

Transcript of Podcast 037: Snow

{Intro}

Kira: Genuine question, what the hell is wrong with you? You're gonna get frostbite. You're gonna lose toes babe. What you doing? Don't do that. Don't lose toes. You don't ... ohhh, it's like herding cats looking after you folk.

{intro music – jaunty, bouncy}

{Intro standard announcement:

Hello. Thank you for tuning in. You're listening to Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure, a fortnightly series looking at unfamiliar places across the world, and aspects of travelling you may never have thought of. I'm your host, The Barefoot Backpacker, a middle-aged Brit with a passion for offbeat travel, history, culture, and the 'why's behind travel itself. So join me as we venture ... beyond the brochure.}

{Music fades. Podcast begins}

Hello :)

How are you all this week? I hope you're doing fine, and that you're feeling a tad more optimistic about the way this year will pan out. We're still in relative but nebulous lockdown here, but there's a 'roadmap' for relaxation for this. Admittedly it's not so much a precise and detailed roadmap, more the kind of thing I used to doodle in meetings at work, but a roadmap nevertheless. Also, my mother has had her first vaccine jab recently, so at least that's done. The vaccine is still far far in my future, to be honest, because I'm still (relatively) young and (relatively healthy). Anyway, she's also made an appointment with a doctor to get some suspicious mole like things removed from her forehead, so she's healthily optimistic.

I've done a few things too, eaten a few metaphorical frogs, as they say at my writing group. I've finally not only made contact with my energy provider but also paid them quite a bit of the outstanding debt that I'd been sticking my head in the sand and ignoring for the past couple of years. Having a follow-up conversation with my lodger/tenant about this is yet to be done, but Future Me can worry about that.

I've also finally registered to vote here in Sheffield, and got my mail redirected. These are things most people would do upon moving, but in a way I kind of don't really feel I've properly moved. Granted I've set foot in my real house about three times since moving here, which is now just over a year ago – I don't recall the exact date I first came to Sheffield but it was sometime late in February 2020 – but I still sort of consider myself to me living in my real house too. The registration and redirection is purely for practical purposes, so I don't have to go back any more than absolutely necessary.

Last week I appeared on someone else's podcast. The nice ladies on the Sounds Fake But Okay pod, which I've illicitly sampled twice so far on my pod, invited me on because I'm old and they didn't know very many old people. In case you don't know, they're a podcast about asexuality and aromanticism, and one of the features of both is most of the people who claim those identities tend to be under 30; I was invited to appear because at 45, I'm quite a bit older than the average, and am apparently seen as a kind of 'rep' for people in older demographic segments. In addition, I was able to talk a bit about how it felt to grow up in the 80s and 90s with a latent queer orientation, and why there are so few asexuals my age about. It ended up being one of the longest episodes they'd done, because basically we're all of us complete balls of chaos and disorganised, and we went off on random tangents. But they kept it all in, which was quite interesting. The consensus is it didn't feel that long to listen to, and my involvement seems to have gone down pretty well. And now my saying 'we are all valid' on the pod has itself been sampled by others and is probably being used in nefarious ways. If people had ringtones these days, I'd be on it. Maybe.

It's also coming up to Census Day here in the UK – Sunday 21 March. This is the survey done every 10 years to see how many people there are in the country, who they are, and where they live. It'd be more exciting if I hadn't spent much of the last three months filling in fake data into various test iterations of the census and thus could probably answer the thing off by heart. It's quite interesting that in every one of the censuses I've

lived through, and I've been on five, I've been living in a completely different place each time – Liverpool, Southport, Birmingham, Kirkby-in-Ashfield, and now Sheffield. Someone in the 22nd Century tracing me will have endless fun with that. Not that I expect anyone to be tracing me in the 22nd Century, given most of the people who do this are researching their family history and tree. I'm a miscellaneous dead-end branch and, technically, the end of my immediate family. But that's by the by. As a thank-you for my help, and to encourage people to fill in the census (which is a legal requirement, so we're a little confused by the 'encouragement' factor), I got a free gift of a window sticker, pen, limp notepad, and face mask all branded with the census. As well as suggested 'I filled in the census, don't forget to do it' templates for tweets and social media posts. Tbh the face-mask is the funky one. It's dark pink, and goes well with my current 'hairy lesbian' clothing vibe. The biggest question I have about my filling in of the census is ... what am I going to put for my gender identity?! We have a question 'what is your sex' (which is easy), and a later question 'Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?'. Free-text field if the answer is 'no'. I wonder if my answer is 'no', and what my answer is, if it is. There's also a question of: "Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?" and there's a free-text field for that too if it's not "Straight or Heterosexual", "Gay or Lesbian", or "Bisexual", but again, that's an easy question. I just hope the data analysts looking at this over the next 10 years (which may well be me) pay attention to people's answers. Mind you, even despite the 'Jedi' affair in 2001, one of the first internet campaigns I can recall, Jedi still isn't an option in the 'what religion are you' question. Which tbh is probably just as well. Sometimes you can't trust the British people. Boaty McBoatface.

