

SNOW AND ICE AND SNAPPY WINTER WEATHER SPORTS

Youngsters Find All Sorts of Fun Outdoors When Mercury Is Hovering Around Zero, and Lake and Hill and Pond and Boulevard Afford Ample Scope for Healthy and Happy Exercise



WITH the coming of winter the out-of-door world is transformed. The somber landscape that autumn has left strewn with the ruins of a summer's burnt out glory is blanketed and buried by the snow. The still, dark waters of the lakes and ponds, stained and cleared into a transparent blackness by the tanning of many decaying leaves that came tumbling down with the frost, become sheets of translucent crystal ice. This new out-of-door world beckons to new sports. The base ball diamond, the gridiron, the regatta course are forgotten until another season.

Soll and water have been replaced and transmitted by snow and ice. The new medium offers other diversions.

First of all, the sports of the winter demand motion and exertion. The spectator is now no longer a part of the scheme of things. To enjoy what winter has to offer one must be a participant. There is no place for languor. The atmosphere is charged with vim and dash and go.

So naturally enough all the winter sports are varying expressions of motion, just simple movement, the joy is that of motion for its own sake. Skating, coasting, sleighing, they are all one and the same in final analysis. These three are the accepted staples of the amusements that belong to winter. In little differing forms they are the property of all lands where winter touches.

When winter comes it is welcome for the new fields of sport that it opens.

Gliding along with even rapid motion over a snowpacked road, the sharp tingle of clear cold air fanned against the face, an occasional thrill from swift turns and billowing swells in the surface beneath, bells jingling softly in rhythm with the swing stride of gingery horses, always at a steady but heart-quickenng speed—that is the joy of sleighing.

To taste the pleasures of this appealing diversion of winter's out-of-doors to the fullest one must get out away from the paved streets, away from the conventional lines of the city. Out beyond the border of the town where terraces and lawn are left behind and the wayside is lined with hedgerows and fences interwoven with the withering weeds and vines of the summer gone, into the stretches where there is elbow room and a bit of space in which one's thoughts and gaze may wander undistracted, is where one finds winter at its best. It is there that your sleigh ride will lead you if you are wise.

The sleigh swings up to the hilltop and you pause a moment before crossing the crest. Off into the distance the eye meets only restful stretches of snow broken here and there across the fields and meadows by the brownish grey of the Bow d'Arc of the hedges or the smoky tinge of the fringing woodland along the stream in the valley below. Here and there a dried and tawny plume of blue stem or a still defiant weed stalk rises from the white of the snow in memorial to the season that was.

Then you cluck to the horses and are off down the hill. The snow sprays up from the sheering runners as you advance with increasing speed down the declivity. The spurting streams of spray fly up to settle in little drifted patterns on the even surface at the sides of the beaten roadbed. A tiny puff of snow dust follows each quick, sharp hoof strike. As you reach the bottom of the hill a short, sudden rise caused by the bump the careless road workers left at the edge of the crossing last fall makes you draw a quick breath as the sleigh half jumps from the earth. Then you glide over the bridge into the woodland stretches. Here the roadway winds about on the level flood plain left by the year's melting of the now frost stilled stream. The winter woods.

One plaintively peeping chickadee or a vociferous sapsucker, commencing about valangorously, or maybe drilling industriously for hidden larvae serve to magnify the quietude. This impudent little bird, however, cares not a whit for your intrusion. He will give you no more notice than to flit across on your approach to another tree stump. He is probably real busy, anyway, as he is occupied until dinner time getting his hard-earned lunch. One is inclined to believe that he has paused just the same to exchange profane opinions with a chattering squirrel up in the oak at the edge of the woodlot.

The somber greyarked tree trunks which go sweeping past as telegraph poles pass a train in your quick gait along the quiet, cold driveway, work a curious fretwork of shadows across the roadway when the sun strikes his winter afternoon angle. The scene gives little hint of the verdure that June will coax out of the tightly sealed buds. But never mind; it's winter now and a bit too chilly to be mooning about in the woods when the restive team is anxious to keep going.

Up over the next hill and on down the long declining sweep beyond into the city again. The first arc light's bluish radiance contrasts strangely with the cold distant shimmering light of the early evening stars way off there in the blue of a few millions of miles of attenuated ether. You are on the edge of the city again. Pull up your horses and turn about to take a look into the country landscape fading into the nightfall. Speed 'em up into the busy streets once more to doggo automobiles and cars again. It is night and there is dinner waiting and the theater yet to add to the day's amusements.

Sleighing is a sane, wholesome sort of sport, if one may call sport such a pastime so curiously blending varying components of pleasure. The easy, gliding swing of the sleigh as it moves over the snow which presents a surface velvety and yet firm, soothes with a peculiar mermic influence, but you are kept awake and alert by the tingling, frost laden air, so sharply refreshing, like a draught of bitter sweet wine. There is enough chill to keep the sense active and give the blood work to do.

The horses themselves get the contagion of it. The beaten snow gives a resilient footing for the sharply caked shoes and the snappy air supplies the impetus to long, powerful strides, following in sure speed-producing succession. The jangling bells of sleigh seem, too, to have a part in giving the prancing team a spirit of pride.

