



**Outing Report: Fort St Joseph
XC Ski and Snowshoe
Saturday, February 15, 2020
by Chuck Miller**

Fort St Joseph - XC Ski and Snowshoe



On the way to Fort St Joseph we were stopped along the road to let a deer cross and later half a dozen wild turkeys – this was a good omen that wildlife was on the move; or as the surprises and changing circumstances continued - what people called Murray Moments.

The day was also dotted with lots of fun moments. One happy circumstance on our arrival was meeting the park naturalist and her husband who (or should I say HOO) were looking for a Great Gray and Barred Owls that had been seen in the area – but they had not had any luck – but told us they had seen the owls along the access road about 2 weeks earlier. They also updated us on walking conditions – i.e. the trails had not been cleared for the winter. We did encounter a few blow-down trees but these we easy to step over or bypass.



XC skiing and snowshoeing conditions were good and sinking deep into the snow was rare – making for easy going – our group of 14 started by walking (skiing) down the access road for 1.5 km as it had been recently plowed into a stiff SW wind. No owl. We then turned north at the Raines Point Trail connector to the Cemetery Trail.

A fox or several foxes had been out on the road and left tracks in the overnight dusting of snow. A Hairy Woodpecker made an appearance. Tracks were abundant along the Raines Trail (a lowland area) with Wild Turkey , Snowshoe Hare, Red Fox, Deer Mouse, Ruffed Grouse, Otter and even Moose – or was it two moose – a cow and a calf.



Wild Turkey



Deer Mouse



Otter

David interpreted the moose tracks and behaviour – noting that if we found droppings we may want to spend some time looking for a bedding site – as a morning moose ritual would generally suggest that the two might be in the same area. Will - went looking and a scat pile was located. We did not find the bedding site. David also offered some moose scat interpretation – looking into the finer dietary fine points.



One of the finer dining points was a demonstration of how a moose might scrape the bark of small maple tree with its teeth.

Rather than sample maple bark we decided to stop for a lunch of a different variety.



A Black-backed Woodpecker had also dined at our lunch spot.

Shortly after lunch we joined the Cemetery Trail.





Along the trail is a cemetery where soldiers and fur traders were buried between 1796 and 1812.

We were then back on to the access road – the wind had picked up while we were in the forest and it had started to snow.

We moved on to Fort St Joseph where we got a feel from the big wind out of the SW how isolated this place might have felt in times past. We took refuge in one of the ruins for a group photo.



The snow was getting heavier and the winds stronger as we headed down the North Channel back to Raines Point and on to La Pointe Point.



Leaving Fort St Joseph



Headed for Raines Point



Brief Stop at Raines Point



Into the Hardwoods La Pointe Point

Into the Hardwoods at La Pointe Point. That was an owl that flew!



Over There

The spirits are swirling – maybe Murray is with us today.



Great Gray Owl

Photos by Chuck Miller, Barb Scott