

Newport Forest

Thursday December 8 2011

1:55 - 5:25 pm

weather: Precip 38 mm; RH 69%; BP 102.2 kPa; WSW 5-25 kmh; cld/sn; T 4° C

Purpose: check property

Participants: Kee

About to turn onto the first Line south of the river, I spotted a gray pickup truck turn just ahead of me. Something in me said, "Aha! First customers." The truck pulled over at the first ravine, thinking to let me pass. I stopped. "You fellas look like you're out hunting. (They wore the usual camouflage clothing.) They nodded. "I'm afraid there's no hunting at all between this line and the river, all the way west to Black's Road."

"That's okay," they said. "We'll be hunting the other side of the Line." (Yeah. Right.) "You'll still have to ask the owners." I drove off kicking myself for not making sure they would go where they said they were going. How would I do that? Easy. All I had to say was, "Well, you don't want to hunt on the other side, either. A pair of cougars have been spotted in that woodlot over there."

I drove on to the property gate and rolled down to the camp on squidgy, but not impassable, ground. Another 38 mm in the rain gauge and, as usual these days, no birds about, except some crows calling in the distance. The creek was still over its banks and the river had dropped only two metres. At least, this made the Thames River Trail walkable again. Which I did. When I got to the Bluebell Woods area of the Riverside Forest, I left the trail to follow the bank, discovering in the process a huge bite that the recent flood(s) had taken out of the shoreline. (See IMAGES below.)

Back on the trail, I came upon a beautiful Split-Gill Polypore adorning the side of a log. Then I came to the side trail to the Sand Bar and took that one. Halfway to the Bar, I was stopped by flooding, as the land here is somewhat lower than the land upstream in the Bluebell woods area. Turning back, I followed the main trail up and over the Hogsback, even as the sun came out, gold-plating the trees of the Riverside Forest. I stopped to admire a small stand of mature beeches, shaking my head at the Newport brothers' early practice of cutting all the mature beech trees to make room for more valuable trees like maple, ash and walnut.

Deer tracks could be seen on virtually every section of trail I walked today, bucks and does both. The rut is still on, at a guess.

Passing through the Blind Creek Forest, I found a bunch of colourful brackets of False Turkeytail sprouting from a liner log. (We get half our wood-digesting fungi from these logs.) With the vegetation mostly down these days, one can see much further into the woods. I spotted a 4-year old American Beech planted not far from the trail and went over to inspect it. (See IMAGES below.)

Back in camp, I looked all around me, absorbing the sight of the tail-end-of-the-tail-end of summer. Sigh. Snow is predicted for tomorrow. In the meantime, Steward Bruce Parker has taken the canoe back to the Novacraft factory for repairs. A big thanks to Bruce!

Phenology: Last snow-free day?

Note on Willows: In the *Bulletin* for November 20 I pointed out that most of the large willows in the Blind Creek Forest had swollen bases, wondering out loud why this might be. This resulted in what might be called a “readers’ blog”, three chiming in with an opinion. Maybe Ian Craig, a professional forester, or Jane Bowles, a plant expert, might render an opinion before any conclusions are drawn.

Erin Carroll (Sarnia): “Not at all scientific, but my instant response to seeing photos of the black willows with a wide base is that they must live in a wet spot. Not sure of the reason, but a pattern I have also noted. Maybe an adaptation that helps prevent the tree from falling over in wind storms? Maybe the lower (wet) portion is prone to the tree equivalent of trench foot? Possibly we are observing thickening due to immune response?”

Patty Frank (San Diego): “Could gall be possible that's spread around the tree base because the tissue has expanded from the moisture? The swelling on the tree on the right in your photo looks like it has distinct areas of swelling.” She goes on to quote a web article on a species of crown gall that attacks willows.

Maria Gitta (London): “In the [Bulletin] Kee poses the question if anyone knows why the black willows in Blind Creek Forest have ‘strangely inflated bases’ I pose a response: The trees are middle aged or older and have been sitting around too much. I look at my own strangely inflated base and see a commonality with the black willows!”

IMAGES:



FinePix

Surprising erosional feature downstream from the point bar involves this dramatic bite out of Bluebell Woods taken by the recent flood. The loss of soil comes to approximately 125 cubic metres or about 85 tonnes of mass. That's a lot of soil, as one can see. We keep a close watch on erosion because river hydrology is very tricky and difficult to predict. At different depths, fast-moving flood waters (1.5 m/sec) can behave quite differently and have quite different effects. The present example may be a one-off or the beginning of a whole new erosional regime!



FinePix

Now this is what I call a HAT! Russian “ushanka” is warm enough to cook ten eggs (or one brain) at room temperature. Pat says I will probably get shot through the head by a hunter before that happens.



FinePix

Many American Beech, planted several years ago, dot the floor of the Blind Creek Forest. All are doing well, as expected. They grow very slowly at first, then after a few years begin to speed up. The thousands of walnuts that now litter the forest have all turned black as the hulls rot away (as here).