The horse is secure at least in his position of honor as the motive power of the sleigh. The gasoline motor has tried to encroach even on this field of equine endeavor and a score or so of sleigh motors, motor devices cunningly arranged with toothed wheels and complicated "pushers," have been patented. They have not been successful, however, and the horse stands supreme in this one winter pastime.

Perversely enough, despite the unusual generosity of the winter season in its advantages for sleighing, Omaha has taken but little interest. Out on the boulevards and through the parks the motor cars go whirling by, while the sleigh is seen but rarely. It appears a pleasure much neglected while the enthusiasm of the city folk is wrapped up in the motor car.

Out in the country, where distractions are not so many, the Nebraska farmer people have been making the most of the winter's snow. Just as they did in the old days when you went to the district

school, the young folk are gathering in merry sleighing parties. The big wagon box is set on the sled runners, which have been pulled down from a summer of storage in the barn loft or implement shed. With the wagon bed filled with hay, plenty of robes and blankets and two sturdy farm teams hitched on ahead, they pile in to ride rolstering and singing along the country highways and byways in the stimulating cold of the night. The Nebraska farmer boy, of course, owns his smart cutter and like as not a motor car like his city cousin, but it's the old farm sled for gregarious sociability.

There's likely to be mugs of elder and some home-made doughnuts at the end of the ride—wake up, you're in Omaha, with butter 40 cents a pound and rent day coming around.

The skaters throng the cold, glazed surface of the lakes and ponds about the city in noisy, frolicking crowds. After school hours and on Sunday afternoon the skating carnival is to be seen at its best.

The skaters whirl and glide and jostle with many a good natured bump and laughing fall. It is a crowd of widely variant people. The little tots of barely 7 are there mingling with the grown-ups. Here and there one sees strange foreign faces in the throng of skaters, faces that show plainly the delight of a new sensation. The immigrants from the shores of the Mediterranean are becoming Americanized in their sports as well as work. In interesting contrast are those stern Scandinavian faces, from a land where climate has engendered long familiarity with the ice.

The crowds on the ice present some interesting figures. There is the little girl who can't skate, much a burden to her big brother and the big girl in whose progress he seems to be much more interested. The fancy stunt man is always the center of a flock of less proficient admirers, who follow him about in his antics on the ice.

Just as the wake of a country circus is marked by a series of barn loft trapeze accidents to amateur acrobats, so the small boy comes to grief and hard knocks trying to repeat the figure skater's performance in a secluded corner of the pond.

The figure skater gives an impression of the unlimited possibilities of his medium. With but a stroke here and there he executes a dozen combinations of "back curves" with a dizzy spin like a dervish and a long spiral sweep at the finish.

On the ice the youngsters play the games that have been the property of children for generations. There are excited, screaming

contests at "blackman" and "tag." Then the school boys have a nondescript game which is neither hockey nor the "shinny" of the country town lots.

There is something in whacking at an old battered can to watch it sail over the ice that appeals to a boy's ardent instincts. This nameless game has no particular finish and no scoring, but there's a lot of fun about it all.

Skating is in favor with many of the young women of Omaha, too. They are to be seen on the fine days skating with just as much leisure grace as the jostling crowds will permit.

The most popular, because the most accessible of the skating places in Omaha, is the lake at Hanscom park. From the vantage of the hilltops about the little pond appears much like a carnival ground as the throng of skaters surge about in many colored streams and blotches from the massing of gay sweaters and caps.

The available skating places of the season have been limited this season owing to the persistent fall of snow following the formation of the ice. Carter lake, which in seasons past has offered the best skating of the locality, has been impossible territory this year because of the snow crust.

Hanscom park lake has been kept cleared for the skater through the enterprise of the street railway company, which reaps many a nickel from the carrying of the skaters.

On one chill, blustery day last week a lone ice boat spread its wings for a little spin across Carter lake. This boat is the last of a fleet of the ice craft that used to skim the lake at lightning speed in performances of wonderful daring.

Ice boating is the most dangerous but fascinating of winter sports. The speed is but limited by the wind. Broad sails, with hundreds of feet of pulling surface, mounted on light steel-shod runners, develop a velocity just a little faster than the wind itself.

The possibilities of the ice boat for producing thrills is unlimited. To ride an ice boat before a winter gale is to travel at a speed that at times may exceed that of an express train. There is just a narrow seat to hold onto and there are sudden turns to be made in the bullet-like flight over the ice. To the experienced ice yachtman an air hole or a bit of open water fifteen or twenty feet wide is not an obstacle. The speed is sufficient to shoot the boat across to the firm ice on the other side. Of course, sometimes it don't—and then. Sometimes the front runners of the craft cross the gap and take the surface on the opposite side, but let the rear runners on the speeding craft drop below the edge of the ice. Then comes a shock. From sixty miles an hour to a dead stop is enough to put the passengers of the ice boat all over the lake, but that's part of the fun.

The encroachments of the ice harvesters and the dangers of the sport have operated as a discouragement, and the fleet of racers at Carter lake have been abandoned. The same reasons have militated against sail skating, which is well near as dangerous and quite as exciting.

