

First Visit for March 2010

Newport Forest Sunday March 7, 2010 2:30 - 6:40 pm

weather: prec. 0 mm; RH 58%; BP 101.9 kPa; calm; sn/hz; T 11° C

purpose: walk trail & light maintenance

participants: Kee, Will

Today's adventures started well before we got to Newport Forest. It happened to be the 196th anniversary of the Battle of the Longwoods. A good 50 to 60 cars lined the road by Battle Hill, where a stone cenotaph marks the site of the battle. I took several pictures of the modest troop of British regulars (some of them older than me and some looking singularly unfit for battle). We left after hearing a ten-minute lecture on the course of the battle and before the wreath-laying and musket-firing began.

Coming in to the property, the ground was so iffy, we were lucky to get out again later; although the soil was frozen below the one-inch mark, the upper inch consisted of meltwater and saturated soil -- with a predictable result. Even the new, heavy-duty snow tires could not prevent the van from slewing (somewhat dangerously) from side to side while following the track down to the lower meadow.

Will cleaned the tools in preparation for the spring volunteer work bees(s), while I made my way gingerly down to the creek; rubber boots suffered the same traction problem as snow tires. The creek is a good foot over normal and flowing steadily with lots of ice fragments coming down. Climbing back up to camp, I spotted an Eastern Cottontail hurrying up to its home under the brush-pile. (?) Will saw it too, as he finished wrapping the tools for storage.

We walked the Thames River Trail, noting a flock of Canada Geese that -- for once -- did not take sudden flight with a cacophony of honking. (2P) The weather was great, with a light breeze from the west and brilliant sunlight. We lugged a few logs to the trail on the flank of the Hogsback, then moved on. Although the vernal ponds at the far end of swampy Blind Creek Forest had a foot or two of water in them, the ponds (A, B, and C) at the east end, were completely dry with perhaps an inch of remnant snow. The precipitation problem has worsened. Here is a table that explains the situation. (Average precipitation for the area is about 900 mm annually.) For each year I have listed the precipitation for the first two months combined vs the year's total. Although the correlation is hardly perfect, the only three good years of the last 8 were preceded by 150 mm or more in the first two months:

year 1st 2 mo total outcome

2003 n/a 730 drought
2004 19 mm 617 drought
2005 119 mm 730 drought
2006 162 mm 1020 good year
2007 139 mm 674 drought
2008 188 mm 1223 best year
2009 196 mm 926 average
2010 46 mm ???

Back at camp I heard a Hairy Woodpecker test-firing its machine-gun in the gallery forest of the creek bluffs. At first invisible, the bird finally revealed itself as it circled a distant trunk.

Will white-knuckled as I drove out.

birds: (6 -- few around)

American Crow (EW); Black-capped Chickadee (Hole); Blue Jay (RB); Canada Goose (TR); Northern Cardinal (FCF); Hairy Woodpecker (GF); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr);

new species: [from the Marshall/Newport insect survey data]

'Pale Orange Dryomyzid' *Dryomyza* [flaveola] NF SM J130/09
'Jade House Fly' *Eudasyphora cyanicolor* NF SM J130/09
'Dappled Fruit Fly' *Eutreta novaboracencis* NF SM J130/09
'Orange-legged Robber Fly' *Leptogaster* [cylindrica] NF SM J130/09
robber fly *Neoitamus* [flavofemoratus] NF SM J130/09

IMAGES:

(click on image to enlarge)



*Remnants of British detachment musters for wreath-laying ceremony**

(click on image to enlarge)



Lone American (?) with wreath at the ready

(click on image to enlarge)



*Kee (barely visible) examines a vernal pond by the base of an old willow -- near dusk
Vernal Pond 'F' is very low for this time of year --- A, B, and C will be completely empty unless we get some stellar rainfall in next three weeks.*

(click on image to enlarge)



Canada Geese, as seen from river bluffs trail, hold climate change conference. Note cornstalk fragments still hanging from tree in foreground following the Great Flood of February '09

*In 1814 during the British/American war, a small force of about 30 American troops went for a hunting expedition in SW Ontario to provision the garrison at Detroit. The British regiment at Delaware (S. of London) got wind of the expedition, sent an equal detachment and, in a pitched all-night battle at "Battle Hill," lost half the force, while the Americans lost 4 men. Guess we showed them!