

Date and time: Saturday February 21 2015 2:20 - 3:30 pm

Weather: Pr NA; RH 81%; BP 101.7 kPa; overcast, lt snow; calm; T - 4° C

Activity: Impasse! Trekking in deep snow.

This was the only day of the month, it would seem, when Newport Forest would not be in the grips of a deep freeze and therefore worth visiting. However the property gate was snowed in rather heavily, as shown in the image below; it would have taken considerable effort to clear and open, even enough to squeeze through. Thus Brian (our assistant) and I decided simply to climb over the gate instead,



plunging into several feet of snow on the other side. I thought that perhaps the snow on the access track (leading to a rise in the distance) would be shallower, but it was still a good foot or more in depth and tiring to walk because of its density and double crust. I had to be careful about exertion because of an aneurysm in my aorta (still awaiting an operation). By the time I got to the distant rise, I was tuckered enough to recognize my limit, so I suggested that Brian continue on, change the trail cameras, and check on conditions himself.

As Brian disappeared over the hill and down into the lowlands, I made my way slowly to the edge of the creek bluffs to look down. No creek was visible, being entirely frozen over and snow-covered. I then pondered what could be retrieved biologically from today's abortive visit. Aha! Plants in winter! I staggered about capturing skeletons of Goldenrods, Asters, Queen Anne's Lace, Yarrow and Teasels. However, having difficulty distinguishing species of these plants when living and green, I was helpless with shrivelled specimens. Was that a Gray Goldenrod or was most of its stem simply buried??

I must admit to never having seen quite this much snow on the property over the 15 years we have been visiting. With mixed feelings I compare my satisfaction at having correctly predicted the climate with the inconvenience it has imposed.

It took Brian a good half hour to complete his foray to the Lower Meadow and when he returned, his face was pale and he complained: “Jeez! I’ve never felt my ticker beating like this! I gotta stop for a while.” Thus we paused before trudging back to the gate, two temporary invalids. As we went, Brian explained the snow conditions, multitude of tracks around the trailer, and the general difficulty of getting about. Any birds? “Oh Jeez, I wasn’t lookin’ at birds.” (Brian is not a naturalist.) With little else to do, we climbed over the fence and drove away.

Phenology: non-drift snow depth in UM \approx 45 cm; depth in LM \approx 30 cm.

Readers Write:

Greg Thorn, our consulting mycologist, comments on some peculiar fungal growths I found on a log last fall, raising the possibility that the “log buttons” as we called them, would be a new species: “I suspect if it was a true *Ptychogaster*, that it looked better earlier in the year; on the other hand, it could be juvenile polypores that simply aborted growth due to unfavourable conditions.”

Climate Report:

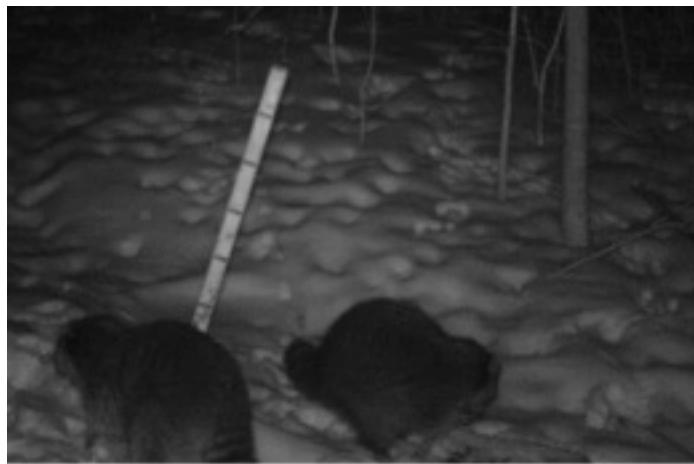
The prediction of a “T-rex winter” made by the Editor of the *Farmer’s Almanac*, as quoted in the Climate Report sent out on December 4 seems closer to the mark than the Accuweather long range forecast. In the local area (southwestern Ontario) December was certainly colder than usual but very little snow fell. However, counties just north of ours were hammered by Lake Effect and heavy snowfalls right through the month, even as were the eastern portions of North America, including especially the Atlantic Seaboard in both the US and Canada.

It didn’t take long for the climatic snow machine to catch up on the December shortfall, as now there are four- and five-foot snowbanks in our home town of London Ontario. Meanwhile, resistance to the idea of global warming takes on a more professional tone: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D-m09IKtYT4>>

IMAGES:



View of Fleming Creek flowing invisibly 200' below my position atop the bluffs. It winds around to the left (south) between the whitish slope and treed area of the Fleming Creek Forest — also part of the Newport property. Most of the vertical relief in southern Ontario arises from deeply cut ravines and valleys. All of the soil that formerly filled this valley has gone down Fleming Creek, into the Thames River and on into Lake Erie over the last few thousand years, at a guess.



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Retrieved trail cam shows two subadult Raccoons visiting the Hole on January 24 after our last visit. One wonders how they will survive the winter.



Can you identify these plants from their winter appearance alone? (Answers below) There is a book on the subject, *Wildflowers in Winter* by Carol Levine (Yale University Press, 1995), which shows hundreds of species in their withered winter condition as a guide to identification. The plants above, in clockwise order, Canada Goldenrod, Teasel, Queen Anne's Lace, and Multiflora (?) Aster.