



Groundhog Day



Meaning of Groundhog Day



It has been said that when a groundhog comes out of its hole after a long winter sleep, it looks for its shadow. If the groundhog sees its shadow, there would be six more weeks of winter. However, if the groundhog does not see its shadow, then spring would be around the corner.



History of Groundhog Day



The popular tradition of Groundhog Day has European roots. It has similar beliefs of Candlemas Day and the days of early Christians of Europe. The custom of Candlemas Day was to have clergy bless candles and distribute them to the people. This day was a milestone of winter and weather was important. For instance, according to an old English song:

If Candlemas be fair and bright,
Come, Winter, have another flight;
If Candlemas brings clouds and rain,
Go Winter, and come not again.

Roman legions brought this tradition to the Germans during the conquest of the northern country. The Germans then came to a conclusion that if the sun shined on Candlemas day, a hedgehog would cast a shadow. This would, therefore, predict six more weeks of bad weather. Six weeks was interpreted as a 'second winter'. The tradition was brought over to Pennsylvania from German settlers. There were many groundhogs in the region. They then determined that the groundhog represented the European hedgehog very well and decided that if it were sunny on February 2nd, Candlemas Day, the groundhog would see its shadow and hurry back underground for six more weeks.

A theory as to why, if the groundhog sees its shadow there would be six more weeks of winter, may be because sunny days in winter are the result of cold, dry arctic air masses. However, cloudy winter days come from mild, moist tropical air.



Is the groundhog always right?



The groundhog's forecast accuracy is somewhat low. Punxsutawney Phil's forecast has been accurate only 39% of the time. Phil sees his shadow 90% of the time. Over the years since 1887, Phil has seen his shadow 96 times, did not see his shadow 15 times and the other 9 years there were no records.

Sources: www.stormfax.com/ghogday.htm, www.gojp.com/groundhog, www.groundhog.org, Dep't of Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and www.learner.org/interactives/weather/forecasting.html



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