But anyway.

I'm looking out the window of my bedroom and it's quite a sunny spring day out there. It feels a little chilly, but I'm definitely more happy that the days are getting longer and the wind is less strong. Sometimes it feels like the first three months of the year are storm-season. To be fair, we're the graveyard for the hurricanes that hit the Caribbean and the southern states of the USA, so it's only to be expected. Most of our weather comes from the Gulf of Mexico. It is also why, given I live on the same latitude as those warm holiday destinations of Edmonton and the Kamchatka Peninsula, I have a much different climate. There are palm trees in the Hebrides, even. There are no palm trees in Labrador, at least not that I'm aware of.

This all means, of course, that the main weather associated with Canada and Siberia, and the topic for this episode, just isn't a 'thing' here. I am of course talking about snow. Unromantically, as is my wont, snow is simply a collection of ice crystals that form in clouds, fall, accumulate where they land, and turn the world white. Or grey-white. Or yellow. But remember, don't eat yellow snow. As an aside, we had a desert at primary (elementary) school lunchtime school dinners, of semolina and jam, which, because of its colours and texture, we nicknamed 'death in the snow'. Because children are much darker and less innocent than you like to think.

Anyway.

Snow is more common in the UK than people think, but that's because most of us live in the lowlands and plains where it doesn't tend to fall, much less accumulate. And there's a whole series of tales about just how badly we, as a nation, cope with the snow. I lived for around 12 years in the West Midlands, which, as England itself goes, is quite a hilly and undulating place, so things like snow tend to fall on the higher ground and fall down into the valleys – indeed, when talking about higher ground, West Bromwich Albion's football ground (the Hawthorns) is often cited as being the highest football (soccer) stadium in the top four leagues in the country, at an altitude-sickness-inducing 168m (551ft). But. While I was living in the area we had a small snowfall of maybe, maybe, half an inch? It knocked out the entire transport network for two days.

An aside about the West Midlands. The region is made up of several council areas, each of which is responsible for their own local road network. One of the main roads in the area is the Birmingham New Road, the A4123, running through the Black Country (an area that would make a fascinating pod on its own if only I could be mythered to do it) from Wolverhampton to somewhere in the Birmingham suburbs, and which for a length forms the border between the councils of Dudley and Sandwell. One year, for cost-saving reasons, one council (I assume Dudley) gritted their side of the road but the other council did not, leading to one very icy morning where travelling one way was clear but travelling the other way was a death-trap.

This is, for me at least, the main issue with snow in the UK – it's not so much the snow itself but the

associated ice. For most of the last 30 years I've lived in places that are pretty hilly, so when the ice comes it makes the roads resemble a toboggan run (and indeed I have seen people slide down the pavements on rubber rings before now), and me being not the most secure person in my balance (as you well know) does not deal with this situation well at all. Where I currently live, in Sheffield, during a recent snow event, I pretty much didn't leave the house for a week. The corner shop is only 230m away and yet I **still** made sure I rationed my bread so I didn't have to venture out into it.

What adds to this issue for me is that, because we're quite a warm country on average (or at least, the official term is "temperate"), when we do get snow it doesn't last very long. A couple of contributors later will mention the 'romantic' look of a setting of freshly-fallen snow and how beautiful it looks, and that's true to an extent, but here in England at least, that vista doesn't last very long. Maybe a day. What happens then is the snow slightly melts in the day then refreezes overnight, leading to ice as mentioned, but also with all the footfall and traffic, rather than being the pretty white icing, what you quickly end up with is a slushy, grey, ugly, mess.

