

Newport Forest

Sunday January 9 2011

2:20m- 4:45 pm

Weather: prec. 19 mm; RH 73%; BP 102.3 kPa; clr; clm; T -4° C

Purpose: tracking in snow

Participants: Kee, Will

I was astonished to find virtually no snow at the gate when we arrived. We had been psyched up to dig out the gate and have a tricky drive in. As it was, we merely swung the gate open and drove down to the trailer in about 2-3" of snow. According to our new game camera, there had been a thaw around Jan 3.

A magnificent Red-tailed Hawk swooped over the Lower Meadow in front of us as we pulled up to the trailer. Was it a sign of something? Was it telling us of dark deeds in the woods? Things progressed normally, with Will repairing the hickory feeder and putting out bird rations, while I took the weather and melted the ice from the snow bucket over the trailer stove. [19 mm of water-equivalent precip.]

Snow on the property was decidedly shallower. An undercrust reflected last week's thaw. I busied myself photographing interesting animal tracks (including an apparent Possum) as we went -- until we came to human footprints. A trespasser! This unleashed the Bloodhounds. Will fore-tracked, following the prints out to the river and up the River Bluffs trail, where he lost them. I backtracked, not as easy an art. Thanks to blowing snow and several heavily traveled game trails I lost the tracks several times. Each time I had to circle the general area until I picked up the trail again. What was wrong with this guy? He wandered like a drunk, always heading for the brushy parts and meandering along deadfall. Then it struck me: he was an out-of-season hunter, using the brush as a cover. I followed the tracks for about 300 m, all the way over to a ravine on the other side of the power lines. It looked like he came in from Janik's property next door. I broke off the chase and called Will on the Walkie-talkie. "What's your 20 and what have you got?" Will's voice crackled, "I'm on the Hogsback and have his trail again. Looks like he's headed down."

I made my way into the Blind Creek Forest to hook up with Will. Then he called again. "Think you better get over here." "What?" "You'll see."

I found Will on the trail at the foot of the Hogsback, staring at the snow in front of him. The area was a shambles, as they say, a bloody mess. There was blood spattered everywhere and a few internal organs of a recently gutted deer, with Crow and Coyote tracks all over the place. I found the stomach, still full of

browse, and two kidneys plus part of a liver lobe. The heart, lungs and liver plus all the intestines, had been eaten, apparently. (These are the high-value items for predators & scavengers.)

Forensics is a fascinating subject. We found deer tracks coming into the area, with one hoof printing blood, meaning that blood was running down it's leg. It had already been hit in one of its quarters, but was still walking. The kill-shot had been fired from up on the Hogsback, where our hunting friend had posted himself. He gutted the deer where it finally expired, at the crime scene we now examined.

He apparently carried the deer out on his back, heading for Janik's. This is no mean feat. There was no blood trail, as the corpse had frozen by this time. Judging from the snow cover, this incident took place no later than yesterday (saturday) or friday at the earliest. The way the hunter had reconnoitered the area coming in, then circling around and over the Hogsback made me wonder if he wasn't native. He was not heavier than me and his shoe size was about the same. He hunted alone, carrying (not dragging) the deer out unaided! White hunters normally wouldn't do either of these things.

By the time we got back to the trailer, the sun was getting low. We just had time and light enough to close up camp and head up to the road to find the hunter's exit along the Janik property. As we drove slowly back past the gate, Will looked down on the Fleming Creek Forest and spotted five deer running through the woods. I don't mind people killing deer so much, as there are plenty around, but I really dislike trespassers! (On those rare occasions when you catch them, they invariably claim that they didn't see the signs. Yeah, right.)

Birds: (9)

American Crow (UM); Black-capped Chickadee (Tr); Canada Goose (TR); Dark-eyed Junco (GF); Downy Woodpecker (GF); Northern Cardinal (GF); Red-tailed Hawk (LM); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr); Wild Turkey (BCF)

Mammals: (7)

Coyote (BCF); Eastern Cottontail (LM); Eastern Gray Squirrel (BCF); Meadow Vole (LM); Raccoon (Hl); Virginia Possum (BCF); White-tailed Deer (UM)

IMAGES:



The possum tends to have a star-shaped print, with the thumb of the hind paw pointing somewhat backward. You can see the drag mark of the tail. It walks with its tail held straight out, but lowers it frequently. Prints are less than 2" wide and feet also leave drag marks. Trail crosses older tracks of a squirrel. The possum was out today, as the tracks are fresh. .



Boot print of hunter filled in somewhat by recent light snowfall. Tread lost. Toe of my galosh at bottom of image.



Deer's stomach and two kidneys visible in image



Trail cam catches coyote crossing into Blind Creek Forest on Jan 6 about 8:27 am.

Note: Camera time offsets are needed, as my fingers were too frozen to set the time last week. Au21 = Jan 1 after 3pm ["00:00" approx. equiv. to 15:00 EST]