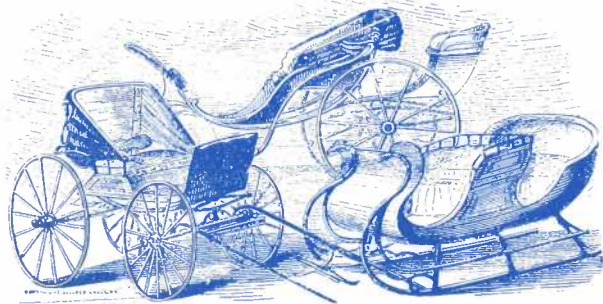


DID YOU KNOW?

Necessity, Invention and Snow Shoes for Horses

Odd as it may seem, winter was considered the best time for travel in the days before paved roads and automobiles. Travel then was either by horse, sleigh, coach, or foot. The roads were often impassable due to the huge stumps that were left standing in their path, as well as deep ruts and mud. Winter temperatures created a new network of clear, smooth highways: the lakes and rivers, which were well used by travelers.

Now, imagine for a minute that you are riding down the frozen Connecticut River with your horse and sleigh. Just as automobiles traveling on snow and ice need snow tires, horses need snow shoes so that they won't slip and slide. These shoes look similar to normal horse shoes except they have spikes on the bottom for traction. As snow builds up on the soles of your shoes, so it does in the horse's shoe, which if not removed, can paralyze the horse. A special tool was invented to dig out the ice from the shoe and hoof.



Today's cars don't have many of these problems. Paved roads make transportation simpler, but unlike our ancestors, most of us think of winter as being the worst time to travel, unless of course, you are riding on a toboggan.

Jingle Bells

Did you know that sleigh bells were used to warn other travelers of an oncoming sleigh? In the winter snows, sleighs moved so quietly on their runners that in order to avoid an accident, bells were used to alert other travelers.



Imagine This

If one foot of snow lay over the entire state of Vermont, its weight has been calculated at one trillion, 599 billion, 944 million, 376 pounds! Now that is a lot of snow!

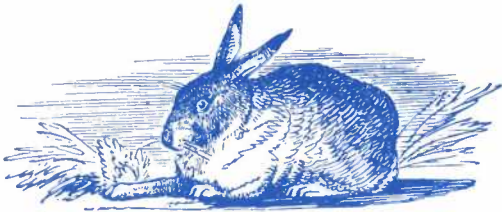
Vermont Winter Statistics

While you are shivering in your boots this winter, consider some of our state's past temperatures and snows.

Vermont's deepest single snowfall deposited 50 inches of new snow in Readsboro, Vermont, in March of 1947. As for cold temperatures, January of 1970 was the coldest month recorded in over 100 years. Burlington's average temperature that January did not go above 3.6 degrees! But can you imagine wearing shorts in December? Well on December 5, 1941, in Enosburg Falls, Vermont, the temperature rose to 72 degrees! But, on the other side of the coin, temperatures dropped to 50 below zero on December 30, 1933, in Bloomfield, Vermont. Of course, everyone has heard about the blizzard of 1888. From March 11 to 14 of that famous year, 30 to 50 inches of snow, depending where you were in the state, fell over New England. Drifts were from twenty to thirty feet high, burying roads and houses up to their window tops.

Insulation

Did you know that when the temperature is well below zero, down underneath the snow the temperature of the ground remains about 32 degrees! It is the snow's insulating qualities that protect the ground, plants, and animals from the extreme cold above.



A lot goes on under that seemingly quiet surface. Small animals tunnel through the whiteness in search of food. If you take a winter walk on the snow,

you may well get to see where the creatures have poked their way out of their protective white blanket and left tiny tracks in the snow. You might also get to see the larger tracks of predators, like foxes, that have dug down through the snow looking for dinner. Snow does not hold the animals' scent, so snow-housed animals are somewhat protected.



Keeping Those Toes Warm

Have you ever gotten into a cold bed, or come in from the outdoors with what feels like frozen toes? Our pioneer ancestors had several methods of remedying that feeling.

Freestones are slabs of soapstone that were left to stand near the fireplace and collect heat. The freestone was then wrapped in a blanket or cloth and used to keep one's feet warm in the open sleigh or in the church pew. Bedwarmers helped to take the chill out of the ice cold sheets in your unheated bedroom. They had long handles with a metal end shaped like a pan. This pan had a cover which one would open up in order to put fireplace coals inside. It was then passed between the bed sheets. Footstoves were also commonly used and very practical in a cold home. These box shaped warmers had a hinged door where one could slip his foot inside. Footstoves, like the freestone, were set next to the stove to gather heat. Sometimes they were heated as were the bedwarmers, by being filled with coals.