

# In the coldest village on Earth, eyelashes freeze and dinner is frozen

By Eli Rosenberg, Washington Post, adapted by Newsela staff on 01.24.18

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Image 1. How cold is it in Oymyakon, Siberia? Cold enough for this man's eyelashes to freeze! Photo from Wikimedia Commons

In this remote outpost in Siberia, the cold is no small affair.

Eyelashes freeze and frostbite is a constant danger. Cars are usually kept running even when not being used to prevent the batteries from dying. The average temperature in this town is -58 degrees Fahrenheit in the winter, according to news reports.

This is Oymyakon, a settlement of some 500 people in Russia's Yakutia region. Oymyakon earned the reputation as the coldest permanently-occupied human settlement in the world.

It is not a reputation that has been won easily. Earlier this week, a cold snap sent temperatures plunging toward record lows.

The town's official measurement recorded the temperature at -74 degrees Fahrenheit this week. The town installed a new digital thermometer for all to see, part of the town's reputation for frigid temperatures. The digital thermometer broke as it registered -80 degrees on Sunday. According to the Siberian Times, some residents' own measurements had shown the temperature below -88 degrees. That is close to a former record from the 1930s.

The village recorded an all-time low of -98 degrees Fahrenheit in 2013.

## **The Town Is Dark And Full Of Terrifying Cold**

Though schools in the area remain open as temperatures dip into the -40s, they were closed on January 16, the Associated Press reported.

The town is dark 21 hours a day in the winter. People around the world have been curious about the town as its reputation for fearsome cold and its resilient residents who withstand it year after year has grown.



Amos Chapple is a photojournalist from New Zealand. He traveled to the region in 2015, to capture the subzero way of life. The village is remote, located closer to the Arctic Circle than to the nearest major city, some 500 miles away. Chapple described an arduous trip to get there to



The Washington Post. After a seven-hour flight from Moscow, some 3,300 miles away, he took a van to a nearby gas station and then hitched a ride to the village after two days waiting in a shack and living off reindeer soup.

"After the first couple of days I was physically wrecked just from strolling around the streets for a few hours," he said.

The harsh cold climate permeates nearly every aspect of existence for the people who live in the area. The winter diet is mostly meat-based, sometimes eaten raw or frozen, due to the inability to grow crops in the frigid temperatures. Some regional specialties include stroganina, which is raw, long-sliced frozen fish; reindeer meat; raw, frozen horse liver, and ice cubes of horse blood with macaroni, according to news reports.

"Yakutians love the cold food, the frozen raw Arctic fish, white salmon, whitefish, frozen raw horse liver, but they are considered to be delicacies," local Bolot Bochkarev told the Weather Channel. "In daily life, we like eating the soup with meat. The meat is a must. It helps our health much."

Video taken during the cold snap showed a market, open for business on the snowy tundra, frozen fish standing rigidly upright in buckets and boxes, no refrigeration needed. Customers in heavy winter clothing walked by, one with a child in tow. The narrator said it was -56 degrees.

"Here is the treasure," the video's narrator said of the whitefish used to make stroganina. He admitted he was getting a bit cold shooting the video.

"While filming the trading rows my hands froze to wild pain. And sellers stand here all day long. How do they warm themselves?" he asked, according to the Siberian Times.

## **Surviving In Oymyakon**

The village was once a stopover in the 1920s and '30s for reindeer herders who would water their flocks at a thermal spring that didn't freeze. Bathrooms are mostly outhouses; the ground is too frozen for pipes. According to the Weather Channel, the ground has to be warmed with a bonfire to break into, such as for digging a grave.

According to the Siberian Times, two men died after their car stalled and they had set out on foot during the cold streak. The group, a horse breeder and four friends, had gone to check on some animals near the river.

The press office for the region's governor said that all households and businesses have central heating and backup power generators, according to the Associated Press.

After his trip, Chapple said it was not easy doing man-on-the-street interviews in a place that was so cold. People outside rushed quickly from one warm place to another. Alcoholism is believed to be an issue in the area, Chapple told reporters. Depending on how cold the weather dips, people often trade off 20-minute shifts when doing work outside, according to news reports.

Chapple said saliva would freeze into "needles that would prick my lips." Shooting with a camera was no easier. His camera would constantly get too cold to shoot, he said. The steam escaping his mouth would "swirl around like cigar smoke," he told *Wired*, so he'd have to hold his breath so it didn't cloud the frame. He told *Wired* that he shot one photo without his gloves only to find his thumb partially frozen.

The town wears its reputation on its sleeve: "The pole of the cold," one sign says.

## Quiz

- 1 Which sentence from the article shows the MAIN problem for people in Oymyakon?
- (A) Cars are usually kept running even when not being used to prevent the batteries from dying.
  - (B) Though schools in the area remain open as temperatures dip into the -40s, they were closed on January 16, the Associated Press reported.
  - (C) The village is remote, located closer to the Arctic Circle than to the nearest major city, some 500 miles away.
  - (D) The harsh cold climate permeates nearly every aspect of existence for the people who live in the area.

- 2 Read the list of sentences from the article.

1. *Video taken during the cold snap showed a market, open for business on the snowy tundra, frozen fish standing rigidly upright in buckets and boxes, no refrigeration needed.*
2. *"While filming the trading rows my hands froze to wild pain."*
3. *Alcoholism is believed to be an issue in the area, Chapple told reporters.*
4. *He told Wired that he shot one photo without his gloves only to find his thumb partially frozen.*

Which two sentences taken together provide the BEST evidence to support the idea that taking video in Oymyakon was difficult?

- (A) 1 and 3
- (B) 1 and 4
- (C) 2 and 3
- (D) 2 and 4

3 Which sentence from the article would be MOST important to include in a summary of the article?

- (A) According to the Siberian Times, some residents' own measurements had shown the temperature below -88 degrees.
- (B) The winter diet is mostly meat-based, sometimes eaten raw or frozen, due to the inability to grow crops in the frigid temperatures.
- (C) The village was once a stopover in the 1920s and '30s for reindeer herders who would water their flocks at a thermal spring that didn't freeze.
- (D) Depending on how cold the weather dips, people often trade off 20-minute shifts when doing work outside, according to news reports.

4 Read the paragraph from the article.

*According to the Siberian Times, two men died after their car stalled and they had set out on foot during the cold streak. The group, a horse breeder and four friends, had gone to check on some animals near the river.*

How does this paragraph support the MAIN idea of the article?

- (A) It highlights one of the stories photojournalist Chapple covered in his video.
- (B) It provides information on what a typical winter day in Oymyakon is like.
- (C) It demonstrates just how dangerous the temperatures in Oymyakon can be.
- (D) It explains what life was like when Oymyakon was a stopover in the 1930s.