wearing clothes intended for strenuous activity.

Bring enough food. Actually, bring more food than you expect you'll need in case there's an emergency. It's essential to have enough to eat when it's cold out and you're exercising.

## **Disclaimer**

Hiking in winter has inherent dangers. Cold is an obvious one, and hypothermia is a real risk. Even if it's warm out when you start, the weather can suddenly change. The weather in our mountains is remarkably unpredictable and fast-changing. Do not rely on a weather forecast. Make sure you have adequate layers along, and turn back if you're too cold or if inclement weather is approaching.

At any time of year, you need to be able to find your way in the mountains. You should be able to read a topo map, which isn't hard to learn to do. The map you want for this hike is Gem Trek's Bragg Creek and Sheep Valley map, or the Greater Bragg Creek Trail Association's Bragg Creek and Area Trails Map. And bring it with you! Even with the aid of a detailed description, you should still bring a map along and be able to read it. This trail is quite easy to follow (although it is unsigned), but you should still have a map.

Finally, turn back if you ever feel uncomfortable with the trail or the terrain you're in, and always make sure you can get back down what you are going up. Mountain sense comes with experience. While Vents Ridge is a good introductory hike, I still recommend you go with someone more experienced for your first few hikes if you're new to hiking.

**Northstar Academy, the Northstar Chronicle, the author, and the editors/publishers are not responsible if something goes wrong, or for any actions undertaken as a direct or indirect result of this article.**

For more information about hiking in Kananaskis Country, check out Gilleen Daffern's superb five-volume *Kananaskis Country Trail Guide*, published by Rocky Mountain Books.

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