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life MOUNTAINS

BY Shelley Arnusch, Kevin Brooker,
 Lisa Kadane, Andrew Penner AND
 Gwendolyn Richards



THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO

WINTER MOUNTAINS

IN THE

This winter it's all about dressing up cozy and heading out to do the things that make your cheeks all rosy — whether that's snowshoeing, skating, skiing or just catching flakes on your tongue — then snuggling up fireside when the outdoor stuff is all done (and eating melty cheese right out of the pot). Whether you're one for cruising down the slopes, or if keeping your boots firmly planted on snow-covered ground is more your speed, we'll see you out there.

Photograph courtesy of the Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise

ESSENTIAL WINTER ADVENTURES

Have a Heritage Moment at Assiniboine Lodge

Should you ever long to follow in history's ski tracks, you'll simply never find a better or more beautiful location to do it than Assiniboine Lodge. Straddling a stunningly photogenic alpine meadow at 2,180 metres, Assiniboine still looks much like the log cabin it was in 1929, when it opened as the Rockies' first backcountry ski lodge. In those times, clients trudged a minimum of 27 kilometres to get here. Nowadays, this living museum can be reached by a 15-minute helicopter ride from Canmore (or a 10-minute ride from Mt. Shark). Otherwise, little has changed, least of all the pyramidal sentinel towering above it all: Mt. Assiniboine, the Matterhorn of the Rockies.

Canadian mountain history seeps from the timbers. The lodge's founder was Erling Strom, from Norway via Lake Placid, N.Y., where he had been North America's first professional ski instructor. But like many after him, he was beguiled by the pristine quality of this region. His family's tenure would last more than a half-century, hosting one illustrious mountain character after another — like the early photo-documentarist, Byron Harmon, and cross-country ski giant Jackrabbit Johannsen. Even employees earned legendary status. For a time, the lodge's chief architect of *gemütlichkeit* (German for “good times”) was Lizzie Rummel, a noble-born Teutonic adventuress who was nevertheless adamant about social democracy, decreeing that hearty but simple food was essential, and that all guests would dine family-style at long tables. One of her lodge helpers was a young Hans Gmoser, later the pioneer of helicopter skiing. Gmoser copped her philosophy wholesale in his inspirational chain of heli-ski lodges, meaning that every time ski-weary clients sit down together to scarf soy-chili salmon or coconut-buttered soup or a hearty eight-grain bread — which these days is just about everywhere in the mountain west — you can thank Assiniboine Lodge for creating the model.

True, there have been a few welcome adjustments. A 2010 update rescued the main lodge from crumbling. There's limited electricity now (but no WiFi) and daytime bathroom trips still lead to an outhouse. Old-school ways are unlikely to disappear under the watch of co-custodian Andre Renner, who, like his Olympian sister, Sara, largely grew up here when his parents took over from Strom in 1983. His partner (at least until 2031, according to the terms of their contract with B.C. Parks) is the

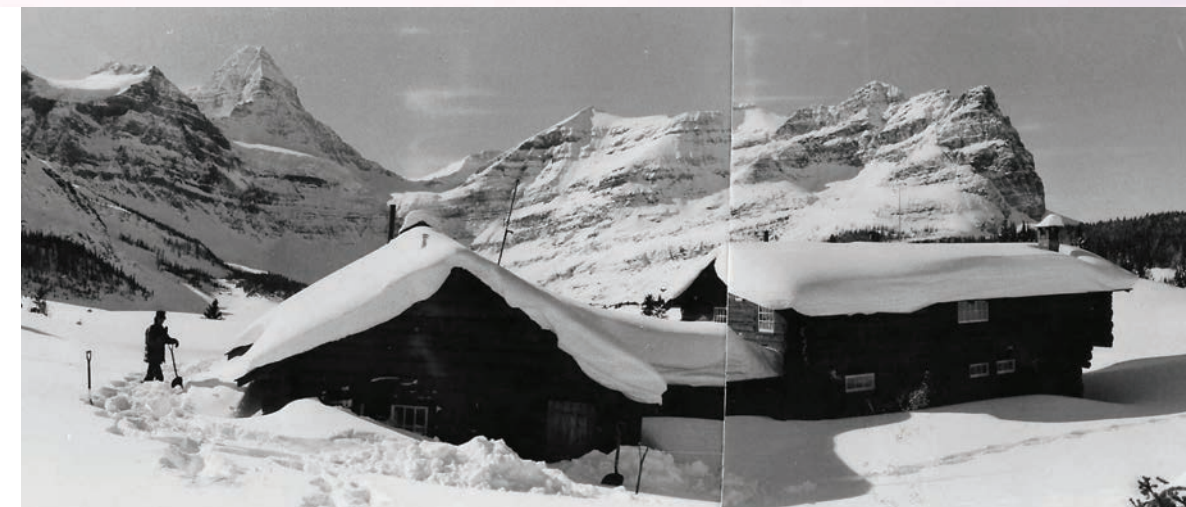
ultra-affable mountain guide Claude Duchesne, whose wife, Annick Blouin, has long presided over Assiniboine's shockingly excellent kitchen.

