

Glimpses of Brillion

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Well folks, I was off by two days when I predicted that the coldest days of our winter would occur one month after the winter solstice, on 21 January. We bottomed out at minus eighteen degrees Fahrenheit on 23 January, and had a repeat of that number on 24 January. If minus eighteen doesn't sound cold enough for you, change it to Celsius and it becomes minus twenty-eight. I believe it is safe to say we are currently in the grips of a cold snap, with negative temperature readings being commonplace this week. Slight warming will occur as the weekends, and February will begin with temperatures above the zero mark. It may be too cold for the woodchuck to stick its head out on 2 February, denying us the opportunity to learn if spring will arrive early.

The onset of negative temperatures reminded some news wonk that when temperatures plummet, residual sap that got left behind when the sap returned to the roots last autumn, sometimes freezes. Since ice takes up more room than its liquid counterpart, the freezing sap occasionally causes the tree fibers to expand to accommodate the increased volume. The expansion is often accompanied by a loud sound, much like a gunshot. A review of the many posts regarding this phenomenon could lead the reader to believe the trees actually explode, and that a walk in the forest could result in one being hit by flying wood. I will concede that it is a startling occurrence, especially in the quiet early morning, but it is hardly something to be feared, but rather something to be enjoyed as an uncommon phenomenon. I have experienced these cracking sounds since I was a youth, but I have not yet identified the tree that sent forth the loud bang. I am sure there is a crack in the structure that accompanies the expansion, but I have not yet found one. I am told that the trees most likely to harbor pockets of sap that can freeze and expand are maple and birch trees, but I do not know this from my experience. And I am sure that on at least one occasion a tree has been split open, perhaps ripped apart, but I have no firsthand experience on which to draw.

Animal tracks in the snow have been conspicuous by their absence. I suppose I am a creature of habit, because not a morning passes without my tapping the barometer to see if the atmospheric pressure is rising or falling, closely monitoring the wind gauge, and checking the outside air temperature. As soon as it is light enough to see, I check for animal tracks in the snow. Since the onset of bitter cold temperatures, accompanied by biting winds, there have been no animal tracks in the snow, snow on which the surface is renewed about daily by drifting or new snow fall. This morning, with only a slight warm up, the snow outside our window shows evidence of foraging deer, rabbits that ventured out, and the passage of one fox, on much the same route it used last week. Squirrels do not hibernate in the classic sense as do bears, but they do take long naps, and they are on an extended sleep at the moment. They routinely prowl about in our yard and on the adjacent golf course, but the cold snap has taken them out of circulation for the time being. I will be watching them return, which will be as soon as it warms up just a little, because they do not store body fat and they must eat in order to survive.

One might think that after making my bold prediction about when the coldest day of winter would occur, and then being wrong by two days, I would be cured forever of making bold predictions. One would be wrong. I have long espoused the notion that it is better to be specifically wrong than vaguely right, especially when it comes to weather predictions. I hearken back to my three Cs – Conviction, Confidence, and Courage. One must be Convinced, have Confidence that his Convictions are correct, and the Courage to espouse them openly, or even defend them if need be. I will suppress the urge to hop up on my soapbox here, but I will say in passing that our founding fathers told the British rulers "We hold these truths to be self-evident." That carried a lot more conviction, confidence, and courage than would a similar statement like "We feel these truths are self-evident." Think about that the next time someone asks you how you feel about a topic. Change the "feel" to "believe" and you will be headed in a good direction.

With skill on the part of the surgeon and guidance from the Good Lord, I will be out roaming the byways next week. The prayers of all who are praying for me are sincerely appreciated. I not only believe in them, I depend on them, and I thank all of you.

Freedom Is Not Free
Frenchy Sends with Warm Regards