Kate-Frankie, from 'This Could Lead To Anywhere', compared and contrasted how the UK deals with snow, with her experiences of a much snowier country, Norway.

[Kate-Frankie – This Could Lead To Anywhere]

Snow is really nice, I do like snow. I love it when I see it like fluttering down outside so I am a bit romantic about things like snow. I think it's ... I don't know, it just feels kind of magical and different and quite fresh when you go outside, and crisp. But I do kind of tend to associate it with, because I'm Northern Hemisphere, with like Winter time, so kind of like White Christmas or that kind of thing, so it is one of my favourite times of the year; if we have snow at Christmas it does feel really special – I kind of remember that from being a kid as well.

Snow when I'm travelling is a different thing. So, it can really get in the way of a lot of plans, it can disrupt transport, it's just, well, if the country is not good at handling snow, so the UK, I'm looking at you! {giggles} It is totally different when looking at somewhere like Norway. So I've travelled before from the UK where we've had like a little bit of slush on the ground, so basically like a bit of melted snow, and everything has been at a standstill, it's been a nightmare just trying to take off. I get to Norway and it's like, you are knee-deep everywhere that you go and there are like .. you land in the middle of like, two basically walls of snow, ice and snow, and the plane has to be like de-iced, the engines have to be checked before you take off and stuff, but they manage it and they make it work. So really, it just depends where you are. Also Norway's just set up as a country to like, everything just works within the snow, and I'm sure a lot of like very Northern Scandinavian countries are the same. I'd love to visit Finland. I'd love to do one of the like igloo kind of hotel things.

The UK is also quite a damp country. It's not overly wet, which may come as a surprise to all my British listeners, but it is very humid. This means our snow is ... much damper, less powdery, less coherent, and, weirdly, feels much colder than snow elsewhere in the world, because of course the wetter something is the colder it feels. This makes our snowy days actually quite uncomfortable and, if you add in the likely constant wind too, often bitterly cold, much more so than you might expect. I really like days with snow on the ground, and clear blue skies, where it's chilly but calm and bright, but you rarely get them here – usually it's grey and overcast and windy.

But to go back to something I said earlier – this is all quite a lowland English attitude. Here in Sheffield I'm within walking distance of the Peak District and there are times when it's clear where I am (and I'm at the top of a hill, about 110m up), and yet only about 5 miles away on the other side of the city, in Stannington or Rivelin, where it reaches 300m in places, you can get a blanket for much longer. And only a couple of miles further on, when you get into the wilds of the moors at 450m (Stanage Edge), still within the city boundary, it can get very bleak and snowy quite often. One of the main roads between Sheffield and Manchester is the Snake Pass (named, as mentioned in an earlier episode, after a pub and not because it 'snakes' through the moors) is one of the first roads to be closed in Wintertime, and it closes on a regular basis. And a couple of years ago, in preparation for our hike across Great Britain, Becky The Traveller dragged me up onto Kinder Scout so I could get used to hill-walking and so we could play with photography and videography. During a

named storm, 40mph wind gusts, and snow on the ground. I'm not saying that's why I ended up a couple of weeks later with a chest infection and cough severe enough to both cancel a trip to Japan and require antibiotics, but it probably didn't help. (In fairness, I'd recently returned from Bangladesh and Nepal, two places not noted for their clean air, so I'm also going to blame that). And obviously the further north you go, the higher the land gets and the more snow you expect on a yearly basis. While never challenging Jasper or Kitzbühel for fame and style, the UK does have ski resorts, mainly in Scotland (Glencoe, Aviemore) but also a couple in the high Pennines near Alston, a town we passed through on The Hike, but given we were there in June, it wasn't exactly the right season for giving it a whirl. Plus I doubt Becky would have let me anyway. She was worried enough I would die just by crossing a road.

Juliet, from *I Am A Polar Bear*, gives a couple of short experiences of growing up in Lowland England and things she likes to do in the snow.

[Juliet – I Am A Polar Bear]

I'm a polar bear, I tend to wilt in the heat so I seek out cold places like Iceland and the Arctic. I don't go looking for snow exactly, but it's definitely a bonus if there is any.

