

Newport Forest

Thursday February 9 2012

1:35 - 6:05 pm

weather: prec. 0 mm; RH 64%; BP 102.3 kPa; Clear; W 20-30 kmh; T +4° C

Purpose: Environmental scan

Participants: Kee

The phrase “environmental scan” may sound impressive, but it’s just a cover for “nothing much” or, perhaps, “a bit of everything”. The sun was out in full force, but a chill and vigorous west wind heralded a new cold front on its way. Hopefully it will bring some snow to the area.

As I set up camp, I was startled by the sound of a Northern Cardinal giving what sounded like its spring territorial call. I went down to the creek to check the rapids, slipping there on the bank and nearly falling in. New Rule: Do not visit the creek when the ground is slick! Wild Turkeys called from the Blind Creek Forest.

I took a walk to the river, finding the impressive sight of some 30 Canada Geese resting on the far bank. I dared not move, but brought the camera up slow-ly. One of the geese stood up, then another. Then they all took off. A mere burp can set these hypervigilant birds skyward.

I stood for a while in the Blind Creek Forest contemplating the chain of ponds that winds through the wood east of the trail, connecting with Fleming creek, as it were. (See the second image below.) There is a mystery here.

The Mystery of Blind Creek

Did Blind Creek once flow with water? I am tempted to interpret the chain of pools that mark its course as once being part of a relict pool/riffle system that characterize most streams. Mature willows, some already fallen with age, line the chain. One visitor to Newport Forest thought the chain of depressions marked a flood spillway. The only problem with that interpretation is that by the time flood waters reach that height, they are virtually unmoving and do not “spill” anywhere. As the flood subsides, it does so slowly and everywhere at once.

If Blind Creek did once flow with water, the explanation of why it no longer does would be very simple. A loop of the river, constantly cutting into the forested bank, eventually intercepted Fleming Creek (see second image below) which formed a new mouth and “blinded” its downstream continuation. The diversion event happened at Time T. When was T? Was it in the last 100 years?

Fantasy: If a creek ever ran through Blind Creek Forest it have made an ideal site for a year-round village, sheltered from north winds by the Hogsback in the winter. Most native bands in the area had camps near the river in warm seasons where they lived on fish. In winter, the band would move inland to seek shelter and game in the forests.

The first pool in the chain called Blind Creek is right beside Fleming Creek and at a point some 30 metres upstream from the present mouth. The “bed” of Blind Creek is about five meters above the bed of Fleming Creek. The diversion, if it ever happened for the reason given, would have been a pretty dramatic event, with a cataract forming very quickly, then eating its way upstream. Stream hydrology dictates that a watercourse will lengthen over time to distribute its energy as evenly as possible along its length. In succeeding decades the creek lengthened as more bends and loops developed, excavating thousands of tons of soil in the process. It would have been during this time that the creek bluffs and present Fleming Creek floodplain first formed. That would put T back a few hundred years, I suppose.

The name “Fleming” commemorates the first European family to homestead in the area -- a few km downstream from here. At about that time, in 1790, the Moravian fathers, fearing for the safety of their charges, moved the Delaware people into British territory, being granted the land now known as Moraviantown.

I did nothing of note during the rest of my stay, except to gather a small sample of algae coating a tree root in the middle of the Blind Creek Forest. Back at my microscope, I found some *Desmococcus* (already logged) but found similar cells filled with “aplanospores”, possibly indicating *Apatococcus*, which would be new. I expect to find the latter genus, but it’s tricky, owing to many lookalikes.

Birds: (7)

American Crow (BCF); Black-capped Chickadee (Tr); Canada Goose (TR); Dark-eyed Junco (Tr); Northern Cardinal (BCF/W); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr); Wild Turkey (BCF/E)

Phenology: Property continues to be snow free.

IMAGES:



FinePix

A resting flock of Canada Geese takes off at the merest noise. Although it is not obvious from this image, already zoomed to its limit, most of these birds are already in flight.



This Google Earth image enables us to map the chain of pools that form Blind Creek. If it was once the continuation of Fleming Creek, it flowed behind the Hogback, emptying into the Thames about a km downstream from the new mouth that formed later. The last few hundred metres of Fleming Creek are shown in red and Blind Creek is shown in yellow. Green polygon marks the Middlesex/Elgin county line.