

Bowron Lake Winter Circuit February 3 – 11, 2007

Full Circuit Trip by Tony Bouwmeester

Weather, snow, ice and travel conditions:

Saturday, February 3, 2007

At Bear River Mercantile (recorded by Sandy Phillips) –

- *The weather is changing - it is clouding over after 10 straight days of cool clear weather.*
- *Max overnight temp -4.5 °C - Present (8:00am) -17.0°C*
- *Min overnight temp -17.5°C*
- *scattered sky (less than 50% cloud) turning to overcast by afternoon*
- *Relative humidity 72%*
- *surface condition (of snow) - hard crust with surface hoar*
- *no overnight precipitation*

Trip Notes –

We left - started at the “trailhead” at 7:23 a.m. This was approximately 1 km West of the Park Registration Centre, but at the end of the graded road. The temperature was -18°C and there was no wind. The snow was approximately 18” deep with a hard crust on the top. The trail had been used by a snowmobile, so we were able to follow the track. We were using a backcountry type ski with a “kicker” skin. Travel was good and we arrived at the real trailhead at 7:40 a.m. Daybreak came with about 50% light cloud. On trail (packed) there was no sink, but off trail there was about a 3” sink with the skis and sleds. Towards Kibbee Lake the snow depth was 24”. We arrived at Kibbee Lake at 8:40 a.m. There was much less snow on the lake and virtually no sink. The ice was thick and firm. We had no mechanism to measure ice thickness. We were able to travel in a direct line across Kibbee Lake, however the snowmobile tracks went to the north side (outside). They ended at the end of Kibbee Lake, however ski tracks continued on the portage trail to the start of

Indianpoint Lake.
Snow/ice crystals on the lake surface.



At 9:30 we started across Indianpoint Lake, again with excellent travel on the lake ice. We arrived at the cabin on Indianpoint Lake at 12:35 p.m. It had appeared to be warming, but then we had been working also, so our bodies were warm. At 1:05 p.m. we left the cabin and began the portage to Isaac Lake. Progress was slower as the trail had to be broken. The snow depth

and conditions were similar to the previous portage trails. We arrived at Isaac Lake at 2:05 p.m.

The snow and ice conditions on Isaac Lake were similar to that of Indianpoint. The sun disappeared behind clouds at 2:30 p.m. and was not to be seen again for the next 3 days. There was between 0” and 6” of snow and the sink was only about 3” maximum on the 6” snow cover. Wolverine Bay was completely clear of snow, but was icy. As the travel had been direct and speed good, we arrived at the inner point at 4:05 p.m. We decided to head directly across the lake to

Moxley Cabin, arriving at 5:05 p.m., just as it was beginning to get dark. We had travelled 26.5 km in 9.5 hours (with a ½ hour lunch). Snow around the cabin was about 3' with a crusty top and there was about a 10" sink on skis. The temperature never got higher than -13°C throughout the day.

Moxley Cabin was a welcome sight and there was dry wood left inside for use. We replenished what we used. Required to melt snow for water.

Sunday, February 4, 2007

At Bear River Mercantile (recorded by Sandy Phillips) –

-started out overcast with a trace of snow. Had a quick hail storm which turned to big snow-flakes which turned to rain by 2:30pm

8:00am readings

- Max overnight temp -3.5*
- present temp -3.5*
- min overnight temp -18.0*
- overcast*
- RH 79 %*

- surface was ice crust with trace of new snow

- overnight precipitation .5mm

4:00pm readings

- day changed drastically*
- max temp +1.5*
- present +1.5*
- min temp -3.5*
- overcast and raining*
- RH 78%*
- 7cm new snow then rain - turned surface very wet and sloppy*
- new precipitation 9.5mm*

Trip Notes –

We woke up at 6:00 a.m. and the temperatures had changed dramatically. It was about -3°C and at 7:00 a.m. it began to snow a granular type of snow. We left the cabin at 8:00 a.m. and as the lake had good ice and little snow, we decided to walk, pulling the sleds. We were able to make excellent time as the fresh snow provided some grip on the ice. At 10:00 a.m. two of us tried skis, but had to abandon them as the warm snow was sticking to the bottom of the ski skins. It was snowing very heavily, small flakes, with a 10 km/ hr. headwind from the SW.



The ice was very thick and smooth. If there was no snow, we would have been able to skate from Wolverine Bay to the Isaac River. There was some open water near shore due to Lynx Creek.