Equipped with a big triangular sail mounted on sturdy frame the skater can execute maneuvers on the ice that wonderfully resemble the swooping flight of the swallow. It is a sport for a strong, sure skater. As with the ice boat, the skater can veer and tack like a vessel, making a reasonable speed against the wind.

Clothed with a covering of packed snow, every inclining roadway and hillside offers the opportunity for sport to the coasters. Out in the districts where the crowded traffic is not an interference the sleds are busy. A bulky lot of exercise the coasters get.

It is a long walk up the slanting course to the top. A rest at the starting point, then a plunge off with a suddenness like flying through space, swiftly at first, dying slowly in the long slide out on the level end of the course, then trudging back again, dragging the sled; that is the endless circuit of the coasters.

Perhaps the graphic description improvised by an old Indian is the best way to express it. This redskin had for the first time seen a full-grown bobbed take a steep slide. He watched many trips in wonderment and delight. The speed made a great hit with this thoughtful brave. An attempt to explain his sensations to his fellows found his vocabulary uncomforably deficient. Groping about for some way to say it, he at last exploded:

"Swish, swish—walk a mile."

That was the whole story—down the hill and up again. When a bobbed loaded with eighteen lusty boys gets into the grip of the Newton's law of gravitation on a slippery hillside it is bound to develop speed like a sixty-horse power motor car on Farnam street's down grade, which is generally admitted to be going some.

The steersman of the bobbed has a strenuous job. He is the guardian of the safety of his passengers and the strain of a long slide over an uncertain course puts a bicycle face on the man in front. A few inches off the beaten track and the treacherous sled will turn turtle, which means that the joy riders will pile into an ungraceful tangle, with the possibility of some broken bones.

Controlling Trains Automatically

SEVERAL important devices in railroad signaling, intended to diminish the human factor in railroad accidents, come over from the old year for development in the new. The aim and importance of these devices is explained by a writer in the Railroad Man's Magazine. In part he says:

A telephone on the train connecting with distant cities so that a traveler can conduct business from a speeding coach as if in his own office is one of the striking features of a three in one invention which Fred Lacroix, a young railroad man of 24, has just placed in successful operation on twelve miles of the Erie railroad in New Jersey. The two other parts to the combination are a cab signaling system and an automatic stop, and the whole proved its efficiency before half the signal engineers and many financiers of New York.

The inventor is staking his success on the practical working of the safety appliances, but the appeal to the general imagination is in the telephone. For though the public at large does not know when it travels whether the road is automatically controlled or operated by hand signals, it can see a telephone and feel a thrill of wonder when it is possible to sit in a car and talk with someone 1,000 miles away while the train is whirling over the country.

As to safety, Lacroix's system has all the advantages of the automatic block in preventing collisions, and goes a step further by stopping the train if the engineer does not heed the signal. The fact that its method

of cab signaling is simple as well as certain is also worthy of comment.

Up to the time Lacroix appeared with his device the most advanced form of signaling included only cab signaling and the automatic stop. This combination has been used, moreover, only on a few miles of road in England and is not thoroughly established as yet. The difficulties encountered have been chiefly with the weather conditions, necessitating the use of steam heat to melt the ice and snow at the points of contact between the engine and the signal arrangements on the track.

With Lacroix's system a third rail is used, and there is only such inconvenience as is caused by ice on a third rail anywhere, and that is not too great to obviate, as shown by the success of third-rail systems in the open country.

The telephone in the cab is entirely new in signaling, and has immediately commended itself as a time saver. It provides a quick and direct means of communication between engineer and operator and permits the issuing of orders to trains on the move at a distance from a station.

A light third rail does the work. It conveys the signals, applies the brakes when necessary and acts as a telephone wire. The mechanism is on the engine, where it is brought into the roundhouse for inspection, and all that can get out of order along the track is the track circuit, containing a battery and a track relay. If anything should happen to these the train will be brought to a full stop.

The engineer receives his information as to the condition of the track ahead from a green light, which shows in his cab as long as the right-of-way is clear. Directly under it is an electromagnet, which derives its magnetic powers from a shunt-wound dynamo driven of steam pressure from the engine. When it has its full energy it is sufficiently powerful to hold a heavy iron arm, which, when in contact with the magnet, does not affect the air brake valve.

If anything happens to the current so that the magnet loses its power the heavy iron arm falls, opening the valve and setting every brake in the train. And, as the air escapes it passes through a whistle which it blows in warning. As the current also supplies the light it goes out simultaneously with the dropping of the arm.

In the same circuit with the light and the magnet is a shoe of steel brushes, made to scrape the third rail and communicate an electric current to its surface. As long as the third rail is in a closed track circuit not broken by the presence of another train the current which is local to the engine flows out through the third rail, making a complete circuit of the track wires and returning through the wheels and body of the engine.

If there is another train on the track and the circuit is not closed the engine circuit is abruptly broken by the same opening in the track circuit which interrupted the track current, the magnet loses its power, the arm drops, the brakes are set and the train stops.

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