

COLD WEATHER FUN IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER -

How Bout Some Woof Woofing This Year?

HOW TO USE A DOG SLED

Dog sledding can be one of the best outdoor winter adventures you will ever experience. From the sound of the dogs barking as they beg to be chosen to pull the sled to the sudden quiet as each dog runs in unison with only the sound of the snow under their paws and the wind rushing through your hair. Indeed, it's a picture of calm and beauty that is hard to forget once you have explored the frozen tundra with man's best four-legged friend.

If you're really serious you can go buy a sled, but check out the experience with a dogsledding outfitter first to make sure it's your thing. You will use anywhere from six to 12 and in the beginning the outfitter will give you the harnesses, tug lines, tow lines and the fan hitch use, but be familiar with those terms anyway in case you love this outdoor winter activity.

READY - SET - LET'S GO!

Step 1

There are many types of dog sleds depending on what you want to do like racing, having a good time or actually use the sled as a means of transportation. Determine this first and then you can pick out your type of sled.

Step 2

A basket sled is raised several inches on top of the snow and it is the kind most commonly used for dog racing. If you are not interested in that then a sprint sled might be better or a toboggan. Toboggans are lower to the ground with a closed bed. This is good for recreation and the sled virtually glides over the snow. What is known as a freight sled can pull heavy equipment and all sleds will have runners that stick out at the back of the sled. This is where you will stand as you "drive your team."

Step 3

Learn the commands of dog mushing so you can lead the dogs and they will know what you are asking.

Step 4

Next, you will need to put together your dog sled team. This is the part that can make or break the entire dog sledding experience. Pay careful attention to the lead dogs. There will also be the point dogs, swing dogs and wheel dogs. Point dogs are lined up behind the lead dogs, followed by the swing dogs and wheel dogs. Swing dogs are chosen for the strength and speed and lead dogs for

their intelligence. Wheel dogs generally have calm temperments as they are right in front of the sled. One word of advice, never let the lead dogs out of your sight as they can save you when you are stuck in snow or in various other sticky situations. Specific breeds that do well as sled dogs are Siberian Husky, Alaskan Malamute or even German Shorthaired Pointer.

Step 5

You will need equipment for your sled before you get going; a dog sled, harnesses for the dogs, and tug and tow lines. The dogs will be lined up in pairs of two and one thing that is vitally important is to use a fan hitch, which means if there is trouble only one dog will be dragged down, go through the ice, etc.. The towline is what you will use to attach the two dogs or pairs together and it keeps the dogs parallel in front of the sled.

Step 6

Once you have everything on right including harnesses, hitches and you know your dogs are lined up as they should be, it's time to go. Use the commands you have been taught and go for a ride.

Step 7

When you need to stop your dog sled remember, you will be standing on those runners in the back of the sled and you just need to step down on the brake. Old sleds have hooks attached to the sled with a rope for brakes, more updated sleds will use a drag and claw system that is built into the body of the sled.

Tips and Warnings:

You will be warned that your sled can tip over, it can so be careful. The last thing you want to do is fall off and watch the dogs run away with the sled leaving you literally, out in the cold.

! You can get really cold while traveling with the dogs so dress warm.

! While you are mushing remember you have to yell commands to the dogs, commands they recognize, make sure you know what these commands are before you take off.

! With as many as 12 dogs it's not easy to put on the brakes as there is a lot of power behind the dogs as they are running, be firm when braking and giving commands.

! You can be nice to the dogs, but remember they are working and are not pets (at least not while they are tied up to the sled).

