



### Whiskey and Snow Snakes

The Merriam-Webster Online dictionary defines snow as "precipitation in the form of small white ice crystals formed directly from the water vapor of the air at a temperature of less than 32°F (0°C)". Snake is defined as "any of numerous limbless scaled reptiles (suborder Serpentes syn. Ophidia) with a long tapering body and with salivary glands often modified to produce venom which is injected through grooved or tubular fangs". And the definition of whiskey as "a liquor distilled from the fermented mash of grain (as rye, corn, or barley)".

You won't find "snow snake" in the dictionary but it has been defined elsewhere as: swirling coils of snow that form behind a passing car, wavy lines of snow that move across the road with a sidewinder type of motion, the trail left by balls of snow when they roll down a steep slope after sun action and, my personal favorite, those nasty little critters that suddenly dart out of their snow burrows and grab the tip of your ski, thus precipitating an accident.

For some reason I was chosen to write a story about these elusive creatures and their relationship to the above named liquor as part of the Snow Survey Centennial Celebration. Perhaps it was felt that I had some personal experience in this area. While I don't deny a couple of possible snow snake bites, I disavow any personal cause and effect relationship between grain liquor and the bite of these extremely cold-blooded reptiles.

Others, however, claim a strong relationship between whiskey and snow snakes. A report from Manitoba which, by the way, is claimed by some to be the "Snow Snake Capitol of the World" states that their tracks have been found leading off into the bush from the back of a local tavern. Track sightings are said to be most frequent on pay-day weekends after a few hot toddies (see image on the following page).

Halfway around the world in Siberia, sightings have been reported from near a large vodka distillery. Actual photos were taken of the creatures from the back window of that tavern in Manitoba. Sorry, I am not at liberty to use the copyrighted images in this story.

Not only does this stealthy beast have a history of being found in close proximity to where alcoholic beverages are manufactured and consumed but stories abound as to the healing properties of those beverages to those suffering from snow snake bites. I read an excerpt from an article written by a group from Michigan's Upper Peninsula

stating that whiskey is such a good antidote for their bite that they gather several times a week to practice survival training. A side-effect of the training, however, was a severe headache the next day. Some felt the cure might be more painful than the bite!



Track of the Snow Snake

Along those same lines, you may recall from a previous article in the Snow Survey Centennial commemoration series, a story from an old snow surveyor's diary regarding a request for a quart of Old Boston Whiskey to be included in his supply list for "help in curing snake bites and to limber up sore muscles, etc.".

While I have no experience in using the antidote preemptively, I can say with a great degree of certainty there are positive benefits to post trauma treatment, both in pain relief and from a psychological standpoint.

So, if you are out surveying the snow and one of these white, reclusive, mostly nocturnal animals should suddenly dart out of their cozy snow burrow and grab the tip of your ski bringing you to a sudden stop on what looked like a smooth area, get back on your feet and press on with your mission. Remember, they are attracted by whiskey, so the severity and frequency of attacks can be minimized by leaving your medicine at home. In other words, save the treatment for after the survey.

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