

Trip Report: The Crazy Yooper Strides Again
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Friday afternoon I went off in search of a lake I saw on a map sometime in January I think it was. I was not readily able to snowshoe to it because I had to get across a small creek which was a bit too wide to jump. I figured I could wade or something come spring, so that was my mission for the day: to see that lake.

The lake is small, and apparently has no name. For the curious who have mapping software, it's in the extreme northwest corner of Section 23 of Township 49 North, Range 6 West (or "T59NR6N S23" I've seen such info formatted on survey markers I've run across in the woods)

The temperature was about 52, and it was sunny, with a slight filmy haze to dull the blue a bit was all. Knowing I was likely to be walking through water a lot of the time, I ditched the shoes before leaving the house. Ah! Now that's more the thing! It felt so good to FEEL where I was going again. Sticks, ferns, reindeer moss, sand, pinecones all crunching underfoot. Cool ground, warm ground, wet ground, frozen ground, etc. Yet more input to throw in along with the sights, sounds, and smells. It's also so much quieter. I see more wildlife this way, usually.

The destination is roughly six miles out of town to the west, Perhaps slightly more by the time you throw in how the trails I took wiggle around a bit. I chose to take the snowmobile on the south side of the highway out. Sections were flooded, but I just walked through. Most of the larger floods were no more than knee deep. The biggest one I found would almost qualify as a small lake, and I failed to pay enough attention to the bottom, and slipped off a ridge down under the murky water, and fell in a hole up to my waist. The water was cool, but not actually cold. I dried out so only the cuffs of my pants were still wet an hour or so later, though I kept walking through more water all the time, so the bottoms never had a chance to fully dry. In some places, the water is warm. Some places it still has slush floating in it, and that is so cold it's painful to walk through--somehow even worse than walking through the remaining areas of snow. The liquid has superior contact and therefore is able to suck out heat faster than the solid granules of ice, I would guess.

About four miles out, the snowmobile trail also parallels the north side of the highway, giving you a choice. For no real reason, I

crossed over to follow the other side instead. I was occasionally seeing four-wheeler tracks in the mud and sand, but I was often wading through water that had turned them back, I could see. This amused me. I *AM* the Ultimate ATV! The soft mud held lots of raccoon and coyote tracks, with a couple fox tracks here and there. No deer tracks. There was still a good deal of snow around, but it was clearly in the extreme minority compared to bare ground now.

After crossing a rudimentary county road, an old logging road heads west as far as the creek I would have to get across. Some maps show the road continuing on the other side of that creek, but it no longer does. Even the bit of logging road is sort of closed, in that the 4 foot deep roadside ditch cuts across the entrance. I waded this, and didn't walk far before I saw rabbits, still with traces of white in their fur. I was able to stand still and watch two of them moving around a bit over 20 feet away and apparently unconcerned that I was there. This I found odd for two reasons. I have made some half-assed attempts to hunt them in the winter, and haven't been able to get closer than somewhat over 100 yards to them at best. They are supposedly fairly easy to get with a .22, but I haven't learned the pattern of it, nor have I really expended hardly any effort at finding it out, really. The other thing about seeing these rabbits is that one previous spring I looked down at my feet and was surprised to see a rabbit sitting there a couple feet away. After making some noises and such, I literally sat down on the ground at arms' length from it and talked to it for a few minutes before getting bored (it wasn't much for conversation) and moving on. It didn't even do much more than idly hop once a few inches away when I stood up. That one had also had touches of white still. This leaves me wondering if they are for some reason "tamer" in the spring, and if so, why? Another possible factor is that I was without shoes both times.

The road west toward the creek had a long stretch that was ankle-to-knee deep for probably a full quarter mile in one stretch, with other random flooded spots. Most of the water here was not only warm, but warm enough to feel nice. Even the mud in the bottom of the water was warm. This too had turned back some ATV's. Maybe even the same ones. I flushed some more grouse as I walked on--I was seeing a lot of them out in the sun today. They're apparently solar-powered. :-)

I recalled that the creek had a beaver dam in it right at the end of the road. It was possible that it had washed out, though. Indeed, when I got there, I saw in the patterns of the dry grass that that water level had at some point in the previous week or two had raised the little 4-foot wide meandering peat bog trickle into a sprawling,

expansive semi-lake which had been at least three feet higher than its current level. The beaver dam was still there, though as it had been in the winter, it was a rather leaky, rudimentary one. Using the staff poked at the river bottom to steady me, I made three shakey steps across wobbly stumps and half-floating logs. Then there was a couple hundred feet of black mud, water, tufts of grass, and brushy tag alders. This stuff is sort of fun to walk in because it's springy. Your feet sink in six inches or so, squishing black mud and cold water out of the grass, but it springs back and sucks down again when you walk on. Odd deep holes just big enough to swallow your whole leg are here and there for some reason, and need to be watched for if you are trying to not get totally wet.

