



# ICE INTO GOLD: The Alchemy of the Carleton Cup

## 1. HIBERNATION AND DENIAL: Your Winter Survival Guide

In Canada we are taught to deny the cold. We are expected to pretend that it's really not that bad. We are actually taught to deny the harsh reality of our climate in our schools as children. I know I sure was. **(1)** We are led to believe that to simply admit the obvious - the cold is unbearable - is somehow *less* than Canadian. The two survival techniques we're taught to get through the Canadian winter are hibernation and denial. And let's face it, we all tow-the-line. We all sit inside huddled together and regale each other with the great Canadian fable about the stupid Americans seen driving down the 401 in August with skis on their car. What the heck were they thinking?



We laugh indignantly about all the deluded people who think we live in igloos, as if that would be the most absurd place in the world for a Canadian to live ("an **igloo?!?!"**) - forgetting that traditionally the indigenous peoples of this land did actually live in igloos. We seem to believe that if we downplay the cold, it will somehow make us seem more worldly and sophisticated. Less like the hapless bunch of hosers that we truly are.

The truth is that nobody cares if the bottom tip of Ontario is equal in latitude to northern California, about the number of chinooks that blow through Calgary per season or the lovely summers we enjoy. The ugly reality is that the Canadian winter is an all-out ordeal. Our winters are vicious, merciless and absolute. Winter beats the living crap out of us, every year, and without fail. Only in the last few years have we started to accept the brutality of winter as an irrefutable scientific fact. Whether you've been diagnosed with Seasonal Affective Disorder or not, the bottom line is that winter means pain and suffering for each and every one of us. We who participate in the Carleton Cup happen to believe in the heretical notion that the only reason the rest of the world thinks that Canada is so cold is because **Canada is so cold**. Canadians seem to be the last ones in on the joke!



Winter is all-pervasive, inescapable - it affects every aspect of life on this frozen wasteland. Our climate affects our commerce, art, music, literature, sport, our politics, demographics, the way we socialize and interact with each other. Our climate has shaped our culture, our lives, and the way we define ourselves.

The Carleton Cup was created as a survival mechanism for winter. We call it "the Ultimate Canadian Triathlon" simply because in creating this race, all we were doing was what our ancestors have taught us to do. For as long as there have been people living on this land, there have been people who've faced a formidable climate, and people who have continually proven themselves to be quite adept at *doing something about it*. We don't suffer silently, we rise above. Let's face it, when it comes to coping with winter Canadians are pretty damn good at it. The message is **winter is easier to take if you participate with it.** Don't hibernate and push it away, embrace winter and all that it has to offer. The key is to be completely honest with yourself about how truly difficult it is, the toll that it takes on each and every one of us and what it means to live with the soul-numbing cold. The Carleton Cup is the perfect solution to the age-old Canadian problem: how does one live a civilized life in an uncivilized climate? (2)

## 2. GLOBAL WARMING: Our Changing Climate



Everyone knows Canada is cold. The cold weather in Canada is something you can just take for granted, right? Wrong. Our climate is changing. The bane of every Canadian's existence, our great, fierce Canadian winter is on its last legs. This is something we who participate in the Carleton Cup learned very early on. We were unable to hold our second race in 1990 because there was no ice to skate on that year. (That was a hard year for all of us. So this 'Global Warming' thing was to blame, eh? That was the name we had engraved on our trophy.)

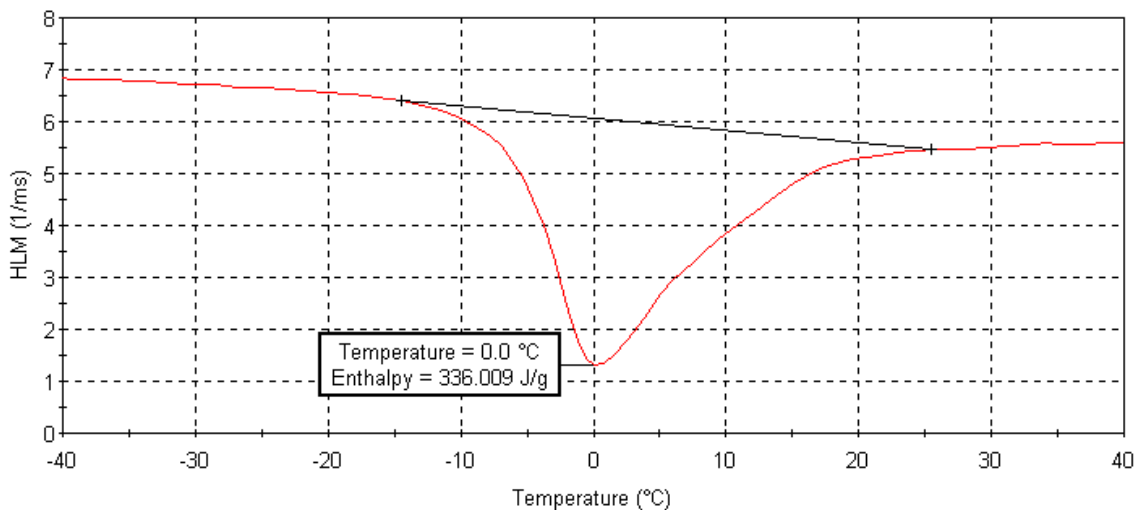
We thought that was a fluke: what are the chances of the Rideau Canal not being frozen in February? We confidently planned our next race in 1991, but then *the very same thing happened again*. The Canal washed out on us two years in a row!!!



