



# IN AND ON THE SNOW

For many thousands of years, people have found ways to travel on and learn from snow . . . and have fun in it, too!



A First Nations woman making snowshoes in northern Quebec, 1928.



Man strapping on snowshoes, an 1884 painting by Robert William Rutherford.

## TROMP

If you live in this territory, you have to be able to get around in the snow. Inuit, Métis and many First Nations created different kinds of snowshoes to suit their local conditions. Skilled people steamed or soaked certain kinds of wood until it could be bent to make frames. They made long, thin strips of animal hide, or babiche, and wove them onto the frames in an open pattern. A leather strap attached the snowshoes to boots or moccasins. The webbing spread out the wearer's weight and kept them from sinking deep into the snow, making winter travel and hunting easier. European fur traders and later settlers saw the value of this brilliant technology and started using snowshoes for practical reasons and then for fun. Members of snowshoe clubs that formed in the 1800s would go on hours-long "tramps" in cities or the countryside. They organized snowshoe races, some of which involved jumping over short hurdles. Just as they had since time immemorial, snowshoes allowed people to get out into the winter for exercise, work and pure enjoyment.

Indigenous craftspeople created snowshoe designs that worked best in the kind of landscape and snow around them. Wide, round styles are better in deep snow, while narrow ones are good among trees or on steep slopes. On the next page you'll see some of the best-known designs of snowshoes — there are many other variations.

Companies started by Wendat people in Canada make some of the world's most famous snowshoes. Noé Sioui and Célide Gros-Louis started what is now the Faber snowshoe company in 1870 in Quebec City. In nearby Wendake First Nation, a company has been making snowshoes since 1959. GV Snowshoes now has three manufacturing plants. The name comes from the last names of founders Antoine Gros-Louis and Maurice Vincent.

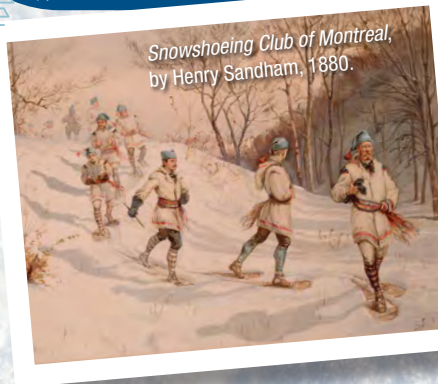
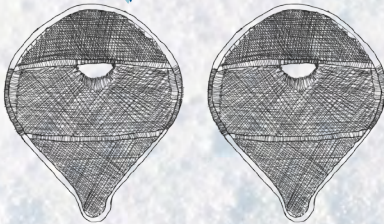


Guy Gros-Louis dips snowshoes in varnish, Wendake, Que., 1969.

Early French-speaking settlers gave this winter footwear the name *raquette* because snowshoes reminded them of tennis racquets they knew from back home.

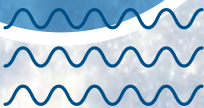
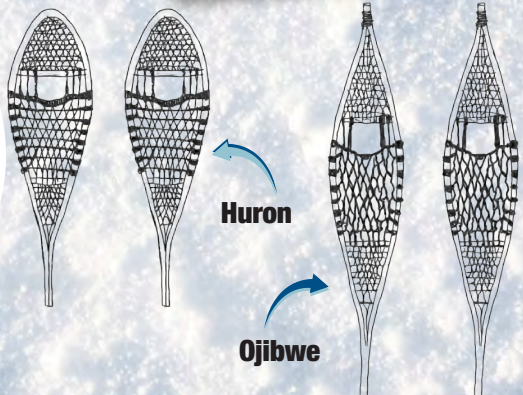


**beaver tail**



Snowshoeing Club of Montreal, by Henry Sandham, 1880.

The first snowshoe club in the world started in Montreal in 1843. The Canadian Snowshoe Union formed in 1907 to set rules for the growing sport.



# WHOOSH

Walking through snow is one thing, but how do you take stuff with you? Many different Indigenous Peoples came up with a similar invention: the toboggan. (Our word for it probably comes from the Mi'kmaq *tobakun*, which means sled.) Inuit likely made theirs out of whale bones. In places with trees, people made them from long pieces of wood. To curve the front, they bent the wood when it was still green or steamed it. Strips of leather or bark held it all in place. Voila — something that could be used to pull a deer home from the hunt or rabbits back from the trapline. People could put a loop around their waist and pull a loaded toboggan, or attach one to a dog to do the work. No doubt people have also been tobogganing down hills for countless generations, too. As settlers started to use toboggans for fun, it wasn't just for kids. Adults sometimes dressed up in their best furs, fancy scarves and even top hats for big toboggan parties.



