

Winter Doldrums



Winter has been rather long and cold this year. Last year, with several warming chinook winds, winter didn't seem that much of a chore to tolerate. This year, we have been inundated with several feet of snow and severe sub-zero temperatures. And as we reach the end of February, there are finally signs that we may be coming out of the deep freeze.

There have been some plusses to the cold. We have been getting beautiful clear blue skies. Contrasted up against the white of the snow, any picture taken will have a certain brilliance. The cold air has much less "stuff" in it, increasing clarity. I'm kicking myself for never having the chance to get out to the mountains with my camera, but the last two months have been busy with writing my new book and another project involving a video training course in my old profession of mining. I could still view the mountains from a distance, however, all white a majestic along the horizon behind the Calgary skyline.

This cold and snowy winter followed a hot, dry summer, which makes one wonder exactly what global warming is actually taking place. The deniers will point to this winter and say, "See, there is no global warming." The pro climate change folks will point to last summer. But in the grand scheme of things, one cannot point to one season as proof of your hypothesis. In fact, even the over one hundred years of modern weather records cannot really point to a global trend that tend to be three or four hundred years long at a minimum, to thousands of years like an ice age. What we seem to be experiencing, from that perspective, is a widening to the extremes for weather. Hot is getting hotter, cold is getting colder.

But it's not like this hasn't happened before. Back when the Vikings were rowing across seas raping and pillaging, they set up a colony in Iceland and Greenland. Now, Greenland may not have been that green, but it must have been enough for it to be worth setting up a colony. If it was just one big glacier, the Vikings would have turned around and rowed back to Norway. When Leif Erickson rowed over to Newfoundland and called it Vine Land, it must have been warmer than it is now because you don't see too many vines there. He also didn't seem to mention all the fish that Cabot made note of about

500 years later. I tend to think that global temperatures were warmer then than what we had in the 1950's.

The Greenland colony died out about 1300 AD at the latest. This corresponds to the time period known as the little ice age. The Thames River in London froze and people were able to skate on it. Obviously, it had not frozen over during the times of the Vikings. The colder water around Newfoundland brought back the cod fish stocks that Cabot found in 1498. Leif never mentioned them in 1000 AD Viking annals because the water was too warm for them to be there.

So, historically, the world has gone through these types of warming and cooling cycles before and we haven't perished from the face of the earth. Like many of the animals of the earth, we adapted. Mother Nature goes through these long cycles of three to four hundred years between ice ages. We are most likely changing to a new cycle in our time. Maybe there's a wine industry in Newfoundland's future.

But that doesn't mean we have to contribute to it.

What is man's impact? As a person with a scientific background, I don't put much thought into industrial carbon dioxide levels. Most people don't even know that for every molecule of carbon dioxide produced, two molecules of water are also produced. That leads to more fresh (ish) water on the planet, which is actually good. But the biggest source of carbon dioxide on the planet is us, breathing, and we can't do much about that.

The concern over industrial sources of carbon dioxide should be the production of noxious chemicals that are formed because of incomplete burns. The heat generated causes other substances in the air, like nitrogen and oxygen, to form bad chemicals like nitrous oxide and carbon monoxide. Incomplete burns also generate a huge amount of ash that is sent into the air.

So, Mother Nature is going through a cycle. She does it every few hundred years or so. We have no control over her and have to live with that. What we can control is what we put out into the atmosphere that is generally toxic. We focus on that, we'll probably cut back on the carbon dioxide as well.

OK, I'll get off my pedestal now.

It's sunny, clear and -10C. They are predicting -2C as a high. Perhaps the winter doldrums are coming to an end.