

Peninsula's magical winter wonderland awaits kids of all ages

by Nicole Johnson



Nicole leading a school group and helping the children experience winter at its finest.

Many people can't fathom why we choose to remain in Alaska during the winter months. Some folks see the season as a lifeless, dreary and depressing time of year. Yet, there are so many things to discover and explore.

Even with all the technology that surrounds us, we still seem to have a hard time entertaining ourselves. We simply retreat indoors and mimic the natural phenomenon of hibernation.

Whether it is renting movies, watching television or simply sleeping more, we are missing out. There is a thrilling world outside waiting to be discovered, explored and appreciated.

Everyone knows about the art of building a snowman. Some people have it down to an engineering feat that would impress the Egyptians. But there are plenty of other activities that can spice up the ordinary snowman.

You can, for example, add some creativity with an

ice sculpture. Start by cutting the tops off some old plastic containers and filling them with water. Leave the containers outside. When they freeze, you can become the Michelangelo or Leonardo da Vinci of the North, with an ice castle in your own yard.

With the abundance of snow, why not make some delicious snow ice cream? Collect four-five cups of clean snow in a bowl and place in the freezer. Mix a cup of milk, half of a teaspoon of vanilla, and half a cup of sugar. Stir until the sugar is dissolved. Then slowly add the snow and continually stir until it is as thick as ice cream. Enjoy!

My personal favorite is studying the uniqueness and beauty of snowflakes. I put a piece of black construction paper in the freezer, and when the flurries begin, I make a dash outside and collect the snowflakes on the paper. With a magnifying glass I can see the fine detail that explains the saying, "No two snowflakes are the same."

Other options include coming to the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center on the weekends for a variety of films, free of charge. The ski trails surrounding the visitor center can provide hours of good exercise and wildlife viewing. Feel free to call us at (907) 262-7021 for film schedules and trail updates.

So when the children are complaining "We're bored!" we can take them outside and show them firsthand the exciting world that surrounds us on the Kenai. For kids of all ages, the possibilities of discovery are endless if we dress warm and enjoy the magical winter wonderland.

Nicole Johnson is the environmental education coordinator at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. For more information about the Refuge, visit the headquarters on Ski Hill Road in Soldotna, call 262-7021 or see the website at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.