Duchesne and Renner lead the day trips, tailored to the skills of the guests, but always with an emphasis on fun. The ski terrain surrounding the lodge is effectively limitless. Whether on cross-country gear, snowshoes or the light, modern alpine-touring gear now favoured by many, Assiniboine routinely delivers the best winter touring of your life. It's not cheap; fully guided and catered stays start at \$290 per person per day, excluding heli-transfer. But the point is, if you're a skier and this is not on your bucket list, you're doing it wrong. —K.B.

assiniboinelodge.com

Current lodge photograph by Peter Moynes

Historic photography courtesy of Assiniboine Lodge



BACKCOUNTRY LEGENDS

Assiniboine Lodge has hosted many legendary figures over its long history, including the late Sam Evans (left), a ski pioneer from Wyoming who first came up to the lodge in the 1930s and his contemporary, Ken Jones (right), the first Canadian-born mountain guide. Both Evans and Jones were guests of Assiniboine Lodge up into their early nineties.

LEFT Assiniboine Lodge as it looks today, following the 2010 renovations.

BOTTOM Assiniboine Lodge circa 1960s.

MOUNTAINS

FLY IN FOR **FONDUE** AT PANORAMA

There's an illicit thrill to being high up on a ski hill after the chairlifts have powered down for the day and all the skiers and snowboarders have cleared out. In this peaceful, snow-covered world, you can watch the sky turn pink as the sun dips behind the surrounding peaks, while the normally whirring lifts sit eerily quiet.

At Panorama Resort you can pair that otherworldly setting with a two-course (cheese and chocolate) fondue at Summit Hut, the rustic alpine cabin perched at 2,730 metres. Though the hut is just off the top of the Summit quad chair (the gateway to the expert terrain at Panorama) you don't have to be an expert skier or even a bunny-hill skier to do the fondue here. The resort's neighbourly relationship with RK. Heliski has made possible a heli-fondue experience that whisks guests up to Summit Hut via a 12-minute flight from the base area, with a return flight back down — no skis or snowboards necessary.

Sitting around communal tables in the cozy log-cabin room, sipping one of the B.C. wines the hut has on offer, dipping breads, veggies and fruits into the warm cheesy and chocolaty goodness, it's a little taste of alpine extravagance that comes with one heck of a ride home. —S.A.
panoramaresort.com

HELI, YES!

The single-day packages offered by RK. Heliski at Panorama are a great way to add a heli experience to your resort vacation. Skiers and snowboarders can book as individuals with one of RK.'s standard nine-to-11-person groups, or book a semi-private experience as a small group. Along with that wonderful Purcell powder, the day includes lunch in the backcountry, breakfast and après-ski at the warm and inviting RK. Heli-Plex, and a certificate to prove how awesome you are. —S.A.
rkheliski.com



Panorama photography courtesy of Panorama Mountain Resort

OPPOSITE PAGE (TOP) Fondue at Summit Hut, Panorama Mountain Resort. BOTTOM Summit Hut exterior.

THIS PAGE (BELOW) Ski touring in the backcountry near Kicking Horse Resort in Golden, B.C.



Try Touring in Golden

There are many mechanical ways to get up a mountain so that you can ski down it: gondola, chairlift, T-bar, helicopter, snow-cat, et cetera. But if the thought of burning millions of calories melts your ski wax, you can slap on the skins (grippy strips that adhere to the base of your skis) and go up via your own leg power. Yes, it is way harder — and way slower — but some will say way more rewarding for it, as well.

