

Trip Report  
January 2, 2003  
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I spent most of January 2 out snowshoeing, beating the brush and trying to find that route I uploaded the map a few days ago about. I kinda got skunked. the little stub of road on the map heading west was nice, but when it peters out, it stops at a small creek. I was unable to find a good spot to get across, as it was about a foot wider than I could jump on snowshoes. The ironic thing is, is that if it were narrow enough to jump across, I'd likely find some place where a bush and the snow had made a natural bridge to just walk over anyway. I started walking south, seeking to get further out in the bog toward the source of the streamlet where it would narrow or spread out, and I could probably walk right over the top of the water, held up by grass and snow. I was leery of walking along and feeling ice crack and settle under the snow, and sometimes having the snow collapse under me, and the snowshoe tracks would be soaked with water when I came back over them a bit later if I retraced my steps. We just need more snow. There being only a foot, despite it being pretty stiff stuff, it's not quite enough to cover the wettest swamps over well. Another foot, or maybe two would bridge all the ice gaps over nicely, so I could snowshoe right over them with no bother. ....so I detoured even farther south, figuring I could skirt around the edge of the bog down that way, where the trees picked back up again, but I ended up all the way back down at highway M-123. Heh. Well, hell, if I have to come that far, I might as well just walk the edge of the road, huh? I have some reason to expect, based on the land layout as I know it, that if I can get past that, I won't have much bother, other than possibly evil thick brush, for the next 4 miles or so through there.

There is a beaver dam right where the road ends, but unfortunately it's not a good enough one to cross. I kicked around the idea of dragging up enough dead brush, if I could find enough, to lay on top to walk across, but it would take half a day. Really, the deciding factor is that I'm looking for a route to pull a sled through, and I can't do that very well over a beaver dam anyway.

All is not yet lost though.

This morning, I was also out in a swamp, and tried out a new idea. I usually go without any poles of any sort, relying on my sense of balance when snowshoeing. I have once or twice tried carrying one of my lighter hiking staffs, but they are really a bit too heavy for snowshoeing. One of the ones I made to sell was, for variety, nearly 8 feet long, but fairly light, being at most not quite an inch and a half in diameter at the butt end. Having a pole like this to shove in the snow works good on 45- degree steep slopes for both up and down. Snowshoes like to turn into skies on such spots! Also, as long as I had it, I was idly poking at the ice/water spots in the swamp as I went. Most of the water that has thawed all the snow above it is only a few inches of it, with mud below, and even that is mostly froze over so hard it can be walked on with snowshoes, as it turns out. Conversely, and sort of disturbingly if you didn't know the type of terrain, most spots

with snowcover, you can easily shove the pole 4 feet into the ground or more...and there's only a foot of snow. That is amusing, but not really worrisome. The mat of weeds, cattails and brush is holding the snow up, and the snow holds you up, and the snowshoes distribute the weight over the snow. Perfectly safe.

So, perhaps I was overly worried about getting wet in the bog on the 2nd of January, and should go back with a long stick to prod at questionable areas. Perhaps I can simply strike off across the bog anyway, if I know that it's only 3" of water and not 6 feet of it before me. It just looks dead black, and is impossible to judge the depth. At worst, really, it's not \*actual\* open water, just supersaturated grass and peat marsh, so I'll not get wet over my knees, most likely. I'd just rather not have that happen 5 miles west of town.

Meanwhile, if I don't get around to finishing my trailblazing, I may just wait for 1 or 2 AM one Tuesday or Wednesday night, and I can probably get to the Lower Falls on the snowmobile trail before daylight. Probably, I won't even see a single snowmobile, or at least only a couple. From the Lower Falls, I can cut off onto the hiking trail system and get away from the snowmobiles before they come out at daylight. If I make good time, I may press my luck and continue on to the Upper Falls to make some more easy distance.

For some reason I like these kinds of projects. From a few points working ends-to-middle, I've been trying to find some sort of feasible route to hike from the north side of the river near the Upper Tahquamenon Falls to get to the NCT south of the Rivermouth. The river can be crossed pretty easily at the upper falls, the lower falls, or at a spot a half mile downriver of the upper falls. The spot downriver of the upper falls is the least desirable, as the other side is nasty swamp which would probably take a couple hours to clear the half mile to high ground if laden with a backpack. Across the lower falls is the most interesting route, as out there, I found what seems to be a 40-50-year old abandoned logging road. I was trying to follow it, but lost it somewhere while screwing around taking side trips to look at other things, so I headed back to the upper falls for the day. On the way, I discovered several white pines that were easily 4 feet in diameter at the base, and a 3 foot or so diameter yellow birch that was rather impressive. I suppose if I had a GPS, I could have marked where they are... Hmm...I dunno. I have enough problems when I use a compass, and seem to do better without it, for the most part. This indicates that I could get REALLY lost if I tried to use a GPS :-)