Are we not lucky to live where there is snow!

By Janet McVittie (co-starring Annie-the-dog and Native-Plant-Snow-Person)

When I lived in the Greater Vancouver Regional District, I would run into an occasional prairie expatriate, who would say during the long dreary wet days of fall/winter/spring that "At least you don't have to shovel rain." And, on those dreary days, I would think: "At least you can shovel snow!" I honestly thought that, when the trees started to turn green in March, they were going mouldy. So much rain! With snow … there is way more fun to be had!!
Things to do with snow:

1. Shovel snow. Really, this is fun. Talk to your neighbours while they shovel theirs.
2. While you are shoveling the snow off the walk, turn it into a snow hill for tobogganing!
3. Build a snow person. Or, a snow bunny, or snow flower …
4. Make a snow angel.
5. Build a snow fort.
6. Build a quinzhee (this is a useful skill to learn for those who like to wander far, outdoors, in winter).
7. Have a snow ball fight (but don't be mean about it). Having a snowball fight can draw on the snow fort that was built earlier!
8. Play fox and goose. Try this with snow shoes or cross country skis on.
9. Build a maze. The walls do not have to be high for the children to be lost in it.
10. Track a labyrinth. The point of a labyrinth is to follow a path mindfully.
11. Leave a message for the pilot of an airplane to read.
12. Go tobogganing. There are some great natural hills in Saskatoon, or, you can make your own if we have a massive snow dump. My kids built a snow hill off the back deck, which hurtles down and right into their quinzhee.
13. Go cross-country skiing.
14. Go skijoring (a sport where your dog pulls you on your skis. My dog likes to take turns – she pulls half the loop, then I have to pull her the rest of the way.)
15. Hook the dog up to the sled and have her/him pull your little one. Or she/he can pull you.
16. Go kick sledding. And, if you have a dog, hook your dog up to the kick sled to pull you.
17. Dog team racing. The real dog mushers, the ones who have whole teams of dogs, and either race their dogs, or take people on tours, have toboggans with wheels to keep their dogs in shape during the summer.
18. Dog team exploring.
19. Go snow-shoeing.
20. Look for tracks in the snow. What kinds of animals live here? What were they doing?
21. Set your own tracks for a friend to follow. How heavy was the person who made these tracks? How long where the person's legs? How fast was the person moving – walking or running?
22. Figure out stories as you learn to "read" tracks in the snow.
23. Play snow frisbee.

24. Play snow golf.
25. Play Chicken: form into teams of two people each, and, for each team, the smaller person gets on the shoulders of the larger person. Now, bat at the other team with your mittened hands, or with a pool noodle, trying to knock them off-balance into the snow. Best done in deep soft snow, because soon, you will all be giggling on the snowy ground!
26. Go winter camping.
27. Use a can as a mould to compact snow, or to make ice, and put a light inside. Take the compacted snow or ice out of the can, and turn on the light.
28. Make decorations for a tree. Take a natural object (leaf, cone, pieces of wood, stone, etc.), put it in a mould, fill the mould with water, add a loop of string with the ends in the water. Freeze it. Take it out of its mould, and hang it on a tree as a biodegradable decoration.
29. There are places that will take you on a hay ride, with horses pulling the sled.
30. Ride a fat bike along the back country biking trails. They are remarkably stable on ice, but still – exercise caution on ice!
31. Don't forget, you can just go for a walk, with winter boots (and other warm clothes).

Add to this list. I believe it can easily get up to 101 things to do with snow.

Then, there are the winter activities that rely more on the cold (and ice) than on the snow.

32. Go skating. Some places have "wild ice" for skating on. Pike Lake has cleared a skating route, so you can explore the shore in winter on your skates! How much fun is that!
33. Play hockey.
34. Play shinny.
35. Go ice-fishing.
36. Have a sauna.
37. Go curling.
38. Play crokicurl.
39. Invent your own snow or ice game.
40. Sit by an outdoor fire, cuddle with a friend, have a hot chocolate.

Me, I like to head out on my skis and observe the world where few humans go, so I can figure out what is happening to the plants and animals in the winter. Have you ever noticed how the snow is not nearly as deep immediately near the trunk of a tree? Is this because there is heat in the trunk that melts the snow near it? Or is this because the tree branches hold the snow, so not as much falls right near the trunk? How would we find out? (Did anyone bring a thermometer?) Have you ever seen squirrel tracks, and where are you most likely to find them? What kinds of birds hang out in the forest or on the prairie during the winter? How do they keep warm? Have you ever found a grouse in a snowbank? (They can suddenly, and very scarily! burst out of the snow and fly into a tree.) Can you find some moose tracks? What about a moose? Do you know the difference between wolf and dog tracks?

What happens under the snow? What is happening for the plants and their insect friends? Some days, I just enjoy skiing, in the near silence of the winter forest. Some days, I enjoy skiing with friends and family. And some days, I am in full-on inquiry mode, trying to figure out the stories the snow tells.

Snow person adorned with native plants
Photo Credit Meghan Mickelson

Annie-the-Dog reluctantly waiting for child to settle in the sled

Child, being mindful, in snow labyrinth.
Photo credit: Janet McVittie

Skijoring, while Annie is still interested in pulling.
Photo credit: Kat Riley