Ski touring is growing in popularity for numerous reasons: the freedom, the adventure, the workout, the lack of lift lines or crowded runs. Then there's the heightened connection with the alpine world. They're all legitimate.

For beginners looking to get into ski touring, there are some challenges, however. For starters, snow safety and gearing up can be daunting, putting on the sticky skins and working with adjustable touring bindings can be tricky, and understanding and mitigating avalanche risk is critical.

For your first foray into touring, your best bet is to go with a professional guide. As for locale, you can't do much better than Golden, B.C., a legitimate contender for the ski-touring capital of Western Canada title. A fully guided, one-day backcountry tour setting out from Kicking Horse Resort is a good starting point for the touring novice.

Golden photograph by Andrew Penner; Deer Lodge photograph by Shelley Arnusch

A local guide such as Rich Marshall with Backcountry Solutions, will assess the group's ability, assist with gear, provide mandatory basic avalanche training prior to starting out, and then guide everyone into the powder playgrounds that envelop the resort.

The best part? A gondola trip to the top provides a glorious, 1,260-metre "freebie" before you even start your trek beyond the resort boundary. Plus, you can end your day by skiing down a front-side cruiser run, then duck into the Kicking Horse Saloon at the base and brag about your backcountry bliss to the lazy skiers who rode the lifts all day. —A.P.
backcountryolutions.ca

...OR, JUST RIDE THE HORSE

Touring-hubris aside, you can't deny the awesomeness of lift-accessed skiing, particularly if those lifts are accessing the amazing spread of terrain at Kicking Horse Resort. A true "skier's hill," Kicking Horse has the fourth-highest vertical drop in North America and averages more than seven metres of snowfall (yes, *metres*) over the course of a winter. —S.A.
kickinghorsesort.com



Four hotel fireplaces to cozy up to this winter.



Banff Aspen Lodge, Banff
Contemporary tub-side toastiness.
banffaspenlodge.com



Fairmont Banff Springs, Banff
Clearly cozy in the Gold Lounge.
fairmont.com/banffsprings



Deer Lodge, Lake Louise
Rustic rock for toasty toes.
crrm.com/deer



Mt. Engadine Lodge, K-County
Classic Canadiana coziness.
mountengadine.com

GO ICE-SKATING ON LAKE LOUISE



There are few things that capture the spirit of winter so perfectly as skating outdoors on a frozen pond. And when that pond is the incomparable Lake Louise, it's nothing less than a winter-time mic-drop. During the cold-weather months, the lake's ice surface receives top-notch maintenance courtesy of the staff from the Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise, getting multiple Zamboni coatings over the course of each day. The resulting ice sheet does have the odd crack (befitting any natural ice surface), but for the most part it's sheer and smooth enough to handle the most intricate figure-skating manoeuvres.

While the main ice surface is pleasure-skating only, there's a satellite shinny rink that draws a handful of hockey-stick-toting players in the late afternoons, many of whom are staff on break from the various Lake Louise properties — in other words, they're young and strong adventurous types and they'll give you a good game.

There's no fee to skate on the lake, and if you don't have skates, they're available to rent from Chateau Mountain Sports in the hotel (you can also rent a hockey stick). If you haven't been out on the blades in years, it might be a bit awkward at first, but as baby steps give way to smooth glides, you'll feel that initial apprehension give way to rosy-cheeked smiles and the breath-catching-in-your-throat feeling of being in the most beautiful place at the most beautiful time. —S.A. fairmont.com/lake-louise



SKI AT LOUISE

They call it “the Lake,” though it's somewhat incongruous to compare the massive Lake Louise Ski Resort with a placid body of water. With 4,200 skiable acres, Louise represents the biggest of the Big Three resorts within Banff National Park (the other two being Sunshine Village and Mt. Norquay). Whether it's the long, steep runs, the insanity-inducing terrain-park hits or the incredible views across the Bow Valley, a day at Louise always makes a big impression. —S.A. skilouise.com

Find Your Glide in Fernie

Megan Lohmann grew up cross-country skiing in the 1990s in Ontario. She loved the sport, and especially the close-knit community associated with it. Now a mom of two living in Fernie, B.C., Lohmann is introducing her kids to skinny skis and helping her preferred winter pastime gain a foothold in a town better known for its steep-and-deep downhill terrain.

