

January 11, 2020

By Ron Prickett

It was a cool day with a brisk breeze at times when 16 Soo Nats and a couple of welcomed guests pushed upward to the top of the ridge that lay above Maple and Quinn lakes. The scenery is awesome. You press upwards around the base of the ridge and while you do this you look back at the forested valley through which the Searchmont high-way meanders.

Along the logging road we followed up to the top, we paralleled a precipitous rock cut. Looking across the creek on our right to the rock face on the next ridge we observed brown lichen clinging for life. At several spots the trail of rolling snow balls were observed tracking down the snowy cliff face resembling a mini avalanche. It was easy to imagine they represented the tobogganed path of a playful river otter sliding down to the creek.

A wildlife tree was spotted covered with giant chiselled holes evidence of the mighty sharp pounding of a pileated woodpecker. Along the way we observed in the snow several tracks of feeding ruffed grouse with their snowshoe like feathered feet. One even did a flyby over the heads of our adventurers.

Dave gave a brief lesson describing the feeding behaviour of grouse. They eat all day storing their gathered food in their crops then dive into the snow to create a cozy burrow for the night and spend the evening leisurely dining on their food in their gizzards and digestive system. One of their favourite foods is the female catkins of speckled alder which contain more energy and nutrients in their fertilized seeds than the male catkins.

Nestled behind a giant fallen tree covered in a metre of snow, we settled in for a quick lunch. The sun came out and gave us a bit of warmth to combat the cold that several of us were feeling. We could see as we nosed two old trees covered in a multitude of polypore fungi.

We then proceeded down the back side along Maple Lake and skirted the shoreline of Quinn Lake out on the ice with another great vista. We joined the logging road that had been travelled by a snowmobile so the trail was smooth and leisurely back out to the starting point. A great day in the woods.

Thank you to Val and Karen for breaking the trail up the ridge. Thanks to Leslie, Mary Ann and Jeff who shared their mitts and warmers to those who needed a little respite from the cold. Thanks, Val, for a great choice for another Soo Nats' adventure into the forest.



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