

Winting, 2019: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

I've been searching for winter most of my life. I remember being put down in waist-deep snow when I was probably about two years old, and I want waist-deep snow every winter, for months at a time. Never mind that my waist was much closer to the ground when I was two, and never mind that putting me in waist-deep snow was probably a quick and easy way to keep me from wandering off. I want waist-deep snow. So when I was offered a visiting fellowship in Freiburg during the winter of 2018-2019, I jumped on the opportunity, not just for the intellectual possibilities but also for the proximity to places that usually have some form of winter. Waist-deep winter? That remained to be seen. What I saw in Luzern, on the way to winter in the Swiss Alps, were birds, waist deep in water that wasn't crystalline.



Winting, 2019: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

The Swiss Alps in the winter have been on my list for a long time. But that's a big area, and a span of months. When to go? It turned out to be Tuesday. Where to go? Anywhere, really, since I've never been anywhere, so any place is as good as any other place. I did some poking around on the Internet, and I finally decided on Engelberg, and specifically the rotating cable car up the mountain. I enjoyed the cable car in China, and the one in Engelberg rotated. Oooh. But there's winter in Engelberg, or near Engelberg up in the mountains. Waist-deep winter, even.



Winting, 2019: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

Up and up and up: Engelberg is at 3,323 feet of altitude (1020 meters), and the end of the cable car is 10,623 feet (3238 meters). One of the slogans for Mt. Titlis is that there's only one season on Titlis: winter. Hi, honey, I'm home.



Winting, 2019: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

There's an ice cave. I could be inside of winter.



Winting, 2019: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

I could appropriately use 'massif' in both its geological and mountaineering senses.



Winting, 2019: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

Mt. Titlis has quite the weather station on it, and lots of weather-related detritus on the station. Winter is unavoidable, not that that was ever the goal.



Winting, 2019: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

I was on my own for this excursion, so I had plenty of time to think about winter and about what I was doing. I wasn't thrilled with 'visiting winter' as a label for the activity, especially since I had made the decision early on that I would like to do what I was doing more frequently. What was I doing? I needed a verb. Winting.



Winting, 2019: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

Winting as a verb can cover everything about doing winter. Skiing, sledding, hiking, having lunch near the top of a mountain in Switzerland, crossing oddly placed suspension bridges to nowhere, etc.



Another picture, because I like to look at winter, which is also part of winting, but not when it's in picture form. One has to be looking at winter, during winter, from within winter, for looking at winter to count as winting. Each hour on the hour while I was on the mountain, two airplanes flew over the area and broke the sound barrier. It was the first time I had experienced a sonic boom. I don't know entirely what the purpose was, but given the steepness of the slopes, avalanches are probable and common in the Alps, and I think that the booms were ways to help control avalanches by triggering them before skiers could.



Winting, 2019: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

On the way up Mt. Titlis, I stayed on the cable car through all of the changes and stops. But on the way down, I hopped off at each stop to see what winting I could do at each of the different levels along the way. The shadow of the cable car can be seen on the cliff.



I didn't ski at the Titlis resort. I had been told that skiing in Switzerland was cheaper than skiing in the US, but at least at Titlis, that was not the case. I went sledding and tubing, which I could do without paying for more than the cable car ticket that I'd already covered. Titlis is a busy place. The lift for the sledding/tubing slope is in the tunnel. The ski lifts overhead take skiers up to where they can take marked trails, or just ski down the side of the mountain. I learned a new term, to label skiing anywhere off marked trails: off piste. I was going to note that it sounds naughtier than it is, but then I remembered that about one hundred people die every year skiing in the Alps, most of them off piste. Not naughty, but fatal.



Shortly after I returned to Freiburg, a colleague asked what I'd been up to lately, so I told him. Then he chewed me out, in a most polite, German-intellectual way. He also is in perpetual search of winter, although my fantasy of staying in a place where I can climb out the skylight and slide down a metal roof into a huge pile of snow that I have to tunnel through to get back inside seems a bit extreme to him. Nevertheless, we came to an understanding: the next time I went a-winting, he was to be informed, invited, and included, in no uncertain terms. The professor who'd invited me to Freiburg had recommended a place. So off we went, I for cross-country skiing (langlaufen), and he for hiking.



Winting, 2019: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

I make it sound somewhat hostile, but it's really okay to have a winting buddy. It is rare to find someone who is also in search of winter, and perhaps even more rare to find someone who is interested in discussing precisely for which semantic domains 'to wint' could be appropriately used (we had an extensive discussion on whether winting applied when riding on a bus the wrong direction through a winter landscape: it does, and now that the word and concept have a community of users, even if only two, it's a real word, and I'd still like to expand the community of users for this word), and perhaps rarest of all to find someone who's willing to throw a polite fit in order to spend time winting with me. Jolly good all around.



By contrast with downhill skiing in Switzerland, cross-country skiing in the Schwarzwald was relatively economical. When I considered the fact that I had all of the equipment, but on a different continent, it was mildly irritating to have to rent equipment, but still cheaper than downhill skiing or an international plane ticket. My wintering buddy did not want to rent equipment because his stuff was stranded in Berlin, and not an international plane ticket away. So he took a hike, which cost even less: nothing at all. And by contrast with the kind of cross-country skiing I usually do (bushwhacking), I skied on groomed trails, for only the third time in my life, which meant that I also used short skis and could move by skating along or by skiing traditionally, but faster. Clarification: I was not faster, although the possibility of faster existed. With longer skis, the skis are mostly where they are. With shorter skis, I had to spend some time managing the skis because they could go in more directions than I'm accustomed to.



