



## Enjoying the Great Outdoors: Winter Weather Conditions

Winter in various parts of the world means different things to different people. Some look forward to snow and colder temperatures and others “migrate” to a warmer climate for the winter months. In the southern part of the US, people are enjoying milder temperatures that are allowing them to get outdoors and enjoy themselves, something that they can’t do during the long, hot summers. On the other side of the world, people in Australia are experiencing their summer at this time of year. Whatever climate you have where you are spending your winter, you can make the most of it by dressing appropriately for the weather and making sure that both you and your dog are ready to face the environment. There is plenty of fun and enjoyment of the outdoors to be had during the winter months no matter where you are.



Your ShinRin Yoku walks will have a whole different look if you live where there is snow. Remember that these types of walks are not for exercise, but for the soaking nature and all its healing and rejuvenating powers. This past summer, many folks who joined us for the first virtual camp (Scrap the Summer 2020), were unable to take walks every day because of the extreme heat in their part of the country. Hopefully, the winter will allow them and others in similar environments to get some exposure to the great outdoors. Those in colder climates can also enjoy all that

winter has to offer. There’s just nothing like snowshoeing through a pristine forest at midnight guided by a full moon. There’s one of these, the Snow Moon expected on February 28. This can be an other-worldly experience, as each snowflake seems to sparkle in the lustrous moonlight.

While you’re in the great outdoors, see how many trees you can identify. You can tell by their bark if you can’t observe leaves present in winter. It’s especially handy to know your tree identification if you are going to participate in the sports of Geocaching or Letterboxing as some of the clues may reference a particular kind of tree. Both of these are fun pastimes that your dog can enjoy in the winter.

If you want to do hiking or backpacking with your dog, winter is a great time to do it. If the snow gets very deep, like we experience in Michigan, you can don a pair of snowshoes and take an invigorating hike. Remember to keep your hikes shorter, especially if your dog is having to leap through deep drifts of snow. In some snow conditions, dog booties may be needed.

If you have a groomed trail near you, you could try the sport of Skijoring. The dogs also enjoy pulling a sled or kick-sled (called “sparks” in Nordic countries). If you do this, you will want to be sure you have the right equipment for the exercise you’re undertaking. Always keep safety first and be sure to read the Training and Criteria for the Trails and Pulling Merit Badge training available on our web site. Also look over the check-off sheets if you think you may want to pursue a badge in one or more of these activities.

It’s your job as the smart end of the leash to check temperatures, wind chill factors, and humidity. On a humid day a dog can get overheated under



exertion, even in cold temps. Whether you have snow on the ground or enjoy mild winter temperatures, you must observe caution when going outside with your dog. You always need to check the snow conditions, temperature and humidity before venturing out.

Always follow the rule of 120, which says that if the temperature plus the humidity exceeds 120 exercise extreme caution when doing any kind of exercise outside. As that number gets higher, exercise beyond simple walking should be avoided. Following this rule will help you to ensure that you don't experience a critical medical emergency with your dog.

Watch out for "punchy" snow conditions, where a layer of snow has previously melted and formed a crust. This can be either on the top, or a few inches below fresh powder. You and your dog may feel like the surface is firm, but when you put your full weight on it you punch, or fall, through the crust. This is unpleasant for walking and could cut up your dog's feet if you don't have booties on him.

Another bad snow condition is "sticky" snow. This happens when the snow is melting rapidly and starting to become wet quickly. Sticky snow results in those "snowballs" that will form in your dog's fur and between his toes. It is REALLY uncomfortable for your dog to walk under these conditions. It's like if you were walking with a sharp rock in your shoe or boot, located just under the most sensitive part of your foot. In the photo to the right, Weasel has fallen victim to the dreaded sticky snow.

Be sure you venture out properly prepared for the weather and go with a buddy if you are able to. If heading out alone, leave a hiking plan with a friend so that people will know where to look for you if you become lost or injured.



Enjoy the great outdoors, regardless of the winter weather Mother Nature has in store for you. Be safe out there!