

THE WINTER THAT WASN'T

After the third-warmest winter in recorded Canadian history, millions of Canadians spent February and March basking in a record-shattering heat wave that baffled meteorologists, toyed with the economy and upset the country's very natural order. "I've been in this business for over 40 years and it takes a lot for me to be surprised and shocked by weather," said David Phillips, senior climatologist with Environment Canada. "It's like snowing in July or a hurricane in Winnipeg — it's just not possible." Warm air always surges up from the U.S. this time of year, Mr. Phillips said, but it is usually swiftly cooled down by blowing across several thousand kilometres of frozen, snow-blown Canadian countryside. This year, with snow cover at historic lows — and Arctic winds kept at bay by the jet stream — warm air was free to surge into Canadian cities at "almost the same temperature at which it left," said Mr. Phillips.

Nature out of sync

Tricked into thinking that spring had sprung, birds hatched and mammals came out of hibernation — only to be hit hard once temperatures petered off near the end of February. Raccoon populations are expected to be hit particularly hard by distemper this year, as the disease is normally killed off by winter. Mild weather could also see an unwelcome crop of beetles and other damaging pests heading for Canada's forests and farms.

Bitter harvest for maple syrup producers

With maple trees budding early this year, maple syrup producers saw their operations cut short by two to three weeks. In Western Quebec alone, harvests were expected to be only 50% to 75% of normal levels. Thanks to a strategic stockpile of maple syrup kept in reserve by the industry, however, consumer prices for the sweet liquid are expected to remain stable.

The gasman goeth

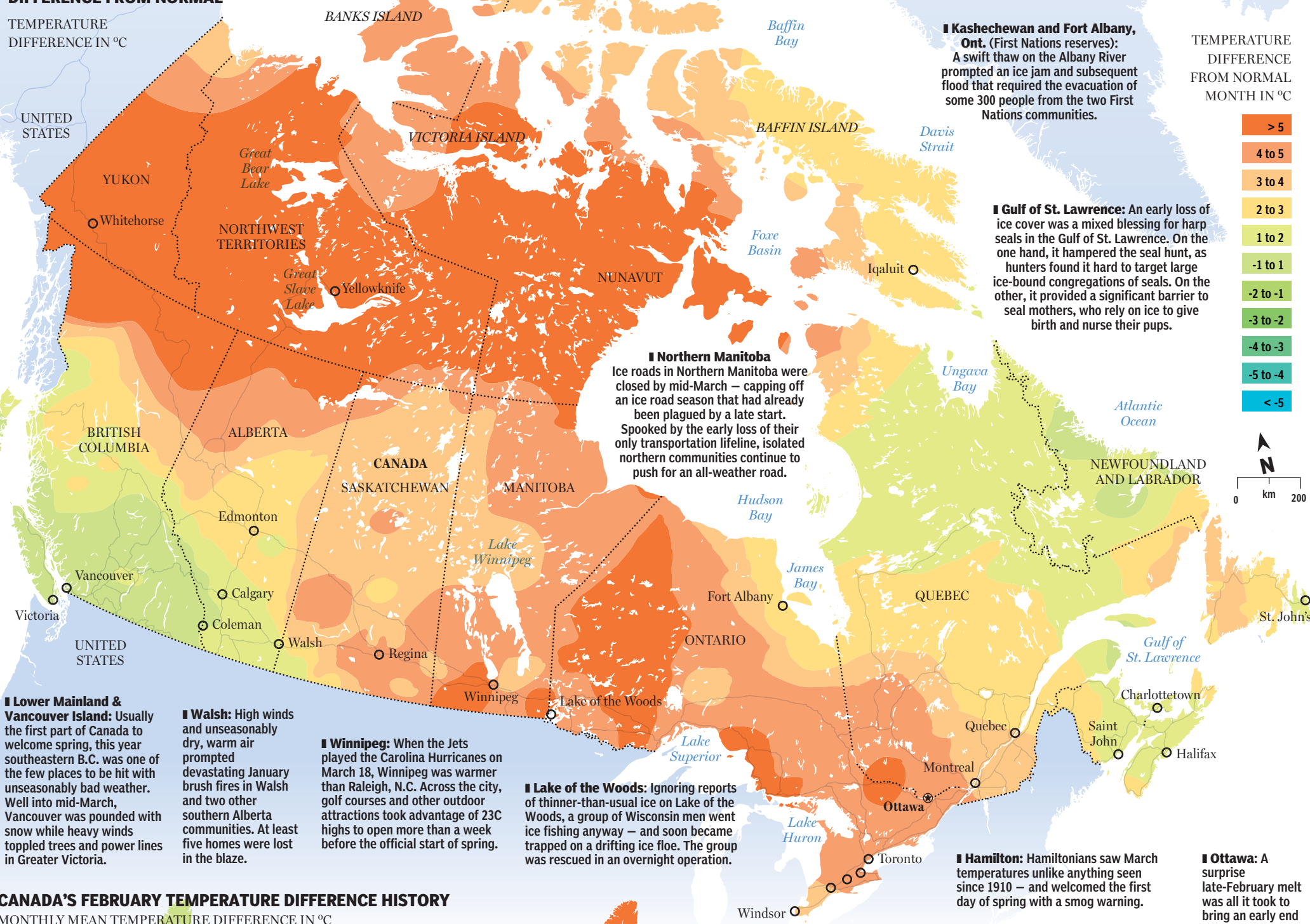
Traffic along Canada's natural gas pipelines slowed below projections in March as Canadian and U.S. homeowners shut off their furnaces early. "There's little demand to be seen," Eric Bickel, a natural gas analyst at Summit Energy Services in Louisville, Ky., told Bloomberg News this week. In the U.S., the heat wave may be having the reverse effect on energy usage as Floridians and Texans give their air conditioners an early start.