We didn't get a lot of snow when I was growing up in Dorset. The only 'snow day' I remember, my mum's school was still open, but mine was closed. So I went and played on the field whilst she was teaching, built a snowman, and I put my glasses on it. And then I immediately forgot about them, until the Head found them a week later, in the field, after the snow had gone.

I don't build many snowmen these days, but I really like snow-shoeing. I'm not very good at it, but at least snow is soft when you fall over in it. And I fall over in it a lot. Snowmobiling is fun too, in a terrifying kind of way. I don't ski – that's far too difficult. But I do snowboard a little bit, and I'm very good at sliding down a hill on a plastic disc.

I used to go to Michigan regularly (I was dating a woman there, of all things. An asexual dating a polysexual went about as well as you'd imagine, but we're still really good friends), and certainly one time I went in a February when everything was snow-bound, and we spent a day sliding down a small slope on rubber rings etc. Surprisingly the only time in my life I've done it. It was kinda fun, but of course the distances involved were short and the speed was low. One of my twitter friends (Simon Burgess) has offered to give me snowboarding and skiing lessons recently – a couple of my other friends have started to list ways in which this would not be a good idea, including dislocated knee, getting lost on a mountain and then falling over a cliff, falling off a chairlift, or hitting a tree while distracted by a shiny thing. To be fair, they may have a point. Someone else pointed out that you can't fit skis to bare feet – I'll be honest and say that had never occurred to me since I'm not a complete loon; I do own boots. I don't wear them very often, granted (not since that practice hike over Kinder Scout in the storm, in fact), but I do have them and they would be used!

As a related aside, I did mention earlier that snow in the UK tends to be quite damp. Obviously, and mostly 'for the gram' as the cool and hip kids probably said several years ago, I've often wandered in the snow barefoot (though not to the extent as in the K d Lang song), and what I've noticed is that it's a much more comfortable experience (or at least, an experience that doesn't make me go 'why am I doing this' after about 15 seconds) in other, much colder, countries. The two that come immediately to mind are Quebec and Andorra, where in both the snow was much drier, more powdery, more comfortable to step in, and this meant it didn't feel as cold, clammy, and uncomfortable underfoot. I mean I'm not going to run a marathon barefoot or anything in the snow, but still, it's pleasant enough for a short wander. But I'm not like my friend Hannah, mentioned in episode 35, who does run barefoot in snow. I could probably do an entire podcast episode on running barefoot, but that would be a tad niche. And not really related to travel, history, politics, or identity.

Research, by the way, has shown the world record for a barefoot snow half-marathon is 1:44:58, set only last month (February 2021) by Norwegian YouTuber Jonas Sevaldrud. By the looks of things he could have gone quicker too - in an interview with *Runner's World* magazine he suggested the cold itself wasn't a problem, he just wasn't used to running barefoot so kept stopping every 5km just to check how they were faring. He smashed the previous world record of 2:16:34 (which suggests that people don't really do this very often, and I'm not really that surprised) set by that famously perfectly well-balanced individual Wim Hof, a man who

thinks that ice-baths are fun. For the record, I've only ever done one half-marathon in my life; I was 16, it was entirely flat, it was warm, I was wearing running shoes, and I think I did it in 1:27:51. These days I'd be lucky to break 2 hours. Running a half-marathon was one of the few things on my 2020 list that I never managed to do, because of ... world events.

While I was in Toronto one year, I had an evening watching a pre-season ice-hockey game at the Blue Jays. One of the entertainments put on in one of the period breaks was a short session of barefoot ice-hockey. It was ... weird – it felt quite a bit slower; it shows just how fast people on skates can go. It also looked, well, 'wrong' is probably the best way I can describe it, it looked ungainly and awkward. I mean it might have been fun but I don't know if it's ever likely to catch on.

