

ACTIVITIES, TIPS AND EVENTS FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY



Mush Your Way to a Blizzard of Family Memories

A rare adventure gives you
bragging rights with your friends



Grab a pair of mukluks and hit the trails, towed by a team of hard-working huskies. Hunkered down under a toasty pile of blankets provided by avid musher Ginger Plummer, families can taste travel adventure at its best with a 3-mile jaunt down the Great Western Trail in Warren County.

If a brief touring mush breaks your winter blahs, and you can bet it will, try leading your own team of friendly Siberians through Plummer's musher training program, set up by special arrangement. With nearly 35 years of husky and sledding experience, her training allows you to command your own howling, husky-powered polar express and drive the straining team for a fast ride, cruising through the snow. "If anyone wants to learn to drive, we can teach them," says Plummer.

Dog sledding rates depend on the weight of riders as this determines how many of Plummer's 45 seasoned sled dogs to hitch into a team. A 175-pound man will require six to eight dogs. It takes one assistant per husky to keep the raring dogs contained before launch.

The sled fits three small children or two larger children. Adults must ride solo, except of course, for the capable driver, who alternately runs and rides the sled rails. "The driver has to be in good shape," quips Plummer, who notes they must also prepare for the unexpected, such as controlling the team should a rabbit appear down the trail.

"When you pull up and first see the dogs tethered, they are nuts—screaming and howling," says Plummer of the shrieking, lovable huskies. "Don't be afraid about the noise, the dogs are very friendly, but just extremely excited to get going. They know what is coming when they get tethered up and they can't wait to start running."

Once the sled starts, the dogs settle in, getting their rhythm and setting their pace. During the ride, expect the boisterous huskies to focus on their task and bask in

the sheer pleasure of their work. "They won't make a sound while running," she says. "You will hear silence mostly, except the paw pads on the snow and dogs breathing." Expect to see birds and other wildlife along the way and billowy breath clouds from the dogs.

On the return, the dogs are fulfilled. "Their tongues will hang out, but they are happy. They love to run."

WHEN TO CALL

To make a memorable experience, at least 2 inches of the right snow is needed. "The snow must be packable," says Plummer. "Like snowman-making snow." Light, fluffy snow doesn't support the sled runners and overly deep snow also poses pulling problems.

If the conditions are right, that's the time to call for the weekend-only arrangements. Make advance reservations if possible, based upon snowfall forecasts or the current snowpack.

Rates vary, with a minimum charge of \$25. Rides last 20-30 minutes for the three-mile ride, depending upon conditions.

**www.howlinghills.com, email: plummer@howlinghills.com
4751 - 10th Ave., Cumming, Iowa, 515-981-5120
Ginger Plummer, Owner**

STAY SNUG

Dress in layers. Wear a synthetic underlayer, such as polyester, to wick moisture from the skin. Top the wicking layer with a warm layer such as fleece or wool. The last, or outer, layer should cut the wind and prevent snow from soaking your warmth layer. A nylon windbreaker, waterproof pullover or parka usually works. Wear snow pants and tall boots to prevent snow from soaking your feet. Don't forget warm gloves or windproof mittens, a scarf or facemask and a hat.