



Outdoors

WHAT TO DO IN WINTER

by Michael Rosen

Mais...la solitude. I don't suppose too many Canadians outside of Quebec are familiar with the recording artist Leo Ferre, or one of the tunes he sings, entitled "La Solitude". If you ever get a hold of the disc that cut is on, grab a dictionary and listen. It might blow your mind.

So what is this, an article about records and singers, or one about the outdoors? Hang on to your pantaloons, I was just going to tell you something about "La Solitude". The fact is, the french word "solitude", can mean two different, but in retrospect not so different, things to a francophone. It can be translated as the english word "solitude", but it can also mean "wilderness". Solitude and wilderness. Something tells my anglicized brain that they do indeed go together. What better place to look for solitude than in the wilderness.

When I say "wilderness", I'm not necessarily talking about the kind of place where the only evidence of man within a 50 mile radius is an oil rig

(excuse the cynicism). I'm talking about any woodlot, any bog, any place, in fact, where man and his space-age trappings are not immediately apparent. Kevin Moore, the dipstick, informs me that even the Halifax area has such places in proximity.

Have you ever even considered trying snowshoeing or cross-country skiing? Why not? It only takes five minutes for the average person to learn to keep his snowshoes from knocking as he walks. Takes ten minutes if you're pigeon-toed. For Kevin it took two hours. And if you've never donned a pair of cross-country skis then let me assure you that there is nothing to it at all. Ever hear tell of Jackrabbit Johannsen? Herman "Jackrabbit" Johannsen skis part of the annual Montreal-to-Ottawa run each winter. He did it last winter and I haven't the slightest doubt that he'll be out there again this winter. Jackrabbit will be 99 this coming August.

And while you're walking you can be doing all the other naturalist things at the same time: bird-watching, poop-collecting, freez-

ing, picture-taking, freezing, reading signs in the snow, etc. Don't give up the scene just because it's a little cooler outside; there are definite advantages to the wintry months. If you're keen on scats and stuff like that, as Kevin is, then winter's the best time to collect. It's a simple matter of contrast. In summer the stuff blends in with the fallen leaves of the year before, but in winter it just about screams at you to pick it up. For obvious reasons.

I'm not so much of a poop man myself, but one thing that's always, fascinated me is castings. Many predatory birds, such as crows and ravens, and all raptors (hawks and owls) regurgitate pellets of indigestible material. For example, a barred owl will pass the night feeding on mice and other small mammals and then spend the next day leisurely sitting in a cedar, belching and occasionally ejecting cylindrical masses of fur and bones. In Laval, Quebec, whence I hail, many of the farmland woodlots house two very common species of large owl, the barred and the great-horned (for the scientific terminology fanatics that's *Strix varia* and *Bubo virginianus*, without mentioning any names, Kevin). The neat thing about these two species is that they often return to the same tree for a good day's snooze. Castings in the snow around the bases of these trees gives them away. Once I located these trees I made repeated visits. I'd collect the castings (bring some Baggies), and then later I'd use a couple of probes to dismantle them on the kitchen table. Doing this over a period of several winters gave me a pretty good idea of the prey distinctions the owls made - all kinds of thesis opportunities here for some budding young Dal biologist. Three four-inch barred owl castings I

dissected coughed up the skulls of 44 *Peromyscus* (either deer or whitefooted mouse - they were both common in the area), 4 shrew skulls (of unknown species), and the skull of a long-tailed weasel. The great-horned owls tended towards bigger stuff like squirrels and things with wings.

What about bird nest-collecting; have you ever tried that? Winter's the best time for that too, for several reasons. First, and most important, you won't be displacing the builders; at the very moment that you'll be freezing your fingers trying to disentangle the structure from the surrounding maze of twiglets and branches they'll probably be stuffing their napes with Jamacian marsh flies. Just about all songbirds build new nests each year, so you don't have to worry about causing them any extra work next spring. A word of caution, though. Some large predatory birds begin to nest as early as March, so you should cease all collecting before then. Another advantage to winter nest-collecting is that, as in the case of scats, it's easier to see them (in those instances where the nest was built in a deciduous tree).

It seems as if every second naturalist is on the photography bandwagon these days. There are two reasons why winter is cheaper for photography. First, there's no need for colour film, just about everything out there will be black, white and gray anyhow. The artsy-craftiest winter photos I've ever seen were in black and white. And if you're shooting black and white you can do your own developing; and that's a money-saver too. Anyone can do it - there are simple kits available in just about every photography shop. Don't worry if you're negative is slightly under- or over-exposed, it really doesn't matter, ask Kevin.

Many of his pictures are badly exposed, but he has another word for it. He calls it "artsy". You too can demand artistic freedom.

If I had more space I'd ramble on and on, because there is a lot the nature-freak can do in the bush during the crisp months. Like tracking, or making plaster casts of prints, or collecting the twigs and buds of different kinds of



plants, and so on and so on. But do you really have to have a reason to be out there? Isn't just being out there enough? About a hundred years ago, long before the eco-crisis, and oil rigs and the Sierra Club, Henri David Thoreau said: "We need the tonic of wilderness." Well, maybe some do and maybe some don't, but how do you know until you've tried? It's too bad that I'm preaching to the converted (in all-probability), because it's really to the non-convert that this last paragraph is addressed. For me, the sheer tranquility of a clear, crisp, windless winter day in the woods is rejuvenating. It might be for you too. Vive la solitude!

Dal loses to Braves 104-97

by Joel Fournier

Playing the type of basketball that was thought to have been virtually eliminated from the Studley Campus, the Dal Tigers were trampled by the Husson College Braves, from Bangor, Maine on Friday night to the tune of 104-97. Both teams played with little inspiration in the first half, neither being able to generate much momentum or sustain any offensive motion. The Tigers however, who looked particularly lax and threw enough bad passes in the half to complete their quota for the remainder of the season, came out the worst, being down by a 53-41 count at the 20 minute mark. To coin a phrase, they were repeatedly caught "flat footed" in the front court and were burned badly by a combination of alert Husson fast breaks and the inside, outside shooting of forward Jim Trynham. Trynham, who somehow gives the impression that he'd be

more comfortable in business suit than a basketball uniform, was the best man on the court as he came through with super 37 point effort. He was aided by teammates Ray Clark and Ish McKitchen who finished with 16 and 14 points respectively.

In the second half, the Tigers came out playing the type of basketball they're capable of and in 7 minutes, outscored the Braves 20-8, tying the game at 61's. Bruce (Dive-bomber) Cassidy, who regularly loses 20% of his body tissue on the gym floor, began to show old form and power under the boards. In addition, Kevin Kelly began to hit his soft jumpers and Bob Blount began penetrating with regularity. The Tigers had four double figure scorers, with Kelly once again leading the way with 26, Blount with 20, while Mike Donaldson and Bob Fagan chipped in with 12 apiece.

While Husson looked deceptively poor, they do

possess a prolific offensive capacity which has earned them a seventh place ranking among New England small colleges. There seems little doubt, however, that if the Tigers had stuck to their game and their offense, the final result would have been reversed. Although there were some good individual performances, on the whole they were isolated and failed to blend together.

Getting back into Atlantic conference action this week, the Tigers will be part of a big double header at the Forum on Tuesday Night playing the unpredictable St. F.X. - X-Men, while on Friday night, they will duel once again with the Huskies at Saint Mary's. So if you're interested in seeing some fine basketball action tomorrow night, why not walk on down the street and lend some vocal support.

From experience, I can tell you that, especially at S.M.U., it can be a very positive factor, from the players' point of view.

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