

Celebrate winter in Alberta's Lakeland



Photo courtesy Marianne Price

Wish you were here

The cold Canadian winter just got a lot hotter in Alberta's Lakeland » by Tanya Laing Gahr

When summer's days grow shorter and cooler, many Canadians start to hunker down: wood is chopped for the fire, plane tickets are booked for warmer climes, and shorts and tees are traded for wool socks and sweaters. There is usually a bit of grumbling about the change in temperature, or the ice that will need to be scraped from windshields or the snow that will have to be shovelled. But for those diehard sledheads in Alberta's Lakeland, there's a much different attitude when winter looms—snow: bring it on. And more people from outside the region are taking the trip to see why locals wait anxiously for winter. This winter, why don't you join the fun?

Lest you think that sledding is the only winter obsession in the region—and it is an obsession for a reason—be assured that the first flakes of snow to hit and stick herald an entire season of activity. From skiing to carnivals and winter camping, there is enough happening to be active all winter long.

This year, Lakeland is inviting visitors to check out its most famous asset, the Iron Horse Trail, and to stay around to enjoy the region's other amenities. Start in Smoky Lake and follow your nose to the Old Fashioned Bakery. Cozy up in one of the area's charming B&Bs. Add shopping and you have all the ingredients for a perfect weekend getaway. **SR**

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and enjoy an ultimate winter destination!



ST. PAUL



SMOKY LAKE



VILNA



LAC LA BICHE



BONNYVILLE



IRON HORSE TRAIL

VILNA

An impressive trestle with an access route to the Vilna Golf Course and Bonny Lake Vilna Campground. The area around Vilna is rife with curious trivia. Not only does the town lay claim to being the site of the world's biggest mushrooms, it also contains Alberta's oldest operating pool hall.

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LAC LA BICHE

Just 2 hours northeast of Edmonton, the region offers snowmobiling on ungroomed trails and along peaceful lakeshores. Our big winter event is the popular Winter Festival of Speed. The event takes place in March and turns the frozen surface of Lac La Biche lake into a true winter wonderland with fast cars, even faster snowmobiles and all-terrain vehicles in timed racing heats.

Lac La Biche Region.com
1-877-623-9696

IRON HORSE TRAIL

Length: 300 km
Elevation: 2122 feet
Average Winter temperature: -3° to -25° C
Average snowfall: 4 to 6 feet
Sledging season: November to March



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BONNYVILLE

Home of dedicated, well-established clubs that own their own groomers—like the Bonnyville Snowdusters, formed over 20 years ago—they also have plenty of rivers, lakes and cutlines to sled around during the beautiful season.



Town of
Bonnyville
Alberta, Canada

1-866-826-3496 • www.town.bonnyville.ab.ca

ST. PAUL

Situated on the centre of the 300-kilometre Iron Horse Trail, the St. Paul Region is a great recreational riding area for both snowmobilers and quadders as the Iron Horse Trail is open 12 months of the year. The trails are well maintained with 2 cabins along the trail system. St. Paul is the major trading centre for the surrounding area and offers trail users access to accommodations, restaurants, campgrounds and other amenities. The population is 5,441, but what really sets St. Paul apart is the people. St. Paul has always been "A People Kind of Place."



Town of St. Paul

780-645-4481 • www.town.stpaul.ab.ca



780-645-3301 • www.county.stpaul.ab.ca

SMOKY LAKE

Smoky Lake has an elevation of 2000' with an annual snowfall of 4 - 6'. Our sledging season starts in November with so many trails to enjoy including the Iron Horse Trail, so you can choose a number of different directions. The sledging potential is so vast that you can snowmobile all day and all night and never hit the same trail twice. The Pines region has a camp kitchen, where people can stop and make themselves something to eat. Smoky Lake is only an hour away from Edmonton, and is a great spot for visitors and features a great staging area where sledgers can drop off their vehicles and unload their equipment. A lot of work has been done on our trails to help you have a great sledging experience.