Preview of coming attractions

Shorter winters, less snow cover, longer transitional seasons: Everything Canadians experienced this year is slated by climatologists to become the norm over the next century. "Our buildings are built for normal weather, our vacations are planned for normal weather ... but there is no normal weather anymore," Mr. Phillips said.

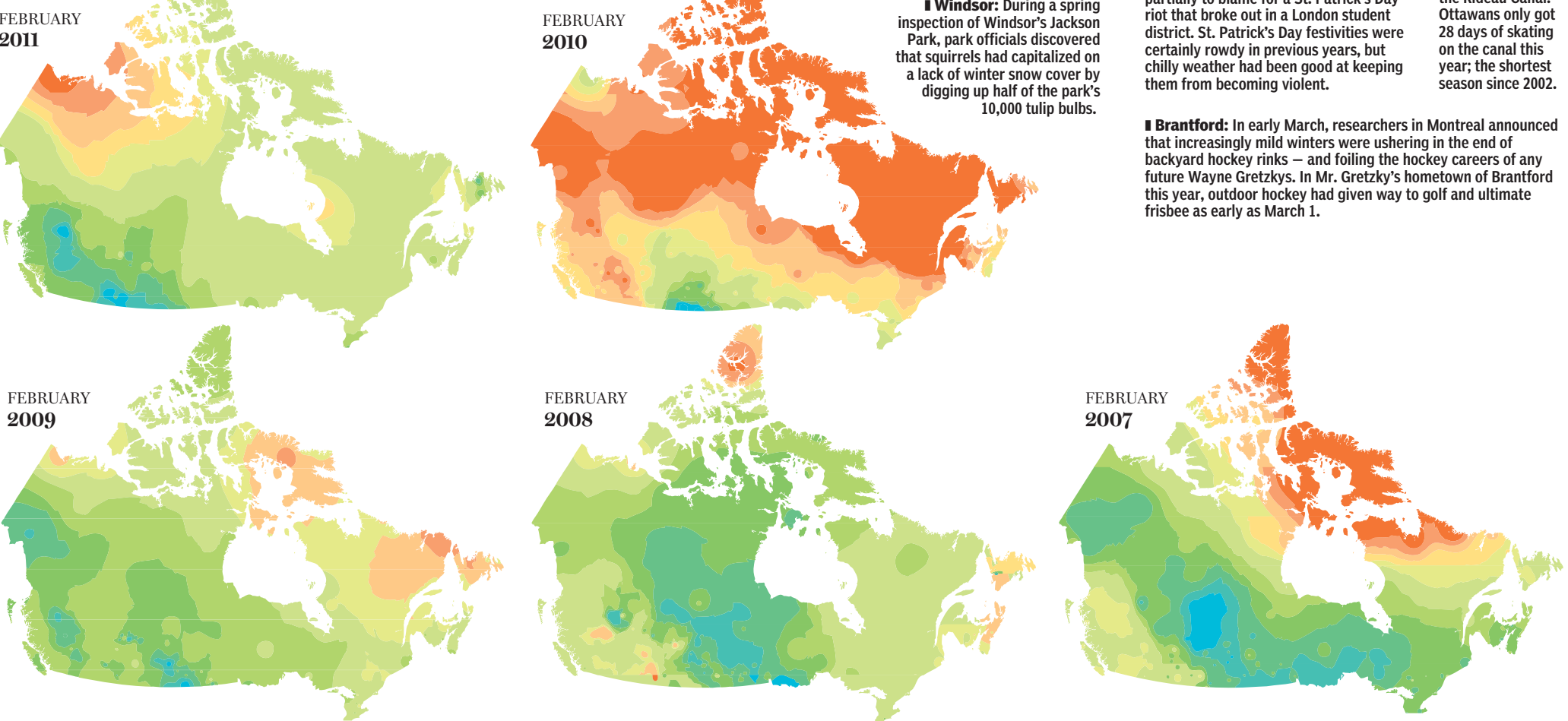
FEBRUARY 2012 MONTHLY MEAN TEMPERATURE DIFFERENCE FROM NORMAL