She's a founding board member and the president of the Fernie Nordic Society (FNS), which has grown from a handful of members to more than 700 since its inception in 2006. What's more, 31 per cent of members are from outside of Fernie, hailing mainly from Alberta.

“The sport is taking off,” says Lohmann. “We have a lot of tourists who come to Fernie and want a day off from alpine skiing, so they explore the Nordic option. And the past couple of years we've had people coming for the sole purpose of cross-country skiing.”

As outdoor enthusiasts look for more ways to stay active all year, it's no wonder they're waxing up skinny skis and hitting track-set trails — Nordic skiing is a really good workout. There's also something romantically old-school about the sport. You can't help but feel awestruck by nature while gliding through a silent forest under your own power as giant snowflakes twirl down from the sky.

To keep pace with the growing interest in Nordic, the number of trails in the Elk Valley has greatly increased, and their quality has improved, thanks to a dedicated team of volunteers that track-sets and grooms new snowfall.

Last fall, a trail was completed that connects the Elk Valley Nordic Centre's skier-only trails (no dogs or fat bikes allowed) in Mt. Fernie Provincial Park with those at the base of the ski hill. There is also a cross-country network up at Island Lake Lodge as well as trails maintained by the FNS at the Fernie Golf

and Country Club adjacent to downtown. In total, there are more than 50 km of groomed Nordic trails in the area.

As more families like Lohmann's add cross-country skiing to their activity repertoire, this traditional winter pursuit should continue its renaissance. “It's a very accessible sport for families, from a cost perspective and the logistics of it,” she says, adding that skiers can head out for a quick ski rather than dedicate the entire day. “It's pretty awesome to have a sport that we can do all together.” —L.K. fernienordic.com



A SWISS TWIST

A popular local adventure is cross-country skiing from Fernie Alpine Resort to Birch Meadows Lodge for a traditional Swiss raclette dinner, where melted cheese is scraped onto a plate to be eaten with bread, veggies and meats. The moderate-to-difficult, eight-km trail is just arduous enough to work up an appetite. The raclette experience requires a group of eight or more and advance reservations —L.K. birchmeadowslodge.com

Lake Louise skate photograph courtesy of Fairmont Hotels and Resorts; Lake Louise ski area photograph by Chris Mosele courtesy Fairmont Hotels and Resorts

Fernie photograph courtesy of Tourism Fernie; Chester Lake photograph by Rebecca Middlebrook



Go Snowshoeing in K-Country

“Roads? Where we're going, we don't need roads.” Christopher Lloyd's famous *Back to the Future* quip is applicable to both time travellers and snowshoers. While getting off the beaten path and pouncing through the powder is the highlight of any snowshoeing adventure, the first step is determining where to go. And you can't go wrong with Kananaskis.

With hundreds of kilometres of gorgeous trails, many designated solely for snowshoeing, and equipment rentals conveniently located right in Kananaskis Village at Kananaskis Outfitters, K-Country is an ideal locale for both beginners and seasoned snowshoers to go for a stomp.

The Kananaskis Village Loop Trail is a tidy little trek to get you started. Just 2.5-km long with only 40 metres of elevation gain, it still manages to provide awesome views into the Kananaskis Valley, as well as the stunning, snow-smear peaks of Mount Lorette and Mount Kidd. Plus, the loop begins and ends just steps away from the Delta Kananaskis Lodge, where you can celebrate your outdoor intrepidity with a pint (or two) from the taps at the new Blacktail lobby lounge.

Naturally, seasoned snowshoers will want to stray a little further. The trail to Chester Lake is a Kananaskis classic, a scenic 10-km round-trip trek to a stunning alpine lake that is a picture of serenity when it's covered in winter snow.

