

CALGARY SINCE 1883 HERALD

Festival celebrates best of winter; [Final Edition]

Joanne Elves. Calgary Herald. Calgary, Alta.: Jan 20, 2007. pg. F.7

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Fortieth birthday spurs Edmonton motorcyclist to launch epic ride to world's southernmost city Baby, if it's cold outside -- celebrate it. For 90 years, Banff has done just that. And like every other year, the activities at the Banff Winter Festival are to be enjoyed with your mitts, toque, coat, boots and scarf on.

Back in 1917, the winter events marked the beginning of winter tourism in the Rockies. The carnival enticed visitors from across the country to come out and try many activities unheard of in the big cities. Cross-country skiing, ski jumping, curling on outside rinks, and snow-shoeing through the forest delighted the newcomers - - setting the stage for the next 90 winter wonder years.

The festival runs from Jan. 26 to Feb 4 this year. Some of the events have changed over the years and many have been added, but the main ingredient is the white stuff that blankets Banff National Park at an average of 350 centimetres per year.

In 1948, Norquay became the first Banff ski resort to operate a chairlift. That first glorious liftoff must have felt like a blast to the moon. Now, the resort offers five lifts with many lit up on Friday nights for night skiing.

On Jan. 26, Norquay is giving us all a good reason to book off work early. From 5 to 10 p.m., Norquay is giving every Albertan (carrying identification) a free night of skiing. If you're there at 5:30 p.m., watch the cardboard sled derby or, even enter. The rules are simple -- use cardboard for your craft, have fun and play safe. The zaniest costume or most enthusiastic team takes the prize. Kids are also invited to enter. Entry forms and the rules can be found at banfflakelouise.com.

At Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise, the chips will fly all weekend at the annual Ice Magic International Ice Sculpture Competition during the Winter Festival. The shavings and chunks discarded from dragons, castles, goddesses, King Kong, The Wizard of Oz and possibly the classic ice swan will mark the efforts of teams from around the continent including Arkansas, Oregon, Washington, B.C. and, of course, Alberta. They will be chipping, sawing, shaving and carving for the \$ 3,000 award.

Sanctioned by the National Ice Carving Association, 10 teams take the task seriously. Each team can have three carvers. The rules restrict the use of computerized gizmos, but countless pointy tools and saws are allowed. Each team receives 15 blocks of clear ice, each weighing 135 kilograms.

Within three days, the ice must be transformed into a work of art up to 2.1 metres tall. On Sunday afternoon, a panel of judges from the ice carving association awards prizes. You can participate by voting for the People's Choice award, which in turn enters you into a draw to win prizes.

As long as a chinook doesn't blow through town, the masterpieces will be on display through March. There will also be a huge ice castle at the lake for everyone to wander through.

If a kid in your group says, "That looks easy," enter them in the Little Chippers Ice Carving on Jan. 27 at Samson Mall in Lake Louise village. The contest goes from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Safety goggles and child friendly tools are provided. Awards will be given out in specified age categories and there will be hot chocolate and cookies.

You can also stop at **Lake Louise Inn** to watch the ice-carving event there, but don't be late or you'll miss it. It's fast and furious and starts at 3:30 p.m.

The frantic ice event is called One Carver, One Block, One Hour. Ten carvers are given one block of ice and within 60 frost-flying minutes something other than a slurpee has to be presented to the judges. The winner takes home \$1,000.

While the carvers are shaving and chipping, you can enjoy the complimentary wine tasting offered by the host of the event, **Lake Louise Inn**. The wine (and hot chocolate for the kids) starts pouring at 4 p.m.

On Sunday Jan. 28, at 10 a.m., the festival goes retro at the Upper Hot Springs for the Heritage Swim, Relay & Swimsuit Competition.

Parks Canada presents a fun relay event for teams of four where heritage swimsuits and dog paddling is involved. It sounds crazy and there are prizes. Check the website for more details.

The festival spills into the next weekend to welcome in February. On Feb. 3, there is an Ice Maze and the annual Mountain Madness Relay event. Entries have closed but be on the lookout for contestants as they either ski from the top of Mount Norquay to the base of the ski out, or run from the Juniper Lodge parking lot to the Bow River. If they are the third person on the five-person team, they meet the runner to skate at the Bow River Skating Oval. The fourth person cross-country skis the Bow River track to finally tag the last member who has to skate-ski the Bow River and shore track to the finish line. The best-combined team time wins the gruelling event.

Sharpen your ice carving skills, bundle up and head on out for what looks like a great way to break the monotony of winter.

See banfflakelouise.com or 403-762-8421.