

Yes, It's That Grungy Rodent...Again!

Groundhog Day (Canadian French: Jour de la Marmotte; Pennsylvania German: Grundsaudaag, Murmeltiertag) is a day celebrated on February 2. According to folklore, if it is cloudy when a groundhog emerges from its burrow on this day, then spring will come early; if it is sunny, the groundhog will supposedly see its shadow and retreat back into its burrow, and the winter weather will persist for six more weeks.

Modern customs of the holiday involve celebrations where early morning festivals are held to watch the groundhog emerging from its burrow.

In southeastern Pennsylvania, Groundhog Lodges (Grundsow Lodges) celebrate the holiday with fersommlinge, social events in which food is served, speeches are made, and one or more g'spiel (plays or skits) are performed for entertainment. The Pennsylvania German dialect is the only language spoken at the event, and those who speak English pay a penalty, usually in the form of a nickel, dime, or quarter per word spoken, with the money put into a bowl in the center of the table.

The first documented American reference to Groundhog Day can be found in a diary entry, dated February 4, 1841, of Morgantown, Pennsylvania,

The largest Groundhog Day celebration is held in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, where crowds as large as 40,000 have gathered to celebrate the holiday since at least 1886. Other celebrations of note in Pennsylvania take place in Quarryville in Lancaster County, the Anthracite Region of Schuylkill County, the Sinnamahoning Valley and Bucks County. Groundhog Day, already a widely recognized and popular tradition, received widespread attention as a result of the 1993 film *Groundhog Day*.

The day is observed with various ceremonies at other communities in North America, including in Wiarton, Ontario, at the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park in Nova Scotia, and at the University of Dallas in Irving, Texas (which has what is claimed to be the second largest Groundhog celebration in the world).

According to Groundhog Day organizers, the rodents' forecasts are accurate 75% to 90% of the time. However, a Canadian study for 13 cities in the past 30 to 40 years found that the weather patterns predicted on Groundhog Day were only 37% accurate over that time period. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Groundhog_Day]

It's a cute and entertaining tradition, but I've never understood the logic behind the forecasts. If it's sunny and the rodent sees its shadow...more winter! If it's cloudy, it means an early Spring. Wouldn't it make more sense if 'sunny' foretold the earlier Spring? And why is it only a groundhog thing? Wouldn't the process hold true for your dog or cat? [Punxsutawney knows a good thing when it sees it, though!]

