

## Winter fun in Canada

Winter in Canada is a season of festivals and carnivals with a variety of activities taking place all across the country.

February is the month of carnivals. Rooted in the medieval European customs preceding Lent (the 40 days from Ash Wednesday to Easter, observed by the Roman Catholic, Eastern and some Protestant churches), the Canadian carnivals take advantage of the winter season.

The biggest of these celebrations, and one that is world-famous, is the Quebec Carnaval, February 5-15. The spirit of the carnival is signified by a walking, talking snowman wearing a bright red toque, Bonhomme Carnaval. "Put care aside for the period of my reign and share the joy of all my subjects," he exhorts his followers.

Bonhomme's home for this ten-day festival is his Ice Palace. Made of water-welded ice blocks on a metal frame, it includes walls, floors, stairways, battlements, toboggan slides and even a "jail".

Each year Quebec artisans create ingenious statues of ice and snow along Carnaval Street, in the old section of the city. Their subject matter varies from historical or political figures to contemporary themes.

Games and contests are an integral part of all carnivals.

In Quebec, the canoe race across the St. Lawrence River is a highlight. The 1.6 kilometre wide river (one mile) at this time of year is clogged with ice chunks. Battling the force of the current and the tide, five-man teams race across the river. Paddling furiously they scramble out of the canoes when they hit an ice chunk and drag the heavy steel-braced vehicles until they hit water again.

At the Winter Carnival (February 6-15) in Vernon, British Columbia, the festival includes games like snow golf, snow baseball and an obstacle race.

### Snow golf

Snow golf, a British Columbia "first", has its origins in the recent past, when some British Columbia golf enthusiasts became tired of waiting for summer and tried golfing in the snow. The game caught on quickly.

"Golf balls" are coloured tennis balls, and "golf clubs" range from brooms to logs. The "holes" are dug out of the snow

and watered until they become ice. The "green" is a mixture of packed snow and water. Par? About 150, says Fernand Desroches, organizer of this year's carnival.

Baseball on ice is another summer-made-winter sport. It is played like any ordinary slow-pitch baseball game, but when you're wearing skates it's a little difficult to stay upright.

In the obstacle race, participants ski uphill instead of down. A few large tires and a couple of water ponds to get the skis nice and sticky ensure nobody sets any speed records.

Serious skiing is done in the freestyle events, which attract participants from Canada, the United States and Europe. There are also snowmobile races, cross-country races, broomball tournaments, an invitation pee-wee hockey tournament, a curling bonspiel and a pet show.

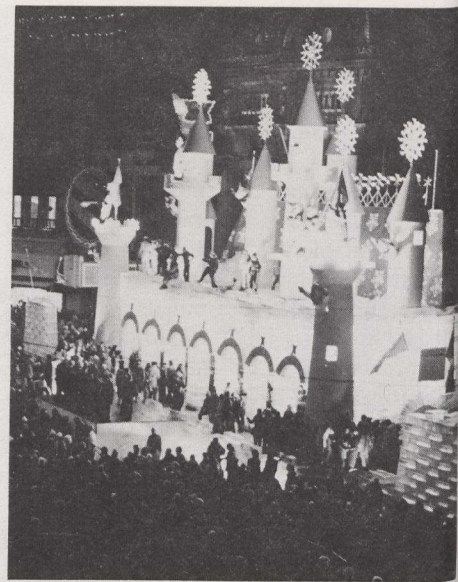
A costume dance is held every night of the ten-day event. Each one has a different theme, from medieval to western.

"Schmooshing", another silly sport originating in British Columbia, is one of the features of the Kimberley Winterfest (February 11-15). It's a form of skiing. The "skis" are two boards, six to eight feet long, held on by leather straps. In a partnership performance — two people get on the skis, one in front and one behind, and "schmoosh" down to the finish line. In addition, there are tug-of-war contests, kite flying, cross-country skiing and snowshoe races.

Kimberley, known as the "Bavarian City of the Rockies", has a distinctive German air. Up at the "platzl", or town centre, there are hockey games for the



*The canoe race across the St. Lawrence.*



*Quebec Carnaval's ice palace.*

children and beerfests and German music during the evenings.

### Voyageur spirit rekindled

The Festival du Voyageur is held each year in St. Boniface, Manitoba (February 14-22) and revives the spirit of Canada's early hunters, trappers and adventures.

The festival recalls the winter of 1816, when Jean-Baptiste Lagimodière, the first pioneer of the Red River, donned his snowshoes, bade goodbye to his St. Boniface home and set out for a three-month walk to Montreal, Quebec to deliver an important message.

Lagimodière's memory is celebrated with snowshoe races, cross-country ski marathons, fiddling and jigging contests, beard-growing contests, moccasin dances and an annual reincarnation of Lagimodière in the form of an early voyageur dressed in rawhide, toque and striped sash.

One contest taken seriously at the festival is the dog-sled race. Dog sleds have long been an important part of Canada's winter. Before the advent of the snowmobile, they were essential transportation in the northern tundra and Arctic regions.

For the race, Alaskan huskies (a mixture of Siberian husky, Alaskan malamute and hound breeds) pull racing sleds weighing between 25 and 30 pounds that slide over the snow with less resistance than well-waxed skis. Combining lightness and flexibility with sufficient strength to stay together under the strain of 15 lunging dogs, the sled is held together with rawhide or twine which prevents the cold, brittle wood from splitting.