

Trip report: "Mucking About"

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Parts of the swamp lakes in the peat bogs have dried up in some places, and you can wander around out in them. It is a lot easier going to wander across flattened mats of dried water vegetation, or even through knee deep mud and water than it is to try walking through the endless expanses of waist-high brush and moss that is in most places. These low spots sometimes come in loose networks, so you can walk from one to the next to the next and cover a couple miles.

One of the most interesting things I found was a water lily root. I was walking along, and my feet were going about 8-12" into the mud, and my foot caught under something. It felt like a branch. I was hundreds of yards away from anything like a tree, so reached into the mud to pull it out. It resisted, but I pulled harder and out it came with a splatter of black pudding...only it was green, 2 1/2" in diameter, looked sorta like a pineapple, and had hairy white roots all over it. Looking around for what it belonged to, I saw a couple pathetically wilted lily pad leaves crumpled up and yellow. I felt in the mud and traced the rest of the root to these, also noticed there was one hell of a network of these massive roots down in the mud. Where they cross, they seem to fuse together, so by feel anyway, it appears to be like a network of rebar. The roots themselves have a very tough outer shell, but most of the inner core is something like polyurethane foam in consistency. In fact, the chunk of root I had pulled up floated like cork, which is strange when you consider that it should normally never be above the water.

I guess I've never attempted to dig up lily pad roots before, either because they grow in nasty places, were too deep, and because I didn't want to purposely disturb them. I'm wondering if they are edible, though? There was a fair amount of moose tracks through the mud too. In fact, you kind of wanted to be careful of them, because placing a foot in one meant you'd fall into the huge hole it left. I seem to recall that moose eat lily roots. Something eats them, anyway. Some bug or worm or the like had gnawed out large areas of it, it looked like.

En route to the dried-up seasonal lakes, I ran into the other usual things, like the odd patch of floating swamp grass. Step on it, and it starts slowly, steadily dropping out of sight, with you on it, amid a busy bubbling of hydrogen sulfide. Kind of like an elevator. "Going down!" Step off, it floats back up. Repeat at will. I wondered how deep the hole underneath this was, the better to wonder whether or not I should be playing on it or not. I shoved my staff straight down through the grass mat and then shoved my arm in after it most of the way to the elbow without encountering anything much in the way of resistance. Interesting. *GRIN* The odd thing is, this little pit amidst the tag alders and grass hummocks wasn't more than 6 feet wide, so getting out of it wouldn't have been that tough. Still, stepping into such a thing by surprise would be nasty. It's not visually obvious, as it has almost the same sort of waist high grass growing on it that the solid spots do. It pays to prod around in front of you before stepping, if not even to prod at

ever prospective place you intend to step, first. This is somewhat interesting, but it is tedious. Don't get the impression I spend all day doing this kind of thing. I just go through such areas going to somewhere else.

The majority of the day was spent on good solid dry ground, or at least mud with a very predictable foundation under it somewhere.