TEMPERATURE DIFFERENCE IN °C



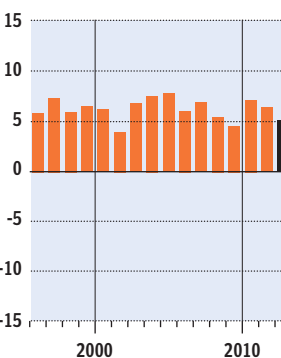
CANADA'S FEBRUARY TEMPERATURE DIFFERENCE HISTORY

MONTHLY MEAN TEMPERATURE DIFFERENCE IN °C



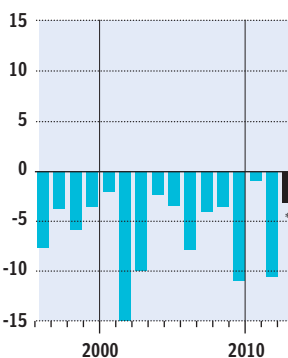
VANCOUVER IN MARCH

AVERAGE TEMP IN °C



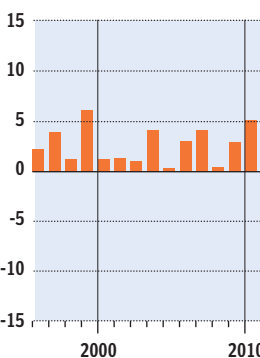
EDMONTON IN MARCH

AVERAGE TEMP IN °C



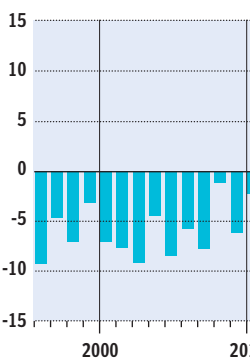
WINDSOR IN MARCH

AVERAGE TEMP IN °C



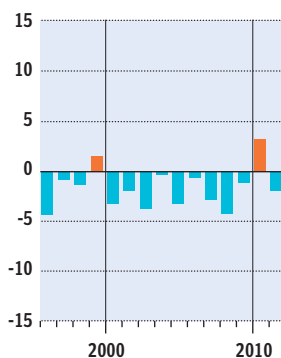
OTTAWA IN MARCH

AVERAGE TEMP IN °C



MONTREAL IN MARCH

AVERAGE TEMP IN °C



HALIFAX IN MARCH

AVERAGE TEMP IN °C

