



February 2014

ZOOM

in on america

A Monthly Publication of the U.S. Consulate Krakow

Volume X. Issue 113.

IN CELEBRATION OF WINTER



A polar bear. Photo © AP Images

In this issue: Winter Carnivals

Zoom in on America

THE OLDEST WINTER CARNIVAL

St. Paul, the capital city of Minnesota, is home to the oldest and largest winter carnival in the United States. It also is home to the biggest palace in the United States--the biggest ice palace that is. The palace is made from 27,000 huge ice blocks. Each block weighs 500 pounds (227 kg).

The origins of the carnival go back to the 1880s, when St. Paul and its "twin city," Minneapolis were experiencing their great boom. The population of St. Paul increased four times during that decade and the city's importance as a rail hub grew extensively. The people of St. Paul had to contend with Minnesota's harsh winter conditions, however. One New York journalist called the place "unfit for human habitation in winter" and compared it to Siberia.

The continental climate of this part of Minnesota can result in extremely low winter temperatures and large snowstorms and blizzards. In January 1885 the weather was so bad that trains could not run. On January 22, 1885 *The New York Times* reported: "The blizzard which has been raging since last night is the worst known among the railroads for years. In every direction it is very cold and blowing at a terrific rate filling cuts and, in the southern part of the country, making it impossible to keep them clear long enough to run trains."

The citizens of St. Paul decided, however, to turn the difficult weather to their advantage. In 1886 they organized the first winter carnival. They also created a legend to give

the winter carnival some added character. The legend has it that the King of Winds, Boreas, chose St. Paul as the capital of his realm. Together with his companion, the Queen of Snows, and his brothers, Titan, Euros, Zephyrus and Notos, he threw a joyous party. Unfortunately his enemy, the God of Fire or Vulcanus Rex, was determined to spoil the celebrations and stormed his ice castle. In the interest of peace, the wise Boreas left for Olympus but only to return to St. Paul the next winter.

Since 1946, St. Paul's winter carnival has been organized annually. The centerpiece of the carnival is the ice castle, but there are many other popular activities. They include a contest for the best ice sculpture (see photos on p. 7) and a snowplow contest, which provides inventors a chance to present robots or machines of their own design that clear snowy paths automatically. Other events include dog sledding, art shows, toboggan rides and torch-lit parades. The festival also includes a reenactment and ball celebrating the legend of Boreas.

[Click to Listen](#)



The 2004 version of St. Paul Winter Carnival Ice Palace. The palace was built with 27,000 blocks of ice cut from Lake Phalen in St. Paul. Each block weighed about 500 pounds. Photo © AP Images

WHERE TO MEET ROYALTY IN AMERICA

Witnessing the coronation of the King and Queen? Shaking hands with a Prince and Princess and the whole Court of Royal Lads and Lassies? Talking with a Chamberlain or an Archbishop? Those who think things like that don't happen in the United States are in the wrong. In fact we, the "common folk," can easily mingle with the above mentioned royalty at the "Royal Reception" that is held in Saranac Lake during the opening of the city's annual winter carnival in February.

Saranac Lake is a village in the Adirondack Mountains. Located in the northern part of New York State, the Adirondacks became popular as a health resort in the late 1800s, particularly for patients suffering from tuberculosis. During this period, Dr. Edward Livingston Trudeau founded the Adirondack Cottage Sanitarium. Today his great-grandson, Garry Trudeau designs carnival buttons and posters which have been an integral part of the Saranac Lake Winter Carnival since 1981.

The carnival started in 1897 as a one-day fancy dress event intended to provide some entertainment for Saranac Lake visitors. Over time, it grew to be a 10-day carnival organized by the Society for Promotion of Winter Carnival. The Saranac Lake Winter Carnival Committee, an all-vol-

unteer group, spares no time or effort to make each carnival a spectacular show. Each year, the whole community votes on a theme for the carnival which is then incorporated into decorations and festival parades. The theme for this year's festival is Celtic Carnival.

In addition to the Royal Reception, other traditions of the festival include an Ice Palace, a Gala Parade and Kiddie Parade, performances, torchlight skiing, fireworks displays, and sports events. Some of the sports events are traditional winter activities, like snowshoeing, nordic and alpine skiing, ice skating and hockey. Other events, such as Snowflake Volleyball played in knee-deep snow, Snowshoe Softball, Ultimate Frisbee in the snow, and Firemen's Broomball, are less traditional.

The festival also includes cultural activities like concerts, theatrical performances, a chocolate festival, and indoor and outdoor movie nights.

The reign of the Saranac Lake royalty is short and comes to an end when the Ice Palace melts. When this happens depends entirely on Mother Nature. In cold and dry weather, the Palace lasts for a while, but if it rains or gets warmer, the Palace becomes unsafe and is knocked down.



People walk through the Saranac Lake ice palace in the evening. The palace is built every winter by volunteers for the Saranac Lake Winter Carnival. Photo © AP Images

WINTER FRENZY



Photo © AP Images



Photo © AP Images



Photo © AP Images



Photo © AP Images



Photo © AP Images

Captions p. 7

OTHER WINTER CELEBRATIONS

Steamboat Springs, Colorado is home to a Western-themed winter carnival. Events like shovel races (in which participants sit on shovels pulled by horses), donkey jumps, and an event in which skiers hang onto lassoes held by cowboys on horseback add a true western feel to the Steamboat Springs Winter Carnival. Horses are the stars of many of the festival's events. A biathlon with athletes dressed in vintage trapper's clothes using black powdered muzzle loading guns brings back the feel of the Wild West. During the opening ceremony, the "Lighted Man" skies down a dark mountain while rockets shoot from his costume. Ski races, ski jumping competitions, and slalom mountain biking take place on the mountains outside town.