By 11:30 a.m., the wind had died down and the new snow depth was about 3". We stopped for lunch. At 12:23 p.m. we started up again and in the afternoon averaged a speed of 4.6 km/hr. At 2:00 p.m. the snow turned briefly to sleet and then rain. This rain would continue for the next 24 hours, even though at times it was a drizzle. Large puddles began to form on the ice surface and some were up to 1/2" deep.

At 4:00 p.m. we arrived at the Isaac River cook shelter. It was nice to get out of the rain and start the stove. The heat it threw for drying of boot liners and outerwear was not very good. The snow depth in the campground was up to 4'. Snowshoes were required until the paths were packed. Sink was about 6" to 8" with snowshoes. Even after packing a path, there could be a tendency to post-hole if wearing only boots. We had a good day of travel (approx. 30 km) and turned into bed at around 8:30 p.m.

Monday, February 5, 2007

At Bear River Mercantile (recorded by Sandy Phillips) –

- rained all night, lake ice has slush and water cover .5 to 1 inch deep (varies all over the lake)

8:00am readings

- Max +3 / Present +2 / min +.5

- overcast and raining moderately

- RH 85%

- surface snow condition is very wet and slushy

- precip 9mm

4:30pm - Max +2.5 / Pres +2 / min +2

- Overcast no precip currently happening

- RH 84 %

- new precip 3mm

Trip Notes –

We awoke at 8:30 a.m., but used the excuse that the last two days were long days. It was still rain/drizzle and so the temperature was just above freezing. The Isaac River was in full flow and our goal was to reach McLeary Cabin, via the portage trail. We left at 10:30 a.m., snowshoeing all the way. The trail had many snow mounds to contend with and so it was slow going. When the trail ended (in the summer you must put in and cross the river), we decided to follow the E (outer) shoreline as far as we could. This lasted to the log jam. There were no snow/ice bridges over the Isaac River. From here we left the sleds and explored the best trail through the trees to the cabin. There were several flagging's with surveyor's tape, but these did not generally help as we would have to pull the sleds through. At 2:00 we got to the cabin, just on snowshoes and it had stopped raining. McLeary Lake had about 2" of a combination of slush and water. The temperature was just above 0°C. We then returned to get the sleds and gear. When we began pulling the sleds through the trees, it was rough going as there were long inclines and a varied up/down path.

We arrived at the cabin at 4:30 p.m. and immediately hunted firewood before it got dark. Again the cabin had dry wood inside to get the fire started. The small cabin soon became a sauna, with all our wet gear drying, but it was welcome. We again had to melt snow for water (adding to the humidity level). We hoped the night would get cold and solidify the slush as we would have to cross to the W (inside) the next day.



Tuesday, February 6, 2007

At Bear River Mercantile –

- Overcast and foggy

8:00am - max +2 / pres 0 / min 0

- RH 85%

- new precip .5mm

3:30pm - got very warm, eves dripping, surface condition soft and slushy

- change look at the temp gauge registered +7

Trip Notes –

At 9:00 the temperature was around 0° again. There were low hanging clouds in the valley. We left the cabin at 9:35 a.m. (completely dried out) and began to cross the lake. There was open water from Isaac River at one end and more open water from the entry into the Cariboo River at the other end. Even though the crossing was the longest right out from the cabin, it appeared the safest. There was still about 2" of slush and water. Rick travelled first (all of us on snowshoes), with a lead/safety line back to Gary, who was pulling both their sleds/boats. The crossing was uneventful and we gained the shelf above the lake. We now had to explore a route (without gear) for the best way around the corner



and over the hump. We arrived at an exit point from the trees just below the confluence of the two rivers. The snow was soft, but not really water-laden and sink was from 4" to 6" on snowshoes. We returned to the sleds, packed some gear into backpacks to lighten the sled load and began the "hump trek". This short route through the trees took about 1 hour, pulling the sleds. We had lunch upon arrival at the Cariboo River at 12:35 p.m. The temperatures remained just above 0°.

