

The Tuff Shed Museum

by Joan Black

High on the wall in the Denver Museum of Nature and Science is a quote by Carl Sagan which reads, “Somewhere something incredible is waiting to be known”. I found this observation to be inspiring and exciting and wondered what incredible thing might make itself known to me. The wait was not long. I found my incredible, almost unbelievable thing less than a two-hour drive from my home, in the small town of Nederland.

This mountain hamlet boasts a miniature museum with only one item on exhibit and a staff of one part-time custodian and a couple of helpers. Opening hours are very limited and maintenance is minimal, yet the town profits mightily from the influx of dollars spent by tourists who visit, not so much to view the one exhibit, but to participate in the activities held each year in March to honor the occupant who rests inside that one exhibit. I challenge you to name any other place, in this whole wide world, that lovingly cares for a long-dead old man who is preserved in cryogenic state.

BREDO MORSTOEL’s body, preserved in ice, was brought to the US from Norway in 1989 and after a series of mishaps and adventures, came to rest in Nederland in 1993, where he lay in a decrepit old wooden structure tended by his wife and grandson until the Nederland City Fathers, in their infinite wisdom, concluded that this really was NOT a very good idea considering he might thaw out and stink up the place and even, maybe, cause a health hazard. So they passed a law that from that time on it was illegal to keep a dead body on the premises. However, by finding the inevitable loophole in the law, Grandpa Bredo was “grandfathered” in as an exception and Tuff Shed manufactures seized the opportunity to get some cheap publicity by donating one of their sheds to house the body, now encased in an aluminum casket inside a large wooden crate. And they also provided a sign which proclaimed “Tuff Shed Cryogenic Mausoleum”. Bo ‘The Iceman’ Shaffer, an environmental consultant, is currently the custodian and once a month, with the help of two assistants, takes three-quarter ton of dry ice from Denver to Nederland, opens the homemade freezer box, fills it with ice, checks Morstoel’s status and then seals everything back up.

All of these ministrations and preservations are in place in order to have a reason for “Frozen Dead Guy Days” when festivities such as Dead Guy Look-Alikes, Coffin Races (with or without a body), a Polar Plunge into icy cold water, Grandpa’s Blue Ball, a Pancake Breakfast and specialty Blue Ice Cream crawling with gummy worms are all part of the entertainment. A portion of the ensuing proceeds are donated to maintain the Tuff Shed Mausoleum, buy the ice and pay the custodian – the rest goes to worthy causes and Nederland reaps the publicity.

This unique museum and its unimpressed occupant might not be the most educational place of learning – but it sure is a lot of fun!