One of the best things about snowshoeing is the lack of technical know-how required. This isn't skiing — there's no learning curve required to prevent yourself from careening into things. If you can walk, you can snowshoe — which is why it's best to refrain from downing those pints until you return. —A.P. kananaskisoutfitters.com



DO LESSONS AT NAKISKA

At just under 100 km from downtown, Nakiska is the closest mountain ski area to Calgary (their official hashtag is #skiclose), making it a great spot for lessons. Brand-new beginners can practice what they learn on the easy terrain serviced by the Bronze chairlift without worrying about ending up on an expert run by mistake (it happens more than you'd think), while more seasoned skiers and snowboarders can sign up for the new Performance Private Lessons, which cater to whatever individual riders want to improve. —S.A. skinakiska.com

ESSENTIAL
EATING

Cozy Mountain Meals

Although it's a word that defies direct translation, *hygge* has, nonetheless, become part of our collective consciousness. With so much confusion over how to pronounce this Danish term, people can only agree that the combination of coziness, comfort and contentment evokes a certain *feeling*. Around here, it would take the form of a snowy winter evening in the mountains, settled into a comfortable chair in a warm, inviting space, enjoying good food in the company of near and dear ones, all dressed down in sweaters and Sorels.

Nestle in at one of these restaurants in Canmore, Banff and Lake Louise to know the pleasures of dining, *hygge*-style. —G.R.



RIGHT Charcuterie at Sage Bistro and Wine Lounge in Canmore.

FAR RIGHT Sage Bistro interior.

MINER'S LAMP PUB AT THE GEORGETOWN INN, CANMORE

At Miner's Lamp, *hygge* takes the form of an English pub crossed with a rustic winter cabin inside a quaint Tudor-style inn. Tuck into a ploughman's platter, some Scotch eggs or the requisite fish and chips (with halibut, even) from the comfort-food-focused menu. If you're lucky, you'll score a spot by the fireplace.

1101 Bow Valley Trail, Canmore, 403-678-3439, georgetowninn.ca

SAGE BISTRO AND WINE LOUNGE, CANMORE

Once a log-cabin show home, this Canmore favourite echoes its past with robust log walls and sturdy beams. Upstairs, the wine lounge offers a smaller menu of charcuterie and share plates, perfect for an après-ski stop. The downstairs bistro is a snug space where curry bowls share the menu with steak frites and Alberta baby back ribs. A solid wine list makes it easy to settle in for the evening, though don't discount heading there in the morning; the filling breakfast bowls will warm you up for your day in the mountains.

1712 Bow Valley Trail, Canmore, 403-678-4878, sagebistro.ca



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ABOVE Fondue Stübli at the Post Hotel, Lake Louise.
 FAR LEFT Waldhaus Pub at the Fairmont Banff Springs.
 RIGHT Seafood tower at the Maple Leaf Grill and Lounge in Banff.

THE TROUGH, CANMORE
 The diminutive room exudes a sense of snugness, while the elevated comfort food will warm you from the inside out. Like the small space, The Trough features a curated menu of dishes that borrows flavours for a worldly approach while still managing to cover every cold-weather craving. The smell of fresh bread, made daily in-house, adds to the restaurant's cozy vibe, as do the mouth-watering aromas coming from the open kitchen.
 725 9 St., Canmore, 403-678-2820, thetrough.ca

THE MAPLE LEAF GRILL AND LOUNGE, BANFF
 The river-rock wall and fireplace and the thick, amber-coloured wooden beams evoke a hunting lodge, but it's the hearty platters of steak and towering trays of seafood that will have you really feeling content. If you're in search of deep snug, stick to the downstairs lounge with its long wooden bar curving through the room and wingback-style chairs that beckon you to settle in.
 137 Banff Ave., Banff, 403-760-7680, banffmapleleaf.com

WALDHAUS PUB AND PATIO, BANFF
 Head below the more formal Waldhaus Restaurant at the Fairmont Banff Springs to its more humble sister spot, the Waldhaus Pub and Patio. Set in the same cottage-style building behind the regal hotel, the pub is a comfortable spot to grab beer in a boot or a serving of sausage and spätzle. Cozy up to the long, dark-wood bar or round up some friends for a free game of pool.
 405 Spray Ave., Banff, 403-762-2211, fairmont.com/banff-springs

FONDUE STÜBLI, LAKE LOUISE
 Literally translated, "stübli" means small, cozy room and this spot lives up to its moniker. It feels like a little log cabin tucked up into the Post Hotel, with sturdy beams, wooden walls and a fireplace keeping the cold weather at bay. Strings of lights twinkling from the ceiling over the handful of tables add to the magic, making for a warm and intimate evening huddling over bubbling fondue pots of cheese, broth or chocolate.
 200 Pipestone Rd., Lake Louise, 403-522-3989, posthotel.com

Maple Leaf photograph by Anna Robi; Post Hotel photograph courtesy of the Post Hotel and Spa



Pure as the driven snow.

