

Date and time: Saturday February 27 2016 2:20 - 4:05 pm

Weather: Pr 31 mm; RH 78%; BP 101.4 kPa; overcast; SW 20-40 kmh; T 4°C

Activity: Property check and more tracking,

Was it a mistake to drive into the property? Our assistant Will and I drove in, expecting firmer ground, thanks to several overnight freezings. But the van slewed, as the ground was already “squidgy”, as we call it. So I decided to park on a low rise this side of the “Mudhole.” As for the mistake, that story comes later.



We walked down to the Lower Meadow, fired up the trailer stove, and set out for a walk to the river, seen above in what might be called a low-flood state. (Not over the banks or first set of terraces). The flood resulted from melting of the latest snowfall to hit southern Ontario. The local winter climate has been very much a roller-coaster affair, with large pulses of warm air from the south, driven by an unusually strong El Nino (Pacific Oscillation) off the coast of southern California.

The main purpose of today’s visit was simply to replace the trail cams and to carry out a little track ID, plus tracking if time allowed. But the snow cover was patchy and almost all the tracks we came across were eroded and, except for deer and Coyote, mostly unreadable. One intriguing double-registered* canid track may have been made by a fox, even though the paw print was indistinct. At the river landing, however, we found fresh squirrel tracks. I was tempted to follow them, but frankly lacked the energy. But with the two of us, one could fore-track and one could back-track. That way, one of us would eventually arrive at the tree where the

squirrel lived; the animal might have been on its way “home” or may have just come from there. Either way, the project could get time-consuming!

We put up birdseed to see who might come, but the wind was simply too high and no birds were about, except for some distant crows and a Northern Cardinal that Will spotted, huddling at the base of a large tree in the Blind Creek Forest.

When it came time to leave, things became dicey. The front wheels of the Freestar, even with all-terrain tires, spun and flung mud in all directions, with the van barely inching forward. Gathering speed, I was sure we would make it to the gate, but water-filled ditches slowed the vehicle once again to a crawl. A nail-biter, but we made it out.

Catching up:

Readers who would like to read past issues of the *Bulletin* are welcome to visit the archive at <http://www.csd.uwo.ca/~akd/newport-forest/> Scroll to the bottom.

IMAGES:

A friend called to inform me that an acquaintance, Dr. Henry Chapeskie who lives near Woodstock, thought that some tracks he found on his property might be those of a Cougar. I got in touch with the good doctor and he sent me some images from his cellphone. He had the presence of mind to add a ruler to the image. (Next page)



My friend thought the four depressions might represent the toes of a cougar paw, but all I could make of it were four paws — those of an Eastern Cottontail, in all probability. The gait was bounding, with 4 - 5' leaps.



Fresh tracks of an Eastern Gray Squirrel: fore paws above, hind paws below.



Too early for vernal ponds: the view above is more typical of the end of March, not the end of February. Later, this area of the Blind Creek Forest will resound with the calls of six species of amphibians.