Alaska is a natural location for a winter carnival. Anchorage's **Fur Rendezvous**, or Fur Rondy, as locals call the festival, dates back to the 1930s when the town had only 3,000 inhabitants. The monotony of long winter days was broken when miners and trappers brought their goods to town to trade. Anchorage resident Vern Johnson came up with the idea to organize a three-day sports tournament

at that time. Together with his friends, he organized skiing competitions, hockey, basketball and boxing as well as a children's sled dog race. The accompanying parade and bonfire offered a colorful break from the dull whiteness of snow and drew the whole population of Anchorage out of their homes. To this day the Fur Rendezvous is much anticipated by Alaska residents. The centerpiece of the Festival is the World Championship Sled Dog Race, which gathers sled dogs and mushers not only from across Alaska but from the whole world. The Native Alaskan tradition known as the Blanket Toss was added to the Festival program in 1950. Other attractions include the running of the reindeer, snow sculpting, snowshoe football, and ice hockey games. Soon after the Festival, in early March, the Iditarod, an annual long-distance sled dog race, starts in Anchorage. It takes anywhere between 8 and 15 days for mushers and their dogs to cover the distance of about 1,800 km from Anchorage to Nome, in western Alaska, to complete the race.



A skier, left, catches air off the Donkey Jump while being pulled by a rider during the Steamboat Springs Winter Festival in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. Photo © AP Images

POLAR PLUNGES

No matter how much we admire polar bears for the beauty of their white fur or for their ability to survive even the extreme weather of the Arctic, few of us would want to emulate their lifestyle: especially when it comes to swimming in icy cold waters.

Some people do just that, however. So called polar bear plunges are now held across the United States. One of the largest events of this kind is the Long Beach Polar Bears Super Bowl Splash. The event takes place on the same day as the National Football League's Super Bowl (which takes place in late January or early February). The first plunge took place on Super Bowl Sunday in 1998 when two fans, Kevin McCarthy and Pete Meyers, decided to celebrate the game that was about to start with a quick dip in the icy ocean. They repeated their feat the next year, joined by a few other fans of icy swimming and the Super Bowl. Since then, the Polar Bear Swim has become an annual event to raise funds for the Make-A-Wish Foundation® of Metro New York. Now, thousands of people head to the beaches of Long Beach on Super Bowl Sunday for a polar swim.

Similar events, like the annual "Plungapalooza" on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay, take place across the

United States to raise money for the Special Olympics. The photo on p.4 (top right) shows a polar bear plunge participant dressed as an ice princess while she gets a running start on her way to taking a plunge into the icy waters of Burt Lake near Topinabee, Michigan.

Polar plunges also are a popular way to ring in the New Year. New Year swims are organized in Seattle, Washington, Evergreen, Colorado, on Coney Island and Lake George, New York, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, at Humpton Beach, New Hampshire and in many other locations.

If you are going to jump into freezing water, it helps if there is some entertainment. Sometimes "polar bears" wear a specially designed costume. The photo on p. 4 (top left) shows a plunger jumping into the Portage Lake Shipping Canal as part of the "Heikinpiv": a Finnish midwinter festival that is celebrated in Hancock, Michigan. The plunger was dressed as a fictional Finnish character.



A polar bear. Photo © AP Images

Activity Page

EXERCISE 1 SPEAKING AND READING COMPREHENSION

Work with another student. Divide the two pictures between you. Describe your pictures. In pairs compare and contrast your pictures. If you took part in an ice sculpture contest what sculpture would you make? Have you ever taken part in a sand or ice contest?

When you have discussed your pictures, read the captions for the photos on page 4 and on this page, which are put in a random order below the pictures. Notice that the names of states were removed with just some letters left. Decide with the other student which caption goes with which photo.

Lastly, still working in pairs, fill in the full names of the states.



Photos © AP Images

- A. Members of the Greater Lowell Technical High School human dog sled team compete during the human dog sled championship as part of WinterFest in Lowell, M---C-----.
- B. A replica of the Minnesota Capitol dome carved in ice is shown in Rice Park as the St. Paul Winter Carnival gets underway St. Paul, M--N-----. A miniature replica of the golden horses or Quadriga are visible in the lower right. At right is the Landmark Center tower and clock.
- C. A Cheboygan Middle School student dressed as an ice princess takes a plunge into the icy waters of Burt Lake near Topinabee, M--H---- during the second annual Polar Plunge to raise money for the Special Olympics.
- D. A man takes a plunge into the Portage Lake Shipping Canal as part of the polar bear dive event of Heikinpiv. Heikinpiv is a Finnish mid-winter festival in Hancock, M-----N.
- E. Cowboys pulling contestants down Main Street on snow shovels in Steamboat Springs, C---R---.
- F. The Steamboat Springs High School skiing band slides down main street in Steamboat, CO-----.
- G. The first place winner in the St. Paul Winter Carnival snow sculpting contest, "It's Bee-ginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas," is displayed at the State Fairgrounds in Falcon Heights, M-N----- on Sunday, January 26, 2014.

Win a Prize!

February 2014
CONTEST

What is Iditarod?

Send the answer
(with your home address) to:
KrakowAIRC@state.gov

Deadline: March 15

Win a Prize!

The answer to
the January
contest was:

January 15, 1929

The winners are:
Dominika from Luzino, Agnieszka from Kilece and Renata from Miedzyzdroje.

CONGRATULATIONS!!!

The prizes will be sent to you
by mail.

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The ice sculpture legend "The Man of La Mancha" sits on his horse in Rice Park across from the Landmark Center in St. Paul, Minnesota. Photo © AP Images