

Iceboating: A Local Tradition

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Photograph of an iceboat on the Great South Bay. Mitch Carucci, 2000

Bellport is a small town nestled on the south shore of eastern Long Island. Many know it as the waterside summer town that sleeps during the winter months. But during those winter months, a long held tradition comes alive. Residents dust off their coats, hats, and mittens and head towards Bellport Bay. There they gather to begin the long awaited iceboating season.

Bellport is home to the South Bay Scooter Club. Founded in 1921, it is the oldest scooter club in the United States.¹ During the winter, members meet at the Bellport Bay Yacht Club, where they will prepare for the iceboat-racing season. Iceboats were not always raced recreationally, but were originally used as a form of transportation.

¹ "South Bay Scooter Club - Bellport.com." South Bay Scooter Club - Bellport.com. Accessed March 03, 2016. <http://www.bellport.com/sbsc/>.

² Andresen, Jack. *Sailing on Ice*. South Brunswick: Barnes, 1976.

Iceboats date back to 17th century Holland, where they were used to move cargo.² Later on Long Island, fishermen used iceboats to travel from the mainland to the beach.³ Since the bay did not fully freeze over they needed something that could support the mixed terrain.⁴ In the late 1800s, Dutch settlers along the Hudson River began using iceboats for sport.⁵ From there, iceboating spread to the northern Atlantic coast and west towards Michigan and Minnesota.⁶ What began as a necessity has since become a favorite pastime for Bellport residents.

Among the iceboating world Bellport is known for its numerous ice boaters.⁷ This comes as no surprise since they planted the roots for iceboating on Long Island. One of the things that makes iceboating so revered is that the conditions have to be just right in order to ride. The Bay must be frozen over which does not happen every year. The last recorded iceboating season for the South Bay Scooter Club took place in 2015. But the moment the ice freezes you can count on the Bay being flooded with iceboats and their riders. Families gather, and little kids practice with their sleighs as they eagerly await the family iceboat being passed down to them.⁸ With climate changes it is unknown how much longer this tradition can last. But what we do know is that these small town residents will make every minute count.

² Andresen, Jack. *Sailing on Ice*. South Brunswick: Barnes, 1976.

³ Stone, Herbert L. *Ice-boating; the Latest Opinions of the Foremost Authorities in America*. New York: Outing Publishing Company, 1913.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Andresen, *Sailing on Ice*.

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Gardiner, Frederic Merrick. *Wings on the Ice; a Comprehensive View of the Sport of Ice Boating*. New York: Yachting Pub., 1938.

⁸ Kilgannon, Corey. "Catching Cold, and Loving It." *The New York Times*. February 13, 2009. Accessed March 21, 2016. http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/15/nyregion/long-island/15RiceboatNJ.html?_r=0.

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