



## *The Weekly Historical Note*

Edited by: Nicolas Reynolds  
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### *Snowsnake*

*The following has been edited to correct grammar and flow. The original material is found in a manuscript titled "Te Twa' Enae" and is found in the Oneida Cultural Heritage Collection. The original author is unknown.*

Snowsnake has been played by Iroquois people for many generations. It is a winter sport played by young and old. There are a lot of skills needed and one should practice a lot. There is a lot of team work needed between the one who throws and the one who shines. Also, a lot of time is needed to find out what shine will slide best in different kinds of snow. This is some information about snowsnake that I know.

#### HOW TO MAKE A SNOWSNAKE


Different kinds of trees are used to make a snowsnake. Some types are: hickory, wild cherry, walnut, oak, hard maple, iron wood, beech, and birch. During the winter, around January and February, a tree should be cut down. This is cut, it should be split and allowed to dry for a year. After the year is up, we use a draw knife to shape the snowsnake into a long, round shaft. At the top of the snake we leave a hump. This will help balance the snake as it travels down the track. Now we soak the snake in heavy oil for two to three months. This will help keep the water from soaking into the wood. Now after it is soaked we sand the wood again until it is very smooth. Then we melt the lead to make a point which will be at the very end of the snake. The snowsnake is now cut to about seven feet, at the back end there is a notch where the thrower will place his finger.

#### PREPARING THE SHINE

The shine is a mixture of shellac and rubbing alcohol. The alcohol helps dilute the shellac so it's so sticky but more like a wax. Each team has someone with their own mixture and these are usually secrets that are passed down to family members. You have to experiment a lot to find out what works best in fresh snow, ice, and wet snow.

#### PREPARING THE TRACK

The track is first made by piling up snow to waist height. The pitch hole (where the snake enters the track) is sometimes three feet high by two or three feet wide. This pitch hold sometimes goes about 20 or 30 feet then gradually slopes to the



ground. After the snow is piled a log is pulled through and a slot is left in the snow where the snakes will travel. The track can be made as long as you like. Some snakes have been known to travel over a half a mile.

#### THE GAME

Each team will have two throwers, sometimes there are seven to eight teams and sometimes more. There are also three classes. First class, they usually are the best at the game. Second class are ones who have played for a while but are still improving. The third class are usually beginners. Now after each team has thrown all four of their snakes, the one who has thrown the furthest is the winner. The mark is made at the end of the snake. Three points are needed to win the game.



Above is a picture of the tip of a snow snake. At the front end, or the end of the snake that leads down the track there is a lead tip placed at the front. In addition the front end of the stick is larger to give balance and stability to the Snowsnake.