Once on the other side, there was a nice dry ridge of red pines with a needle carpet beneath, and almost no underbrush. I briefly prowled around looking hard for any trace of abandoned road to pick up, but didn't have any luck. It was possible it had been gone so long that it now had full size trees growing in it. I gradually started just heading approximately toward where I thought the lake should be, though was still keeping an eye out for any signs of a road. My route was taking me off the high ground and down into a maple swamp, where trees stood in a seasonal lake. Where there was not knee deep ice cold water, there was still several inches of total snow cover down in the thick shadow of the woods here. The wind coming out of the north carried the damp foggy feel of more melting snow which must be in the area. I was just about ready to give up, since with the sun getting lower, the temps were dropping back to near 40 already, and I still had to walk home through water. ..but then I found an oddly-shaped patch of water with perfectly parallel opposite edges. Heh. The road! Well, no... it petered out again, but now I was nearer the higher ground with the red pines again, and so decided to go off-course a few hundred feet in order to stick with that. After a bit more west, I found the remains of road again, here and there. Not enough left to be continuous, but enough to piece together. Turning around back to the east, I noticed for some reason I could only see the road facing west. I would probably not be able to follow it back out. Some combination of the angle of light and the faintness of the trace of it made it only visible from a certain viewpoint. Oh well. I don't probably need it to walk back out.

I was able to fairly easily follow this to the small lake. The lake has a beautiful dry red pine ridge at least halfway around it, which gradually rises to maybe as much as 60 feet above the lake on the far southwest side. It could be a nice secluded camping spot, since it cannot be driven to. I didn't even see any beer cans, so apparently duck hunters don't even come in the fall. The only bad feature is

that there isn't a convenient way to get to the water. I had to walk out through a knee deep mat of brush, moss, and water before stepping out into the lake itself. This water was surprisingly warm too--only mildly cool, and I stood in it for a few minutes looking at the whole lake. The whole south side---the north side of the ridge that round halfway around it, was still solid white with snow. I stood totally still in the water for a short while, wondering if I'd see a fish jump, perhaps, or maybe note some other evidence of life. I thought if I saw a loon, I'd know there were fish, but I don't think loons are quite back yet.

It seems totally surrounded by that mat of spongy moss-and-brush that is only approachable on foot if you don't mind wet feet. Pretty typical for a bog lake, actually. I tried to guess whether it might have fish or not, but it's hard to say without having something to guess the depth by. If it is too shallow, it will freeze out in the winter. Something about the way the edge of it is, makes me think that perhaps it dries up mostly in the summer, yet the fact that it's on the maps indicates it must be permanent.

It was getting late and colder, and I had walking to do. I headed back into the woods, and as expected, was totally unable to find the remnant of road from this direction. I zigzagged in the swamp just off the margin of red pine ridge for a few minutes before deciding to just take the ridge back and see how close it would get me. It curves out of the way a bit, but does come right back around to the beaver dam where I had crossed. If I had known what I was doing at first, the easy thing to do is simply always seek the highest ground as you head vaguely west, and you can't miss the lake, because you'll end up on that high ridge that curves around the south side. A canoe could, I think, be carried out there without too much hassle. The red pine ridge is, as I said, pretty much brushless in the understory. This ridge might sound like the totally logical place to have first looked, because if someone were to put a road in, wouldn't it be there? I don't know why, but the short answer is "no, not necessarily". I suspect a lot of the very old logging roads were only used when frozen in the winter, because they have a strange tendency to go through the most atrocious black pudding quagmires that would nearly suck down a modern log skidder, let alone whatever equipment they had 80 years ago or more.

I have some dim hope that perhaps that ridge goes farther west, and extends a useful distance out into the mostly impassable Betsy/Sheephead bog area, but I doubt it. I may well go back to explore this. The way this usually goes though, is you follow a ridge out into the swamp for up to several miles, and then it just suddenly

stops leaving you on one last knoll looking into miles of flat bog with nothing more in sight. ...so you then have to walk back, sometimes to pick the next one over so you can follow THAT one out a couple miles before it does the same :-)

Upon reaching the creek again, I aimed for the sound of running water, knowing that would lead me right to the beaver dam. It did, but not to the dam I thought. Turns out there is a long wind old beaver dam that one can walk on and even possibly keep dry feet if they have good balance. At the very last there is a bit where you have to make a long hop where the creek cuts through it, but I stuck my staff in the bottom of the river and shoved over it. I noticed the bottom was actually hard, and only about 4 feet deep which I thought was unusual. A lot of times, these tiny, narrow, black bog streams are to be treated with much caution. I've found ones 2 feet wide that I can't find a stick or tree long enough to reach the bottom of.

It got cold fast that night going home from the lake. I noticed that before dark, the mud around the wetter spots was already freezing hard. I was glad I'd thrown a jacket and gloves in the backpack for the hell of it.

After having crossed the creek and backtracking the road home, I found fresh deer tracks. The first of the year. Not over a half mile later, I saw a second set, which were also heading north--apparently the annual northward movement of the deer has reached the area, and even during the couple hours or whatever that I was out at the lake. Shortly after the second deer track, I found a moose track that was relatively fresh, but only in terms of days. I apparently walked right by it walking in was all.

Nothing much to report on the way home. I swear at one point about halfway back that I could clearly smell Lake Superior on the north-northwest wind. There was just one last little surprise. Just cut over onto the local ski trail for the bit in toward town, and ended up having to walk over a quarter mile of snow which I hadn't guessed would still lie in the trail. "Okay, Me, we'd like our shoes now..whose bright idea was this? Me? Don't look at me, it was You. No You didn't do it, it was Myself. Myself says it was I." Oh well. It wasn't far, and it had frozen back up so I could walk across the top, and I've done worse (er..stupider) things, so no huge deal. In any case, even if it was a problem, despite how cold it was getting, when I got back to the pavement at just after 10pm, the blacktop was still warm.

There's a similar lake, somewhat bigger, a mile to the north and half

to the east of that one that is labeled "Goose Marsh". Maybe I'll check that one out soon too.