Ice-Hockey, by the way, is a sport possibly invented in Scotland, and which the UK was one of the founding members of the international association of. Despite this, and the fact the UK, as mentioned earlier, has ski resorts, sports involving snow aren't generally things we excel at. In the history of the Winter Olympics, we're ranked 19th overall, and have won 32 medals. 10 of which, so nearly a third, won in the two most recent, and 14 (43%, just under half) achieved in the 21st Century. Indeed there have been several Olympiads where we haven't won a medal at all, the most recent being 1992. It's also perhaps related that the events we do best in aren't related to snow at all, but in fact to ice, because we simply don't have enough snow to compete competitively. We are second overall in the Skeleton – I'd say that lying on a plank and careering head-first down an ice trail like some kind of torpedo is dangerous but we also do cheese-rolling so evidently as a nation we're not exactly scared of hills. I make such a bad Brit, on many levels. We are also third overall in curling – bowls on ice, and since we're one of the few countries in the world to play bowls, this makes perfect sense. 'Oh, our bowling green is flooded and iced up! Aye? Nay bother, get the broom.'. But the discipline we have the most gold medals in (a massive total of 5) is figure-skating. It's no fluke that TV programmes like 'Dancing On Ice' are British, nor that, despite the average Brit's knowledge of and interest in winter sports being similar to their knowledge of foreign languages or the history of the empire, people like Robin Cousins, and Jayne Torvill & Christopher Dean, are still household names.

Anyway. Back to snow in general. And a quick observation that, whether barefoot or in huge boots, I like the sound of walking in snow. One night, I'd caught the last bus out of Nottingham so it was after midnight, I was walking through Kirkby-in-Ashfield, the snow was uncharacteristically ankle-deep, there was no-one around, and it was absolutely quiet. The only sound I heard was my footsteps. And it sounded for all the world like a purring cat; that low, trilled, slightly longer than a sudden sound you hear when petting a pussy. Not a euphemism.

I don't recall having much snow when I was growing up. Although on the west coast and therefore taking the brunt of the weather, where we lived was exceptionally flat – unlike in most of my adult life as I said earlier, as a kid the nearest hill of any significance was several miles away. The snow, like the rain elsetime in the year, just passed on by and generally dumped its load on Manchester. I know we did have snow at times; certainly I made a couple of snowmen in the back garden, but it doesn't seem to have made an impression on my mind. I don't even remember having any 'snow days', days off school because the snow caused them to close. In fact I'm sure there was one year where I don't recall seeing any snow at all. I certainly didn't have the childhood that's commonly referenced in media, of snowball fights and sledges. I had computers. And bovril.

It was a bit different when I moved to Nottinghamshire for work in 2005. The business park the office was on was one of those convenient but badly designed places, right next to a motorway but with a huge number of offices and only two entrances/exits, both of which went to the same main road. They also, because it was a 'private' business park, or at least not all the roads in it were considered public, tended to not be gritted. These two factors meant if there was any hint of snow during the day, everyone gradually stopped working and looked out the windows. As soon as the first flurry hit, everyone was out of there and often the queue to leave the business park meant it took up to an hour (the same was true if ever there was a road accident on the motorway, regardless of conditions or seasons – for some reason this happened rather more frequently than you might expect). I don't drive anyway, but days like that showed it was often quicker to walk home than drive. They tended to close the office if the roads on the business park were particularly bad with ice in the mornings, which was annoying to me as a non-driver, but fair enough. I could work from home anyway. In theory. In practice it wasn't anywhere as simple as it is in my current job.

Someone with a similar experience of snow growing up in the UK is Kylie, from Between England And Iowa, who ... I mean the clue's in her website's name, to be honest. Here though, she tells us about how it feels to live in a place with long winters and regular months of snow, and how it's a very different environment to the UK.

[Kylie – Between England and Iowa]

Where I live in England, we tend to avoid snow quite a lot, in Essex. I don't know why, but for some reason snow tends to always bypass us. But on the times when it did snow, you'd find that everything would come to a complete standstill. The trains would stop running, and no-one knows how to drive in it properly. I remember a couple of times growing up when we had school cancellations where there would literally be like no snow and we would listen on the radio for if the school was going to be cancelled, and then we would go sledding, so I did quite enjoy that. I lived on the edge of town where there's a big hill so in that sense we would go out and we could enjoy sledging, and it was never really that cold so it didn't really bother me, and most of the time it was always like melted by the following day. So snow in England doesn't so much bother me.