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Photo courtesy Marianne Price

HEAD OUT ON THE SNOW-WAY: From high-octane snocross races to leisurely day trips with 20 of your closest friends, Lakeland offers sledders a bounty of choices.





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ALBERTA'S LAKELAND
Find yourself here

When exploring the communities along the Iron Horse Trail, you'll find there are many ways to get around

First, let's state the obvious: the Iron Horse Trail—and the opportunity to ride it—is one of the main reasons visitors come to the area. And why not? Depending on the season, the trail is accessible to hikers, bikers, ATVers, horseback riders and snowmobilers. The trail, a reclaimed CNR rail bed, travels through Smoky Lake, Vilna and Ashmont before forking to Bonnyville and Cold Lake to the north, or St. Paul and Heinsburg to the south. Local sledders take great pride in the trail and it is beautifully maintained all winter long.

But it's just the start of possibilities for those looking for a winter that is far beyond the ordinary.

As the name Lakeland implies, the region is riddled with lakes—more than 70 prime fishing lakes, in fact—and ice fishing for lake trout and northern pike is a very popular pastime. Be certain to check with Alberta Fish & Wildlife for openings and closings. Know your limit; fish within it.

A ski hill east of the Rockies? Absolutely. Kinsoo Ridge Snow Resort is located 50 kilometres northeast of Bonnyville. »

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Photo courtesy Marianne Price



THE SWEETEST SEASON: Get a syrupy sample from the *Cabaña Sucre* (sugar shack) at St. Paul's winter carnival.

» Kinsoo is a family-friendly hill with natural and man-made snow, a triple chairlift and T-bars. Kinsoo has a brand new chalet this year, so après-ski wining and dining just became more inviting.

For a bit more height, head to Bonnyville's C2 Centre and try the rock climbing wall, and find out about this season's big name headliners. Yuk Yuk's Comedy Club on December 3rd includes a DJ and live music. Enter at reved4snow.com for a chance to win a pair of free tickets. Or feed your soul at Café Impromptu's gallery while dining on a fresh-daily menu.

Cross-country skiers will love the region's trails. The Lakeland Cross Country Ski Club in St. Paul offers adventure beyond the ordinary—a moonlight ski event.

The need for speed

So, you want to go faster? Check out two high-octane events this winter: the Winter Festival of Speed (WFS) in Lac La Biche, and the Sno-Cross races in Ardmore.

"WFS takes place the first weekend in March and features snow and ice drags (as well as) ATV, motorcycle and car racing on the ice," said David Paul, one of the organizers. "It's a big weekend and draws big crowds down to the frozen lake."

The Kinsmen on the Pond Hockey Tournament takes place on the lake as well on Saturday.

Cold culture

A lot of the appeal of Alberta's Lakeland region is found in the communities that make up the area. Live theatre performances, music jamborees and concerts happen all winter long.

Lakeland has many great restaurants, but a visit to one of Alberta's boomtowns, Vilna, is not complete without sampling their local bison burgers. Play a game of cutthroat on hundred-year-old pool tables. There are lots of little artisan and gift shops for shopping; Alberta's Lakeland Top 100 Holiday picks can be found at www.reved4snow.com.

So now you know how Lakeland is heating up the winter season—what's stopping you? **SR**

RESOURCES: www.classicwheels.org
www.ucmaracing.ca • www.frozensurf.ca
www.lakelandxcski.ca
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Photo courtesy Elizabeth Kravonka

Snow races near Grassland add horsepower to Northern Alberta winters.

GRASSLAND

Wide open spaces

The fun starts where the road ends » by Tanya Laing Gahr

Grassland is located in Athabasca Country, where more than 560 kilometres of trails are maintained by the Athabasca River Runners snowmobile club. There are few major highways north of Grassland, but no end of wide open spaces to explore. Reportedly, Athabasca Country is the best place in Canada to view the aurora borealis, a.k.a. the northern lights—an unforgettable experience for any sledder. **SR**

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