Groundhog

Choosing Groundhog as an old-time Tune of the Week opens up the world of bluegrass and children’s music, as well as old-time. There are so many on-line versions of this song, it’s hard to choose just a few to share.

My introduction came from the bluegrass playing of IBMA multiple-time banjo player-of-the-year Jim Mills. Then we visited Floyd, Virginia all the way from California and landed in a jam with Mac Traynham. He was surprised we knew the song, to which I breathed a sigh of relief that I could even keep up with him. Since then Groundhog has become a staple my husband and I play as a “kids’ song,” which we find amusing because nobody around here would ever think of eating groundhog.

We don’t have many groundhogs in California and celebrate Groundhog Day in our schools just as a way to study the seasons and weather. It makes sense to me that if the groundhog sees his shadow and goes back into his burrow then winter just couldn’t be over yet. Sunshine in the cold of winter is just a respite from the needed rain and stormy skies. If it’s cloudy and he stays out a bit to test the air, then it’s a normal winter and will end on time. Anyway, that’s how I explained it to my first graders and they never argued the point, nor minded making paper gophers instead of groundhogs.

Groundhog Day is on February 2nd, so it’s a good time now to add it to our Tune of the Week repertoire. Here are a few facts:

* Its roots go to Georgia, the Carolinas, Virginia and West Virginia. It was played throughout Appalachia and also migrated to the Ozarks.

* The earliest recording was in 1924 by Land Norris.
* Well-known musicians played Groundhog, such as Doc Watson, Frank Proffitt, Marion Reece, Tommy Jarrell, Pete Seeger, Mike Seeger, and Dan Gellert (who’s still alive and fiddling).
* The mixolydian mode is what strikes me as providing the catchy melody.
* Jim Mill’s bluegrass sound and his hammer-ons and slides have transferred to my clawhammer rendition.
* There are many, many different lyrics – take your choice.
* The nickname “whistle-pig,” in some lyrics, refers to the high-pitched sound made by a groundhog when startled or fearful.
* It only has eight full measures, so it should be easy to learn.

Please add your versions. I need some old-time Groundhog education.

[Land Norris, 1924](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l9Gl2bpNHvU) (from northern Georgia, recorded for Okeh label)

[Doc Watson family](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qbxoNcwi0AY)

[Frank Proffitt, 1962](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jLf2A8eGpIE)

[Pete Seeger](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pkOS_EWk8po)

[Mike Seeger with Bob Baker](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhxun7iMEeA)

[Jim Mills on Bound to Ride CD](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7UhhuBTm3A)

[BHO member Ken Elkington](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVF_3qdZOho)

[Bobby Taylor, Kim Johnson, John Lilly](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0mzMAnTAq4U)

[Chris Barry, 2-finger lead lesson](http://sausagegrindermusic.com/2010/09/14/main/a-banjo-lesson-groundhog/) (up to speed at 7:04)

[Marion Reece, 1936](https://www.slippery-hill.com/recording/ground-hog-0)

[Tommy Jarrell](https://www.slippery-hill.com/recording/ground-hog)

[Plinky & Plunky](https://www.youtube.com/upload?redirect_to_creator=true&fr=2)