

Groundhog Day

By Alexandra Rice (US)

Groundhog Day is a North American tradition celebrated every February 2. According to the tradition, if the groundhog (an animal that looks somewhat like a beaver) sees its shadow on February 2 when it leaves its hole, it will go back to its hole to hibernate and winter will last six more weeks. However, if it does not see its shadow, winter will end soon and spring will come quickly.

Around the US and Canada, several groundhogs are used to make weather predictions on February 2. The most famous of these is Punxsutawney Phil, a groundhog who lives in

Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. Every year on February 2, thousands of people gather in Punxsutawney for the ceremony where Punxsutawney Phil makes his prediction. Those who participate in the ceremony wear old-fashioned suits and top hats and the event is covered by the national media.



Punxsutawney Phil has been predicting the end of winter since 1887, but Groundhog Day started being celebrated in the US decades earlier. The tradition was brought to America by German immigrants who settled in Pennsylvania. Groundhog Day is based on a European/German tradition that used a hibernating animal, often a hedgehog, to predict the end of winter. When the tradition was brought to the US, the groundhog was chosen to carry on the tradition.

This tradition inspired the 1993 film “Groundhog Day” starring Bill Murray.

Videos:

2011 Groundhog Day in Punxsutawney: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tg0ZXF0BPI>

Trailer for the movie “Groundhog Day”: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sh7bAaJqvAg>



Another name for a groundhog is a woodchuck. The woodchuck is the inspiration for one of the most well-known English language tongue twisters:

How much wood would a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?