In 1884, the now-famous toboggan run on Quebec City's Dufferin Terrace opened.

*Iggaak*, Inuit snow goggles, are an amazing invention. Usually made from bone or driftwood, they are carved to fit a person's face and have thin slits to see through. This keeps the wearer from being blinded by bright sunshine on the snow.



A Netselngment Inuk man wearing snow goggles, 1926.

# SWOOSH

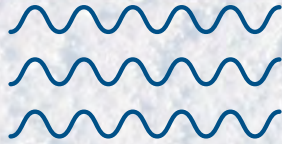
Calèche, cutter, cabriolet, cariole or just plain sleigh — whatever you called this horse-drawn passenger vehicle on runners, it was essential for winter travel in early Canada. Smaller versions that were part toboggan, part sleigh, were pulled by dogs. Red River Métis adorned their dogs' harnesses with bells, feathers, tassels and other decorations. Craftspeople often painted the sides of carioles and other sleighs with beautifully distinctive designs.



Did you spot the dog cariole in this undated picture, *Christmas in Manitoba*?



A horse-pulled cutter, St. Jean, Que., 1926.



Dog sled race, unknown location, 1936.

Inuit tamed wolves, eventually breeding tough northern dogs (*qimmiit*) they used to pull sleds (*qamutiik*) over uneven Arctic tundra. Teams of *qimmiit* could find their way home even in whiteout blizzards.

There are sled dog races in many parts of Canada. Drivers are called mushers. You can even try dog-sledding for yourself at tour operators in snowy areas.



Cross-country skiing in Banff National Park, 2020.



A skier on a chairlift in Quebec's Laurentian Mountains, 1954.

# GLIDE



Skiing, like many winter activities, became popular in Canada in the late 1800s, likely thanks to migrants from northern Europe. Both cross-country and downhill skiing soon started to take off, even though the skis were usually much heavier than modern versions. Tow systems and the chair lift came from other places too. But Canadians made skiing, and later snowboarding their own, whether in spectacular mountains or on gentle hills.

The world's first rope tow, invented by Alex Foster, went into action near Shawbridge, Que., in 1931. Skiers simply grabbed onto the continuous loop of rope, which pulled them up the hill.



Some archaeologists think the Norse who came to the East Coast more than 1,000 years ago probably brought skis with them.





Climate change means warmer winters and less snow. Many Canadian ski resorts are having to make more artificial snow than ever before.

## FAKING IT

Canada is known for snow, but if we don't get enough of the real kind, we just make more. Artificial snow was first used to full effect here at Camp Fortune, a ski area near Ottawa, in the 1950s. It quickly spread to other popular ski spots. In 1972, Grouse Mountain in North Vancouver became the first resort in western Canada to make snow. Most ski hills in Canada had systems set up by the 1980s to extend the season or make up for warm weather with artificial snow. Although it allows people to enjoy skiing and snowboarding for longer, artificial snow isn't as nice as the real thing — it's harder and can be icy rather than fluffy. Climate change means few places can count on a full winter of natural snow, but making it takes a huge amount of water and energy.

It's important for researchers to know how deep the snow is in the mountains. Meltwater feeds the rivers that people count on, especially in Western Canada.



## MEASURING FOR LATER

In mountainous parts of Canada, knowing how much snow is sitting up on the slopes is important for more than skiing. The snowpack is the total amount of snow that falls and stays in a season. When it melts in warmer temperatures, it feeds rivers, especially in western Canada. In turn, those rivers provide water for communities of all sizes as well as businesses and farms. That's why it's so important to know how much water the snowpack holds. Testers use long tubes to pull out a core that tells them things like how deep and how firmly packed the snow is. People in British Columbia have been taking these snow samples for more than a century. The provincial government took over snow surveys in the 1930s, and now works with a range of people as well as remote devices to compile this important information.



Downhill skiing at Whistler, B.C., 2008.

**Check out the comic starting on page 20 to discover the story of the snowmobile!**