However, in '91 the temperature quickly dropped and we were able to reschedule our race and hold the second annual Carleton Cup a week later than our original date. Yet the lesson was not lost on us. When planning our event, the central component - the ice on the Rideau Canal - is completely beyond our control. This is something that has caused us a considerable amount of stress over the years. From 1989 until today we've attempted to run the race every year. Thus in 15 attempts, we have been unable to run the race as scheduled due to poor ice conditions (or no ice at all!) exactly three times. We were able to postpone and reschedule two times ('91 and '02), and had to cancel outright in 1990.

So, 3 cancellations in 15 attempts. Those are today's odds of the Canal washing out for the Cup - a 1-in-5 chance. So anyone planning on coming up to Ottawa for the Cup knows there is a 20% chance that the race will not run as scheduled. One interested in doing the math would also know that there is a 13% chance that we will have to postpone and reschedule the event to a later date.

Melting of ice, 6 mm glass tube  
(A T - H L M, Copyright © 1999 QInc)



Acquisition Date : 04/27/1999 - Acquisition Time : 16:02:53 - Heating Mode  
Tank Temperature = 340.8 °C - Sample Mass = 0.134 g - Calibration Cte = 1.639 J/K

So we're not talking about subjective impressions here, a vague "it seems that winters are getting shorter" or "there seems to be less snow falling each year" sort of feeling. For while the snow banks truly did *seem* to be bigger when we were kids, it's hard to know for sure - we were smaller and perspective counts for a lot. No, those who participate in our race have a tangible relationship with this thing we call Global Warming. The Carleton Cup provides scientific evidence of the warming of our planet - it's not just an abstract concept for us, something

we've only heard David Suzuki talk about. Those who participate in the Cup are equipped with hard data. Facts. Statistics that are irrefutable. For the Carleton Cup is, in a sense, a gauge to measure changes in our climate, a barometer for people to measure our winter as it gasps its last breaths. The dial is set to the same time, same place and same channel every year **(3)**, and dedicated Cuppers have their own memories as the readings on the instrument, their own experience as the evidence.

One-in-five, my friends. Those are not very good odds, and they're not likely to improve. **(4)**

### 3. YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT

Most children learn at a very early age to mind what goes in their mouths, and that what they eat can potentially harm them. Few people would ever consciously eat their own excrement. The majority of people would consider such a thing to be disgusting and pointless. However, we as a species have yet to learn this simple lesson. In terms of development, the human race has yet to be toilet-trained. We expend our own waste into our air, our water - the very food we need to survive - only to consume it again secondhand. We are eating contaminated food, drinking contaminated water and breathing contaminated air, and only because we have made it so. This practice of dumping our garbage into our biosphere and then ingesting it again is not only dangerous, not only barbaric – it is *insane!!!*

We have created a very complicated problem for ourselves. The amount of waste that we produce and the way in which we "dispose" of our own waste has far-reaching consequences, the likes of which we are only beginning to understand. Our dependence upon fossil fuels is responsible for much of the damage we are doing to our planet today. It is more than the waste that comes from our cars or industrial smokestacks, though. According to Cornell University's David Pimentel, the use of fossil fuels in agriculture, which up until the 1950s was almost exclusively a solar industry, has increased dramatically since then and now consumes about 20% of North America's energy. It now takes 400 gallons of fuel a year to feed a typical North American. Put another way, it now takes 10 calories of fossil fuel energy to produce one calorie of food energy. **(5)**



We cannot sustain our planet in the manner in which we are presently living. The greatest minds of our age all agree we are on a collision course with disaster, that we are quickly rendering our world uninhabitable, and the only real debate is about how much time we have left. However, we do know for certain that dumping our garbage into our atmosphere has damaged the protective layer around the Earth and contributed to the undeniable increase in surface temperature or "warming" of our planet.