Winting, 2019: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

So we went our separate ways. Best winting buddy imaginable: okay with being on his own while I do my thing, even as we were out for the day together. Together and separate. Most people cannot manage such apparent contradictions. But there is no contradiction. We had a hike and a ski, and we took pictures that could be discussed for their value in demonstrating different perspectives of the same subjects, and we had lunch before going out for the afternoon to wint more.



Winting, 2019: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

Alas and alack, he was not available on the day that I could go downhill skiing. Downhill skiing in the Schwarzwald was more affordable than in Switzerland, but not cheap, except that I could pay for the amount of time that I wanted on the slopes rather than a full day, which I did not have, by the time I took the train, a couple of buses, and a hike to the ski area.



Winting, 2019: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

The fog thickened throughout my trip, and by the time I arrived at the ski area, I wasn't sure skiing would be possible or allowed. But the cashier assured me that skiing was most definitely possible and allowed, took my money, and sent me out on the slopes. I'm sure there was more than one slope, and a mountain, and a forest, but I didn't see any of that. This was the view up the slope from near the lift.



One of my favorite aspects of downhill skiing is the view. Not on this day. I couldn't see much of anything. This was the view from the top of the slope. I'm a perpetual beginner in alpine skiing because I only do it about once per winter. Nevertheless, I think I made some real progress during this session because I had to react quickly to other skiers and objects who/that, respectively, suddenly appeared from the fog. There are trees on that slope, believe it or not. Sound helped. I stopped to sit with a child who was in a skiing class and who had fallen and was crying. I found him because he was crying. He was physically unhurt, but he was stranded in the middle of fog. He couldn't see anyone and probably couldn't see why he'd fallen so that he could do better the next time. But when his instructor showed up, he apologized for taking a few minutes to find the kid and said that he'd had to take care of the rest of the group, who had all tumbled farther up the slope. We congratulated the kid on making it the farthest, which helped him feel better, and once he could see his group, he could rejoin them.



Winting, 2019: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

The best-of-all-possible winting buddies was available for an outing to the snow sculpture weekend in Bernau im Schwarzwald (not to be confused with Bernau am Chiemsee). This was the day we took the right bus in the wrong direction and had time to discuss the semantic domain of 'to wint'. We also had an opportunity to check out several small towns, one of which was decorated for Fasnet, as it's known in the hinterlands of in Baden-Wuttermburg. I think it has a different name in each place it's held: Fasching, Fassenacht, Fastelavend, Fünfte Jahreszeit, Fastelavn, Vastenoavond, Fastlaam, Fastlom. Whatever the name, it's a kind of German Karneval. It's a holdover from pre-Christian times, and the general idea is that evil spirits can be driven away ahead of the spring fertility rituals with the use of masks and noise. Also with the use of liquid spirits. It's Germany.



Winting, 2019: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

Bernau im Schwarzwald. I have no idea what Bernau am Chiemsee looks like. There's a good reason to go back and do some more winting.



Winting, 2019: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

Once we found our way to the right bus in the right direction, we arrived soon in Bernau im Schwarzwald. But the bus dropped us off before going into the town. The place was crowded, with lines of cars on all of the streets, and lines of pedestrians walking from their cars up the hill to see the sculptures. There was a sphinx, of sorts.



Winting, 2019: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

There's a moai named Hoa Hakananai'a in the British museum. There was a moai, whose name I don't know, at the sculpture festival. One of these days, I'll get to Rapa Nui to see the homeland of the moai. And one of these days, maybe I can enter the snow-sculpture competition. But what to sculpt? Maybe a Komodo dragon.



Winting, 2019: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

I was hoping to go to the festival after the sculptures were completed and to hear the alpenhorn that marked the official end of the festival, but the departure from Germany was imminent, and I had to pack on that day. So we went to the festival on a day when the sculptures were well formed but still in progress. And we made plans for a winting holiday in the next winter. Plus, I still didn't have the waist-deep snow or the sliding off the roof into the snow or the dog-sledding in anyplace other than Finland, or the etc.

The finished project was not going to turn into a self-portrait of the sculptor, but I think this artist missed an opportunity.



Leaving winter turned out to be tricky, which seemed appropriate, given that nobody wanted to leave. The busses were not able to move through town, but we eventually found the right bus stop, where the other people who were waiting for the bus had been waiting for two hours. On weekends in the boonies of the Schwarzwald, the busses don't run frequently. The wannabe passengers told us that the previously scheduled bus had never arrived, so we settled in for a long wait. But then they saw the bus they and we wanted and ran off down the street to catch it. Ambulation in the winter should involve skis or skates or sleds, but we ran along after the other runners, and we caught the bus (the traffic caught the bus), and we followed the passengers who knew what they were doing all the way back to Freiburg, where there was no winter to speak of.

The successful finding of the bus stop

