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We Tried It: *Dogsledding*



You don't have to travel to Alaska to try the sport of dogsledding. Last winter my husband, Dan, and I took our kids, Jackson, age 8, Nolan, 5, and Aaron, 3, on a canine-led

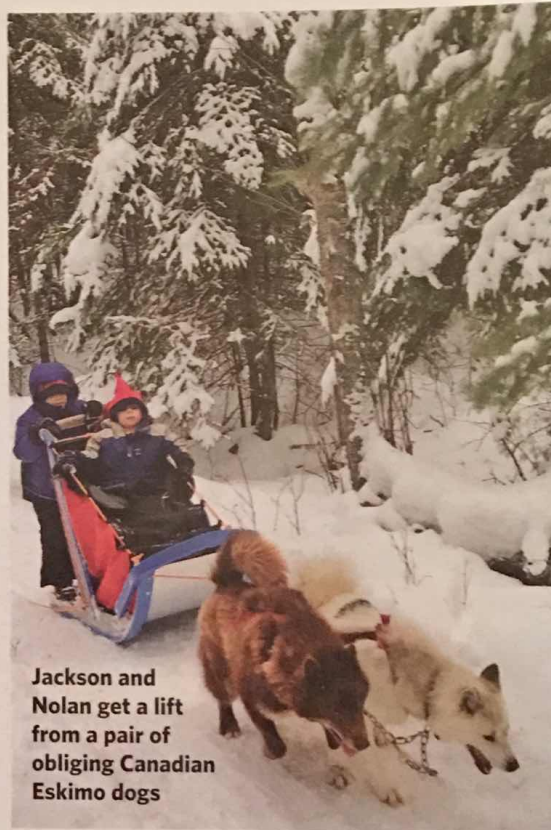
adventure in Ely, Minnesota, a day's drive from our Chicago-area home. The Alaskan wilderness did come to mind as we approached the grounds of Wintergreen Dogsled Lodge: miles of snow-covered roads and evergreens under an impossibly blue sky. What would it be like to travel by dog power? We couldn't wait to find out!

By Toni Klym McLellan

What we did: A half-day outing with Wintergreen Dogsled Lodge, 1101 Ring Rock Road, Ely, Minnesota; 218-365-6022; dogsledding.com. Half-day, full-day, and longer trips are available December through March.

What we paid: \$300 for 2 adults and 2 children, including lunch; free for kids ages 4 and under.

Want to try it? Go to dogsleddrides.com for a directory of U.S. and Canadian outfitters.



Jackson and Nolan get a lift from a pair of obliging Canadian Eskimo dogs



1 Ready to run. After a welcoming round of warm refreshments, we're led down the snow-packed road to the kennels. Wintergreen's owner, seasoned musher and outfitter Paul Schurke, double-checks harnesses as we wonder whether we'll have to know our "gees" from our "haws." Turns out we won't; the dogs will follow Paul, who'll ski swiftly in front of the sled, while wife Susan and son Peter ski behind.

2 Mush! Dan and I stand shoulder-to-shoulder on the sturdy base of our sled, while our two younger boys nestle in the covered front compartment. Jackson rides with Berit, the Schurke's teenage daughter. In a flash we're off on a snowy roller-coaster ride, marveling at the power and energy of our four dogs. Forgetting all about the brisk air, we glide through the woods and over frozen waterways.

3 Wanna drive? As noon approaches, we head in for a hot lunch at the lodge. Paul utters the magic words "all by yourself" while talking with Jackson, who is instantly sold on the idea of driving a sled. After a quick lesson on stopping (stepping on a foot brake) and starting (pushing off with one foot), he's off on a short trail. The rest of us play in the snow as Jackson transforms from tentative passenger to confident alpha musher.

4 Puppy love. After returning to the kennels, the boys get to meet one of the newest members of the Wintergreen family, a 6-week-old pup. As we gaze upon this pudgy creature, it's hard to believe he'll soon be racing along wilderness trails, just like his relatives. When we ask the boys if they'd like to go dogsledding next winter, the boisterous yelping of the pup is momentarily drowned out by a unanimous "Yeah!"