Now whether or not you're politically-minded, consider yourself "issue-oriented," or you find all this earnest talk about the environment embarrassing and you're too jaded to care (you're from Toronto, right?), it does not matter. This dramatic climatic change will affect all of us. For those of us involved in the Carleton Cup, we are being affected a little sooner, a little ahead of the curve. For us the warming of our planet is a little more vivid, and a little more real. For us, as far as Global Warming is concerned, that old 1960s adage applies: there are no spectators.

#### 4. ALCHEMY: Lead Into Gold?



To most of the world the alchemists, those practitioners of the mysterious science of alchemy, were buffoon chemists looking for a way to turn lead and other base metals into gold. People generally (and understandably) thought this was a silly waste of time, and thus the alchemists were left to their own devices. However, the "lead into gold" story was a ruse, a cover to hide the true nature of their work. The real "lead" that concerned the alchemists was ordinary human consciousness, and the "gold" they sought was the golden luminescence of transcendental or cosmic consciousness. That's the way it has traditionally been with mystery schools throughout history - they're Janus-faced, presenting one image to the world and yet another to their initiates. **(6)** Not buffoon chemists at all, these alchemists were actually

undertaking the most noble work there is: the elevation of human consciousness.

This is a little allegory for the Carleton Cup itself. We are not a cult or mystery school, but the Cup works on many levels, is many things to many different people. On the surface it seems the Carleton Cup is all about the party, hedonism, having a good time at all times. Now I'm not going to lie or sugarcoat it, it is true we like to drink a little beer and have a good time. But truth be told, the "party" angle is only the bait. It is a lure to hook the people, reel 'em in and bring them out to the event. Once they show up, they inevitably fall in love with the race and keep coming back year after year.

Once people become Cup "regulars", they look forward to the event as one of the highlights of an otherwise very grim time of year. In coming back to the Carleton Cup year after year, the first conclusion one reaches is that Canada is cold. You'll never hear a Carleton Cupper trying to spin that tired old "Canada is not THAT cold/we're soooo misunderstood" yarn. The first thing anyone realizes in skating down the Rideau Canal in the dead of winter is it IS that cold here. Our international reputation is well deserved. Believe the hype, it's FREEZING here!!!

Secondly, after completing the race, facing winter honestly and participating with it, one discovers that winter is indeed easier to take if you embrace it. Admit that it's cold and see how much fun you can have with it. Hibernation doesn't help, it only makes it worse. To enjoy winter you have to do the very thing that you do not want to do: face it, head-on. One hates the cold and yet somehow *welcoming* the cold actually makes it less difficult to bear. This is a paradox that I still do not fully understand. However, I can say from my own experience that facing the brutal weather does make it easier to take somehow. The key is not to fall into the "it's not that cold" trap (see previous paragraph), and to be compassionate towards others who haven't discovered the Carleton Cup and still suffer needlessly through winter! (7)



The third component of the holy trinity of Cup philosophy is that something interesting happens to those who come out to our race each year: they become a little more environmentally aware. I mean everybody knows the typical Carleton Cup participant is smarter, better looking, and a more productive member of society (and reputedly better-in-bed, too) than the average citizen. Am I right? But did you know the average Cupper is more in tune with the growing pains that the earth, our Mother, is undergoing today? It's true. It's subtle and something that happens

gradually, growing in tandem with the rate at which a person grows to love the

event itself. For the overall warming of our planet directly affects the one thing that makes winter a little more tolerable, our beloved Carleton Cup. Therefore our racers have a vested interest in the water freezing on the Rideau Canal, and tend to watch the weather very closely in the period leading up to our event. In watching closely each year, our racers reach the inescapable conclusion that our climate is changing. The Carleton Cup has taught us that our great Canadian winter, that thing that torments us and defines us, is in truth a very fragile thing in urgent need of our care.

Now we're not doomsayers here. We're not dogmatic, we're not screaming "the sky is falling!" and banging people over the heads with alarmist rhetoric. On the contrary, we invite people to come out and celebrate winter consciously, with eyes open - to wake up and smell the ice sculptures. To see things as they really are, not as we might wish them to be. We are essentially saying in a gentle, kind-hearted, intelligent way: wake up! Open your eyes and pay attention, because what you're seeing is only going to come around once.

The Carleton Cup does indeed work on many levels.

For a great many of us, the Carleton Cup has proven to be the main motivating force in promoting a new understanding of our planet and our environment (and ourselves!). The event is a catalyst for awakening a new consciousness and sensitivity to what is occurring on our planet today. It has melted the ice that was ordinary awareness - an awareness that was frozen, dormant, slumbering through the winter of unconsciousness. The Carleton Cup warms our hearts, thaws our indifference, raises the temperature of our consciousness and turns it into gold.

For this is the true name of our game: raising planetary consciousness, one racer at a time.

**VIVE LE CARLETON CUP!!!!**

Grassy  
November 2003.



