

Newport Forest

December 17 2000

1:15 - 5:00 pm

Weather: oC, cloudy with increasing snowfall and W winds

Purpose: to install bird feeders, look for deer and check trailer

Participants: Kee, Darren and Glen

Just before coming into Wardsville, a jackrabbit run out in front of me from the cemetery, thought better of it, and dashed back in among the tombstones. I picked up some sundries at Pop's Variety and proceeded to the property. The new gate had bowed out. I unlocked and secured it, then drove down to the trailer. Thank goodness for the snow tires. The track was very "greasy," with melting snow beneath the newly accumulating base. Depths on the property ranged from 10 - 20 cm.

I set up the two feeders, filling each with an ample supply of birdseed and just as I completed the second one, Darren arrived in his truck. We went into the trailer where I took out the propane tanks and hooked them up, Darren assisting. Darren took some packages from his truck. Deer steaks and a venison roast for me and Pat. We went inside and made some tea on the stove, waiting for Glen. We decided to go out and look at the creek, anyway. It was very swollen, just beginning to spill over its banks. To my dismay, I saw that our new bridge had already been carried away. The top had stayed tied to the snag, but the creek had eaten out the entire root system and swept it about 30 m downstream where the submerged mass created a dome of water above it.

Then Glen arrived, so we decided to go looking for deer. Just then, Darren spotted a deer in Harvey's bean field, a large doe, browsing for beans. We watched it for a while. It kept looking up at us and even after Darren whistled at it, the deer went back to eating. Darren and I both took several photos. Then Darren whistled a little louder and the deer took off at a sort of relaxed canter, running across the field, stopping to look at us, then off down Edgar's Road. The plan was for Glen and me to walk the Blind Creek Trail up to the hogsback and wait, while Darren beat along the east end, driving and deer into our view so we could count them. Going in, Glen and I spotted tracks of squirrels, cottontails, several deer and even a house-cat (new species). Since the snow was falling, we could be sure that all the tracks had been made to-day.

We came upon the fresh tracks of the doe. It had followed Blind Creek. About a hundred meters along the trail, Glen caught a flash of the deer's tail ahead of us. Presently, we came upon its tracks again, headed up the Hogsback. The Blind

Creek Forest was like a fairy-land, all the trees and bushes draped in fanciful frostings of snow. White and black everywhere, like a Japanese print. I took a picture. We continued on until we had gained our post. I took the walkie-talkie that Darren had given me and called him. "In position." "Okay," said Darren. "I'm on the move."

We waited for about half an hour, with no deer coming into view. My WT jingled. Darren had crossed all the way to the river. Nada. Could we continue along the trail and meet him there? The trail had not been too difficult to follow and we did so successfully until we got into the east end, where there are no liners. We wandered off the trail, but regained it, meeting Darren by the jackpot along the bank. "Look," said Glen. "A mink." He pointed out how the mink always keeps its feet close together when it moves through the snow. It bounds.

We made our way back to the trailer. Before going in, I prevailed upon my friends to help me shift the trailer so that it lined up with the trees a little better. That thing is HEAVY! I made a second pot of tea. Glen told a story about his first deer hunt with his father at the age of 11, how they had tracked the deer across several lots until they finally got close enough to "get" it. He also told of watching a mink hunt a muskrat, stalking it from behind a log, making a rush. But the muskrat had been close to the water and dived in, the mink in hot pursuit. Right into the river. The mink came up after about a minute, looking all over for the muskrat.

We had tea. No birds had appeared at the feeders yet. Glen decided to leave first. We heard his tires whining on the fresh snow. We tried pushing him, to no avail. Darren suggested I make a track for him, by driving out. We turned off the propane, locked and secured the trailer and I set out. Thank God for my new snow tires! I made it out to the road, waited about 15 minutes, then went over to see the Hurdles, my intention being to call a two truck. "Oh, you don't need to do that," said Edgar. He bundled up, went off to his garage and a few minutes later, a chuffing roaring noise issued therefrom and a tractor emerged, Edgar like a knight of old, riding to the rescue. Glen emerged first, then Darren. Glen couldn't thank Edgar enough. After the two left, I gave the Hurdles the venison rump roast that Darren had given me earlier -- in gratitude to Edgar.