

Trip Report: October 6 Random Wandering Bushwhack
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By Chris Hallaxs
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It froze hard overnight, and the day dawned clear and cold. I decided from the frost and also how the day 'felt' that it would stay clear. Maybe I should have actually checked the weather, but I guess I was correct so it worked out alright. I figured it would warm up and dry off, and that I'd be sorry if I dragged a jacket along with me. I shivered a bit and got cold fingers until I walked enough to warm up, but that passed soon. I was glad I left the coat. It actually got hot later in the day.

I swear the air has more oxygen in it when it is cold like this. Summer air never feels this good to breathe. Winter air is good too.

I meandered northwest out of Paradise with no real aim. I started on the ski trail, as it's the first thing you hit going west out of town, but then cut off through the woods and picked up a local sandy road that is also snowmobile trail in the winter. I then wandered off to the north of that and looped around in the clearcut areas, before coming back onto the road to pick up an intersection where three trails come together in the middle of a couple hundred acres of clearcut. There is one trail to the west here that I tried to drive down a few years ago, but hit water and so don't know where it goes. I walked off down that. Most of the seasonal wet holes are dried up, but there was still water here that hand turned back even the four wheelers. I was, for a change, wearing shoes, because of the frost on the ground that morning, so was trying to keep my feet dry. I was able to pick around the brush and hop from log to log and go past that. Then I met a snowmobile bridge. These are odd affairs, having a steep-ish ramp on each end. The main, center bridge section stands a couple feet above the road level. A bit later, I found another one, only this one had the eastern approach (ramp) collapsed. When I stood on it, I could bounce it up and down like a diving board. They might have to fix that before winter comes.

A bit later I saw a clearing to my left, and wandered off to investigate. I found some sort of seasonal water basin that was now dry. The whole bottom of this shallow bowl was almost entirely carpeted in soft green moss, and totally devoid of brush. The brush and trees leaned in from all sides of this clearing. It was now about noon, so I sat on the eastern end of this in the sun and ate lunch. It was almost hot in the sun, let the areas still in shade still had

frost on them. The midmorning sun made a nice radiant glowing blaze of the isolated red maple here and there. These almost look like piles of hot coals suspended against the sky. They are so bright with the sun shining through the leaves, it would seem that they should hurt to look at. Most trees are still green, if rather yellow looking, but there are a minority of trees that are in full peak color right now. The tamaracks have not turned yet, but they won't do that until mid November, if I remember correctly.

From there, it was only a mile or so to a northward-running logging road about five miles west of Paradise that is called "widewaters". I turned left/south and walked down this for a bit through the swamp part, and then left to go off to the side as soon as the woods dried up. East-west creeks blocked my path in places, and these kept turning me back to the road to get around them.

I still didn't have any real goal, but now I was starting to walk around the tops of the hills in the clearcuts, finding there were still a good supply of blueberries up there. By now, they have been frozen a couple times, and also started to ferment slightly and so are very soft and sweet. In the course of this wandering, I ended up at the far back corner of a clearcut, and could see through into another open area through the distant trees. Having filled myself with enough blueberries for now, and also not having ever been in this section of woods, I decided to go take a look.

I picked up another logging road that when I followed it off southwest, brought me into a clearing known locally as the "CCC/prison camp". Apparently at various times, this was a POW prison camp, and also a Civilian Conservation Corps camp. I've never been able to dig up much any info on the POW camp aspect of the history. Actually, I don't quite have enough to verify that it ever was such a thing. Just suggestions of it. Information on these in general is sparse for some reason.

Walking the road seemed dull today, so I paralleled it to the east, eventually crossing M-123 and going south down Preacher Lake road. This is a swampy dirt road that has one of those signs at the highway that says "Seasonal Road: NOT snowplowed by the Chippewa County Road Commission" Apparently the point of this is so that if loggers or someone else happens to open it up, tourists don't drive down it, get snowed in, and then go Donner Party out there waiting for someone to come plow them out.

The road got boring again (this wasn't much of a day for roads for me) and I followed a thin ATV track off into a big sandbowl. Now here was

a curiosity. A refrigerator. A GE refrigerator. Heck it still had a mostly readable "EnergyGuide" sticker on the side. It gets better. I walked around to the other side, and the door was open, and in it were the stinking mummified remains of two ducks and what seemed to be an 18" carp. Oh. And two black bagels in a plastic bag. I stood a couple feet upwind in front of the door and puzzled at this. Did someone have a refrigerator at home that got this stuff left in it, and they dumped the entire thing here rather than clean it? Were they running it here off a generator? Did the fish and ducks get put here after the fact? The animals looked fairly well preserved, but they were mummified, and inside the fridge, wouldn't get rained on, so maybe they would look fairly unchanged for a decade like that.

I mostly did a some half dozen or more random wanderings and giant loops out in the big to the west. I found that I could walk across the spongy, treeless sedge bog and not really get my feet wet, so I tracked deer and moose and bear tracks all over out in the marshy grasslands. Walking on this stuff is tiring. It's like forever walking on knee deep pillows.

There wasn't too much of specific notable interest out here. In the middle of acres of this grass, a quarter mile from anything else, there was a tiny spot of ground 6" higher than the rest, which was dry enough to have a half a dozen shrubs and a couple of stunted trees. In the middle of this was a foot-high anthill. This gave me some pause, too. The ants could only dig down maybe 6" or 8" before they hit the water table, I would think. On the other hand, the fact that they had hauled up enough dirt to make this mound suggested that they had actually gone much farther. Was the whole network of tunnels spread out just under the surface of this little island, just about big enough for me to lay down on? Maybe the ground is impermeable, which come to think of it, is usually the case, and hence why these swamps exist. Perhaps the ant tunnels go down six feet, but water does not enter them. I briefly considered taking my knife or something and doing some digging to find out, but decided not to bother them.