## NOTES

1. When I was a kid going to public school, each class had to line up outside in the morning before entering the school, irrespective of the weather. I remember one morning during a cold snap my buddies and I snuck into the school before the rest of the class had entered the building. We were caught hiding out in the washroom and later, when our teacher found out, he berated us in front of the entire class.

Our school employed the "open concept" floor plan and used dividers to separate each class and grade, which did nothing to stop noise from 'bleeding' into the different sections of the school. So in other words the entire floor could hear my teacher yelling at us. He attempted to emasculate my friends and me in front of all the girls in our class, and we were old enough that this was starting to matter. Which he knew. He screamed that we were "CANAAAAADIAN!!!!!!" And to be "CANADIAAAAAAN!!!!!" required you to put up with the cold, even if it didn't make any sense to do so, no matter what. We were told that this is what it meant to be a CANADIAN, this was our lot in life, this is what we had to look forward to: standing outside in the cold, silently suffering like a flock of docile sheep. By actually being proactive and doing something about it, why, we were letting our whole country down! This was unacceptable, this was unforgivable, this was *unCANADIAN*.

Now my teacher, a man I very much respect (both then and now), is not present to hear my rebuttal many years too late, but it goes something like this: the thing that set us kids apart as Canadians was that we felt the cold and did something about it. We were resourceful enough to figure out how to sneak into the locked school because it was FREEZING OUTSIDE. It wasn't about mischief, it wasn't about breaking rules, this was about sanity! This was quite simply the only intelligent thing to do under the circumstances. Let the rest of 'em suffer, leave it to a true-blue Canadian to find a solution.

We accomplished this difficult task, which meant sending a guy around the front of the school, up the front steps, in the front door and past the principal's office and past all the nosy secretaries, down the stairs and through the school, all without being caught. Then the brave young man had to accomplish the all-important task of letting us in a side door without alerting the other students outside or the teacher standing (wisely) right inside the back doors. And yet we managed to accomplish all this. This is what Canadians do, this is where we excel. Finding ingenious solutions to help one cope with a formidable climate.

2. It has never struck me as an accident that the best hockey players in the world and the two most successful comedians in the world, from a monetary standpoint

at least, Ontario's Jim Carrey and Mike Myers, all come from Canada. It seems that comedy and hockey are nothing more than two winter survival techniques, indoor and outdoor. For when it comes to innovative ways to cope with winter, Canadians are the pre-eminent world leaders.

3. The Carleton Cup has traditionally been held the first Saturday of February up to and including the 2003 race. Starting in 2004 we will hold the race on the last Saturday in January from now on.

4. By this point it would be impossible to enumerate the many well-meaning individuals who have approached us over the years to say things like "you know what you guys should do, start another race/change your race where instead of skating you would . . . ." Absolutely not! We call our race "The Ultimate Canadian Triathlon" simply because it takes place in the nation's capital and involves skating and beer drinking, two of the great Canadian pastimes. If you have an idea, then by all means be true to the spirit of punk rock and **start your own race!** Do it, and know that you will have our full support in doing so. However, the Carleton Cup does and always will involve skating. The day the ice dies is the day the Cup dies, end of story.

5. "Tanking Up On Our Food." By Wayne Roberts, printed in Now Magazine, October 16-22, 2003. [Issue 1135 Vol. 23 No. 7]

6. Stevens, Jay. Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream. (New York, Harper & Row Publishers, 1987).

7. As the Buddha himself stated in his 3 Noble Truths:

1/ ALL winter is sorrowful

2/ There is release from sorrow

3/ The release from sorrow is The Ultimate Canadian Triathlon



## **Pictures**

**Alchemy** illustration from [www.mithec.prohosting.com](http://www.mithec.prohosting.com)  
**Earth under a magnifying glass** image by Judy Green  
**Melt Ponds** from [www.arcticice.org](http://www.arcticice.org)  
**Igloo** from [www.atanarjuat.com](http://www.atanarjuat.com)  
**Snow Shovelling** from [www.highcontext.com](http://www.highcontext.com)  
**Penguin Cartoon** by Anne Ward  
**Rideau Canal and downtown Ottawa** photographed by Ken Watson  
**Melting of Ice graph** from [www.qinc.ca](http://www.qinc.ca)  
**Ford Farming** from [www.famousfoto.com](http://www.famousfoto.com)  
**Merlin** painting from [www.mithec.prohosting.com](http://www.mithec.prohosting.com)  
**Planet Earth** photographed by Apollo 17 crew, NASA  
**Maurice "Rocket" Richard** photographed by Jonathan Knowles  
**Jana Stephenson** photographed by Craig Horton  
**Stompin' Tom Connors** photographer unknown  
**The Ultimate Canadian Triathlon logo** designed by Dave Watson.