But, on the other hand in Iowa, it's like never-ending Winter for like four months of the year. So when it starts snowing in November/December time, it would then be white for like the next four months, and the temperature is ridiculously cold; at one point it got down to minus 50 Celsius, and things were cancelled just because of the ridiculously cold temperature. But on average in Iowa it was mainly minus 20 Celsius, so it was really really cold. But with the snow, most of the time they would plough the road like almost instantly, all the time, so the roads were kept quite good, and when it came to the schools, rather than just cancelling like the English schools did, you would get what they called a 'delay' so there'd be like a two-hour 'late opening' so that would give a chance for the ploughers to go through in the morning, clear the bus routes, and we'd still be expected to go to school. The only time it would be cancelled completely would be if they were expecting a strong snowstorm in the middle of the day, because most of the kids in Iowa go to school by bus, so obviously they don't want the buses to spin off the road and injure the children, so that was a big thing: were the roads safe enough in the middle of the sticks to go and pick up the kids to bring them to school. If it wasn't that's where the lines were drawn.

Also, as homeowners, you were expected to shovel your sidewalks and your driveways. If somebody slipped on the pathway outside your house, you were responsible for it, even though it was technically not your path. But it's kind of like a community thing where it's your job to clear the path in front of your house and keep it open, and like the same with the driveway; if you skipped a day, the chances are more snow would come and it would build up and build up and it would just be an icy mess and you wouldn't be able to move it at all. So snow-blowing was a bit of a chore; to be honest I never did it {giggles} but you were expected to go out there and blow your snow all the time. I don't like snow! Yeh that type of thing happens when you're living somewhere ridiculously cold.

These are things that we in the UK don't really think of, neither in terms of living with snow, nor anything we experience if we travel to snowy places on holiday. When you're in a cabin in a ski resort, you don't tend to worry about how the snow gets cleared outside your cabin, only that it does get cleared. It also shows you that, yes, people do get used to living with snow and they do cope with it well, but that doesn't mean it's an easy experience, in terms of either work or administration.

Someone else with experience of living somewhere more accustomed to snow is Deb, from Tag Along Travel. She also talks a bit about the difference in attitude towards snow between people who grew up with it and people for whom it's a novel experience.

[Deb - Tag Along Travel]

I was born and raised in Winnipeg, Canada, so snow has always been a part of my life. I think most little kids love snow. Parents bundle them up well before taking them out skating, or sledding (we call it tobogganing). There are snow angels and snow men to make, and snowball fights to have fun with.

I think snow becomes less fun for people as they age, because it comes with work. You have to shovel the walk, and the driveway. Ice-downs can cause havoc with your roof. Your car might not start. And for a lot of adults, they just don't dress well for cold, snowy, weather, and if your body is cold, it's not a lot of fun.

But I've always loved snow. I think it's beautiful when it first falls – resting on the trees among frosty branches, the crunch of it underfoot – it's pretty! Having said which, once March hits, I'm ready to say goodbye to it for another year. Unfortunately in Winnipeg, snow can stay around until late April. And it's dirty from all the traffic, and it's messy as it melts; that is not my favourite kind of snow.

I would visit another country that gets snow, but I wouldn't go there for the snow. I have plenty of snow at home, and for me it's nice to escape to a warmer place, when I need a break from minus 25 Celsius for a bit. I'm not sure how people who live in warmer climes feel about snowy holidays; I suppose if you're a skier it has appeal, but I think it's hard for those who live in a warm place year round to really understand what it's like. I live a few blocks away from a transitional apartment block for newcomer Canadians, and every first snowfall you see kids and their parents who have come here from Africa and other hot climate, and they are absolutely joyous to discover and play in the snow.

So I think people from warmer climates should consider visiting a Winter city, just to experience the beauty of it, and what it's like to interact with it.

I don't tend to go on winter holidays to snowy places. It's never appealed. Not strictly speaking because of the snow and the conditions, although if I had the choice between going for a 10km hike over the hills in the snow, and spending the same amount of time indoors with a hot chocolate looking at the snow on the hills, I'm more than happy to do the latter. Rather, it is, as mentioned earlier, and constantly in previous podcasts, due to a lack of balance, and a ... it's kind of related to my fear of losing control, of going downhill fast with no easy way of stopping, of tripping and falling and careering downwards in a snowball of chaos and broken legs. And a fear of heights. And yes, of course, a lack of spacial awareness and an inability to follow instructions related to such. While these concerns are more present in activities like skiing, they're also true for simply hiking. If I can't see where I'm stepping, I have a tendency to fall over. One of the sports I would like to try at some point is Cross-Country skiing, because it's probably about the only snow-related sport I could potentially ... do?

