

## **IT'S A FACT**

By Randy Ray and Mark Kearney

**Q.** Which areas in Ontario are known as “snowbelts?”

**A.** Ontario’s snowbelts are known far and wide among skiers who swarm to them on weekends, and travellers who curse every time deep snow closes roads and plays havoc with travel.

As snowy as local winters are, Ottawa is not in a true snowbelt, according to weather experts.

This province’s snowbelt areas include the highlands south of Parry Sound and northeast of Sault Ste. Marie, as well as areas along the St. Lawrence River and north of London.

On the upland slopes facing Lake Huron, Georgian Bay, and Lake Superior, huge snowfalls in the 300- to 400-centimetre range occur during most winters, with much of the white stuff coming from the prevailing winds blowing off the open lakes.

The snow forms when cold air is warmed and moistened as it travels over the water. It is then forced to ascend the highlands, triggering heavy snows. More snow arrives on the backs of winter storms as they rise over the province’s higher terrain. Known as the orographic effect, this contributes about 17 centimetres of snow for each 30-metre rise in elevation.

Ontario snowstorms have been known to pack a heavy punch. One of the worst took place in London between December 7 and 9, 1977, when 101 centimetres of snow fell with winds howling at 100 kilometres per hour.

One of the worst blizzards in recent memory occurred in Toronto in January 1999 when 39 centimetres of snow choked the city’s downtown core.

Snowfall accounts for about 33 percent of the year’s total precipitation in the snowbelt regions, compared to just 12 percent in snow-sparse regions such as the area around Chatham and Windsor.

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