≡ GOLDEN RULES ≡

Photo by Jeff Bartlett

Make Golden, B.C. your winter destination.

Golden is the perfect choice for those seeking an authentic mountain town vibe with some of the best skiing in North America, and a wide range of winter activities for the whole family to enjoy.

Resort skiing doesn't get any better than Kicking Horse Mountain Resort for a true big mountain experience. With over 2,850 skiable acres, steep and gnarly chutes, fast and fun glades, and even smooth and gentle groomers.

Head to the Dawn Mountain Nordic centre to explore over 33km of cross country ski trails, or rent some snowshoes and step onto the designated trails.

For a fun alternative to the ski slope, book a guided snowmobile tour and experience Golden's backcountry.

Golden has plenty of accommodation options from cozy mountain cabins to luxury mountain homes, all with spectacular mountain views.

Visit www.tourismgolden.com/stay to plan your Golden trip this winter.



tourismgolden.com

ESSENTIAL
APRÈS-SKI

Seven cocktails best enjoyed after a day playing in the snow.



The Rocky Mountain Bacon Cheeser from the Eagle's Eye Restaurant at Kicking Horse Mountain Resort.

DRINK: APRES MERIBEL
WHERE: THE GRIZZLY PAW, CANMORE

Named after France's famous resort, which is renowned for its après-ski partying, this bevvy combines a Sleeping Buffalo Stout reduction with Summer Love Raspberry Vodka from Calgary, then shakes everything with chocolate milk to create a sweet, sour and malty beer-shake.

DRINK: APPLE WHISKEY TEA
WHERE: THE SLEEPING BUFFALO AT BUFFALO MOUNTAIN LODGE, BANFF

Smooth and fragrant, this hot drink stirs together vanilla-bean tea, steamed apple and cinnamon, along with Amaretto for a welcome hit of nuttiness. There's even a small punch of Jameson Irish Whiskey to aid post-adventure recovery.

DRINK: OBSERVATION PEAK
WHERE: PARK DISTILLERY, BANFF

This boozy beast of a cocktail combines the Banff Avenue craft distillery's own Park Glacier Rye with aged rum, Amaro Mon-tenegro and Luxardo Sangue Morlacco (a sour cherry liqueur). It might make your tired legs feel as wobbly as if you've just climbed the nearby mountain for which it's named.

DRINK: SUNSHINE BISHOP
WHERE: CHIMNEY CORNER AT SUNSHINE MOUNTAIN LODGE, SUNSHINE VILLAGE SKI AND SNOWBOARD RESORT

Sunshine's version of mulled wine simmers Portuguese red wine and Port with orange, sugar, cloves, star anise and cinnamon, for an aromatic après sipper that transports *schussers* to their fireside happy place.

DRINK: SOCIAL OLD FASHIONED
WHERE: ALPINE SOCIAL AT FAIRMONT CHATEAU LAKE LOUISE

This robust, spirit-forward classic will warm you from toque to toes in a truly Canadian manner—the base spirit is Alberta Premium Dark Horse rye, which is sweetened with maple syrup from Quebec and spiced up with black-walnut bitters.

DRINK: ROCKY MOUNTAIN BACON CHEESER
WHERE: EAGLE'S EYE RESTAURANT, KICKING HORSE MOUNTAIN RESORT

Shredding more than 4,000 vertical feet every run burns serious calories, so après-skiers need to replenish energy stores with a cocktail that drinks like a meal. This Caesar twist combines bacon-infused vodka with Clamato, a balsamic reduction, chipotle and lime, and garnishes it with pepperoni, cheddar cubes and a pickled bean.

DRINK: MOGUL SMOKER
WHERE: THE GRIZ BAR, FERNIE ALPINE RESORT

You can't beat hot chocolate spiked with rum and Kahlua for warming up after a day smokin' moguls. What's more, each sip is like a little toast to The Griz, a mythical man-bear locals believe is responsible for bestowing Fernie with the white stuff all winter. —L.K. @

Photograph by Emilie Lavioie

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