While this sounds specific to winter sports, most destinations that people go to for a winter/snowy holiday are geared up to that end. It's similar to my general avoidance of small hot tropical islands because they're mostly geared towards either honeymooners (which is, uhm, so not my genre), or diving/snorkelling type activities, which are also out of my comfort and ability zones. I don't want to go away to somewhere wintery and stay in a log cabin for five days for the same reason I don't want to go to a beach resort and stay by the pool for five days. I need to be out doing stuff, else I'd just get bored and feel it was a waste of a holiday, and in a winter sport destination, there's not a lot that I'd want to be doing.

That's not to say I haven't been in snowy places on holiday, but that it was snowing wasn't the reason I was there. One of my first trips away was five days in Poland over Christmas, back in 1996, with my then-future-first-fiancée. We chose it because it sounded nice, different, and pretty – we were in Zakopane in the Tatras Mountains where it was very cold, very snowy, but also beautiful, but because we were only there a few days and because we had some trips booked anyway, we didn't get bored. One of the trips, btw, on a very bleak and white Christmas Eve, was to Auschwitz-Birkenau ... if you're going to go to a place like that, going at a time like that really brings home the dark, bleak, sorrowful, nature of it and just how bad the conditions there could get.

I don't know how cold it got, but we were delayed on the coach on the way back to the UK when the diesel froze. We also got stuck for similar reasons of temperature at the the border between Poland and Germany, just after midnight; these were the days before Poland was in the EU, and the Zloty was a non-tradeable currency so we couldn't really take it out the country. The only thing open was a duty-free shop selling mainly vodka. It was a fun trip through Germany the following day.

A more recent trip to Poland saw me experience the coldest temperatures I've officially and recordably set foot in – about -16°C, or 3°F, where 'F' stands for 'foreign', of course. It was so cold I had to zip up my fleece.

This was in March 2018, during a cold snap that back in the UK we were calling 'The Beast From the East' where temperatures dropped to as low as -7°C and lots of snow-induced panic resulted. Meanwhile I was at the beach. I mean granted the snow covered the sand, the sea was partly frozen, and yes I was wearing closed shoes and thick socks, but nevertheless I spent a little while on the seafront at Sopot. Snow is one of the few reasons I wear closed shoes – I figure if it's deep enough to cover my sandals it's probably not a good idea to wear sandals. Indeed the last time I wore closed shoes was December 2019 in Kosicé (Slovakia) and Budapest (Hungary), at the end of my Inter-Rail trip, because although they're pretty places in the snow, the snow was a little deep.

Apart from the couple of days in Quebec mentioned earlier, which was in April 2018, I've not really experienced snow elsewhere around the world. I've been to places associated with snow, but not generally during the snow season – this includes Song Kol lake in the Tien Shan mountains in Kyrgyzstan, where snow is present up to 200 days a year, but while I saw the surrounding hilltops snow-covered (and it was a beautiful spot), at Song Kol itself it was still about two weeks too early for it. I've also been to Canada at the end of November, but this was over by Vancouver and the weather was ... British (10°C and raining. A lot). There wasn't even any snow on my day trip to the Grand Canyon in early December that year, but again it would come within the fortnight after my trip. And while I saw plenty of pictures of Lesotho covered in snow, the reason I spent a day stuck in the highest pub in Africa (at the Sani Mountain Lodge, 2,874m up) rather than hiking through the nearby passes, was because of the fog. Apparently this happens quite often.

Someone who did go somewhere specifically because of the snow is Roo, from Roo Loves Travel, who tells us what she likes about snow and gives us a tale from Japan.

[Roo – Roo Loves Travel]

I'm not a fan of the cold. I'd much rather be lying under a tree in summer, than putting 20 layers of clothes on in an attempt not to freeze in Wintertime. Okay, I might be exaggerating, but only just.

There is one exception. I will allow it to be cold without cursing or cussing, if it is snowing.

*I love the snow. I love how magical everything looks. I grew up reading *The Lion The Witch and The Wardrobe*, and snow still has that special ability to turn adult life into Narnia, even just for a day. I was more than happy in the recent snow to go out, take photographs of different animal tracks, make a snowman, and slide down a hill on a piece of large plastic parading as a sledge.*

However, if you want serious snow, you may need to look further afield than England.

