

Snow, Roads, Birds and Plows

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Global Research, February 03, 2019

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Shrugging off what's called cabin fever, I depart, slowly, to test my car and traction on the roadway. I follow the country road along the Beaverkill River to town.

A mile out, I notice something unusual—cars standing in front of each of two neighbors' houses. I regularly pass these houses. I know that their owners aren't here during winter months. And with several inches of snow already on the ground, I'm wondering: Why are they here at all? (A blizzard is forecast.)

Not suspicious; just curious.

As I drive on, this curiosity leads to fantasy. They've come simply to enjoy a day of softly falling snow. Having lived here year-round when the children were young, they're recalling the enchantment of fresh snow, how they frolicked at night in the fluffy heaps, flakes still descending on them. After the children sleep, she and her husband walked together under a bright midnight sky.

The stillness of fresh snowfall is unsurpassed. Early morning is glorious... before rumbling plows arrive. Gentle whiteness obliterates flaws on the fields— all that debris flung down by November winds. Through today's leafless trees, they'll see a whole new landscape; hopefully they'll sight the great bald eagles, identify their nests.

Possibly they'll spot a snowy owl, some winter finches, maybe a sapsucker. Juncos, snow buntings and the tit mouse will be plentiful. Cardinals too, their redness even more pronounced in winter. The best treat would be a pileated woodpecker. Gold finches and grosbeaks too.

(So maybe she's come simply to refill bird feeders.)

If they don't see those wild winter turkeys, they'll certainly hear them. What a noisy lot, sometimes a herd of 60 or more, clacking in the woods. They're such fun to watch, but skittish. Even months after hunting season ends, those creatures don't like people.



Source: author

These neighbors' visits are brief and practical. After loading the feeders, they'll check the water. Frozen pipes are a threat; trees too. But what can be done about ice-laden trees falling on wires? With a forecast for freezing temperatures, shut the water main and pour antifreeze through the pipes.

Before leaving they'll check with Big Tim to have him plow the drive and leave a sack of dirt or rock salt on the porch. Never know, you may really need it, he warns. (Although residents near the river shouldn't apply salt to the roads.)

Driving slowly at 20 mph feels comfortable. Remember: there are patches of ice under this snow.

The scanty tracks I follow signal that not many villagers have been out. The few vehicles coming from the other direction are pickup trucks, plows fixed in front. Despite hazards, their drivers welcome these snow days—the time when they become heroes. They'll stop and help anyone, delighted to clear a driveway, often without charging. Need some dirt on that ice outside your door? "Sure. Me and my brother will get some tonight."

And what if these fellows vote for Trump or local Republicans? What if they like hunting too? (We assume pickup truck owners here will be Trump supporters.) Should I check their politics before I ask them to plow?

Remember gearshift cars? Now I recall that feeling of control in snow with a gearshift car. Whatever mechanics and dealers say, gears in snowy weather are unbeatable. Anyway, never brake on ice. Seeing an oncoming truck, I'm tempted. Those snow packed shoulders narrow the roadway. Don't, I warn myself.

It's not a trip where you want to let your mind wander. Forgot to pick up some munchies? The Mail? Never mind.

Don't go out unless absolutely necessary, newscasters advise. Well, I've decided I must, as least drive out this cabin fever. I bundled up, cleared the passage to the car, placed the shovel in the trunk, etc. and made my way into town. That's when I'd spotted those cars out of season; maybe their owners were just chucking their urban apartment fever.

And it's still January!!

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