A couple of years ago I spent two months in Japan. I went over to Hokkaido to work in a resort training up new staff. Snow in Northern Japan is no joke; they call it 'powder'. It's so solid and gives that satisfying crunch when you walk in it, which isn't always easy, I might add. I remember walking to work just before the morning plough had been by. The snow is so deep that the roads and sidewalks have to be ploughed regularly. Trudging through two foot of snow in the early morning is a workout. I arrived at my workplace sweating buckets, with a bright pink face.

Everybody also wears fold-on spikes on their boots, which you have to take off when going indoors, and reapply after. Doing this after coming out of the grocery shop takes a particular amount of skill.

The most impressive and undoubtedly Japanese thing I saw was that certain roads on hills had underfloor heating. There must have been pipes placed under them to stop ice settling and making it too dangerous to drive.

I never before had thought about how populations used to regular and deep snowfall would find their own ingenious ways of adapting. Meanwhile in the UK, a bit of wet snow causes traffic jams for miles. Oh to be British.

Sometimes though, it's not at all what you expect. Here's Juliet again with a very short vignette about doing a snow-based activity in the wrong conditions.

[Juliet again]

I went to Svalbard about five years ago; it was dark Winter so there was no light at all, but it was also too early in the year for 'proper snow'. I went out dog-sledding for the first time and I expected it to be really beautiful and really serene, and instead we spent the first five minutes rattling over gravel with no control at all, feeling like the sled was going to crash onto its side any second.

Places like Svalbard and especially Siberia and Greenland do appeal to me, but I'm not sure if I'm specifically interested to see them in the winter or not. Like, I know that's the stereotype; everyone associates places like that with endless snow fields, glaciers, icebergs, and white mountain tops, but part of me always likes to fight against the stereotype and wonders what they're like in the height of summer, in a setting that people would never think of – green fields, bright sunshine, flowers, all in those long, long daylight hours.

However, I'm not as hardcore as some people. Here's Kate-Frankie again.

[Kate-Frankie again]

Antarctica, obviously I do have to mention it, I know, you're rolling your eyes. It was just the most magical place anyway, it felt like a real adventure and it was a completely different atmosphere, it was just a different environment than I have ever experienced before, and the snow obviously made that, the icebergs, the seeing whales, like amazing humpback whale pods, and penguins of all different species, and yeh just like that whole habitat and the fact it was like wild animals in their natural habitat is really cool, but obviously a very magical place so yes, I'm generally a fan of snow as long as it doesn't prevent me from experiencing the place.

It's on the bucket list for many people, but I'll come out here and admit Antarctica isn't somewhere that appeals to me. Partly because of the sheer cost, and the fact I can see similar things elsewhere in the world for cheaper, but also because I'm an independent traveller and not so fond of organised tours. It's the same reason I'm not keen on visiting North Korea – the lack of ability to go off and do your own thing doesn't appeal.

Also, what she doesn't tell you about visiting Antarctica in that extract is while the place itself is magnificent, the journey there ... is not. A couple of days on the open water, with nothing to see but the grey, dismal, ocean, buffeted by strong winds and huge waves. A combination of boredom and extreme sea-sickness is the price to pay. Both ways. I'm not that excited by penguins.

So what have we learned this time? Snow can be pretty, but in the UK it doesn't stay in that state for very long. Also, snow in the UK is a bit different to snow elsewhere in the world. Living in an environment that gets snow is more work than people in warmer places give it credit for, but some places have unique and efficient ways of handling it that leave places like the UK in exactly the helpless panic as you expect.

And posting pictures of stepping barefoot in snow leads to comments like 'ooof that looks cold'. Because people like to state the obvious, I guess.

{standard section separation jingle}

Well that's about all for this pod. I'm not 100% sure what my next episode (in two week's time, don't forget) will be on, but at the moment I'm leaning towards it being a local one, about Sheffield & South Yorkshire. We'll see. Until then, happy Mother's Day, and if you're feeling off colour, keep on getting better.

{Outro theme tune, same as intro, just a different bit of it}

{Outro voiceover:

Thank you for listening to this episode of Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure. I hope you enjoyed it; if you did, don't forget to leave a review on your podcast site of choice.

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Until next time, have safe journeys. Bye for now.}