We were able to pull the sleds using snowshoes about .5 km before we had to leave the shore and travel through the willows, across the marsh and back to the river (when it veered to the right). The snow was up to 4' deep through the willows and there were challenging times when we hit 'sinkholes' under the bent willow branches. The marsh part was open and well frozen with about 18" of snow cover. We travelled only a short distance when the river made a sudden cut back to the left. We were out of the marsh area, but now faced a very steep incline at the river's edge. We explored half way through a narrow bank and decided that we would have to man-haul all the gear through. The sleds would not have made it loaded and pulled. The total distance on this ledge was about 1 km. The area then opened to frozen side channels and more marshland. It took 1 hr. to carry gear through and return to the sleds for more. All done on snowshoes. 2 ½ hours later, we were all through and decided to set up camp (tent) as it was getting dark (5:30 p.m.). Another long day and slow travel. Cooking and drink water available from the Cariboo River.



The good thing about it, was that there were hints of blue skies – even if they were just sucker holes. There was low “mist” cloud when we went to bed.

Wednesday, February 7, 2007

*Bear River Mercantile (recorded by Sandy Phillips) –
7:00am readings*

- overnight max +4 / pres 0 / min -5
- overcast - no precip currently falling
- RH 84 %
- snow surface is beginning to firm and ice up again
- new precip .5mm

Trip Notes –



2:30 p.m. The snow was wet, but crusted on top, with the sink being about 4" to 6".

As we did not know how long it would stay frozen over, we opted to willow whack and marsh stomp once again. We tried to stay nearer the slope of the mountain to stay away from the willows, but even then there were a lot of mounds

We awoke at 6:30 a.m. to an overcast day. Even at the riverside the overnight temperature was not below 0°, as there were water droplets on the gear left outside. We broke camp at 10:05 a.m. and traveled on an inside channel of the river (frozen and snow covered) until it turned towards the river again. We snowshoed until about



to contend with. We opted to stay away from the beaver dams and ponds. We crossed two marshes where it was easy going as the surface was level. Travel was good, but the snow was too soft for our liking.

We arrived at Lanezi Lake at 2:30 p.m. and headed for Turner Creek cabin. The lake ice was solid once again. The surface was crusty with anywhere from ½" to 6" of water underneath - due to the previous snow and rain. As a result, we were once again walking to avoid the build-up of ice under the skis or snowshoes. The sleds performed well as boats, creating a wake along the way. There were many areas where we saw concentric circles of ice cracks. We believe these to be caused by heavy snow load forcing the ice down in one area and then it would also crack in circles around the centre. The water build-up in these areas was greater in the centre than on the outer edges. The sun broke through several times.



We arrived at Turner Creek cook shelter at 4:30 p.m. It has fully enclosed sides. We used tarps to close off the doors as there was a very slight breeze. This then essentially turned into another cabin. Snow depth here was also up to about 4' in places.

Thursday, February 8, 2007

Bear River Mercantile (recorded by Sandy Phillips) –

- there is a hard crust forming but still fall through without snowshoes

8:00am - max +.5 / pres -4.5 / min -5 overcast

- RH 75%, moderate snow currently falling

- 3.5 cm new snow on board, 3mm new precip

3:35pm - max -4.5 / pres -5 / min -5.5

- still overcast and light snow falling

- RH 66%, have 4.5cm of new snow on board and 3 mm new precip.

Trip Notes –

We awoke at 6:00 a.m. to -5° and a very light snowfall, which increased before we left camp. We left camp at 8:30 a.m. and had to snowshoe to the lake. Once there, we chose to walk once again due to the 2" to 3" of slush on the lake. Just



another day with wet feet! Lanezi continued to have good ice underfoot, but accumulated 2" of snow on top of the slush. Our sleds began to get icing on the front and then became ploughs. There were several times when we had to stop and break the ice off the front and even the underside. As it was hard pulling, we switched the lead every 10 minutes. At 12:30 we had lunch at the end of Lanezi and the restart of the Cariboo River, which was frozen at this location. We were able to put on skis and continue on them for the rest of the day.

Sandy Lake had good snow and strong ice. There was more snow on Sandy Lake than Lanezi and also any of the lakes on the Eastern side of the route.

By 3:00 p.m. we reached the Cariboo River flowing out of Sandy Lake. We took to the E (inner) river bank as it was level for the most part and wide. If we were not able to do this, we would have been able to travel on the shelf just above this bank as it was generally open treed. Snow depth was about 2' with a slight crust and there was about a 2" sink on skis. There were 10 trumpeter swans on the river.

We arrived at Babcock Creek Ranger Cabin at 5:15 p.m. Snow depth here was still about 2'. There was a moose near the Cariboo River just before we arrived at the cabin. We used the cabin porch for cooking and shelter. There was little wind and only a -5° temperature (by the ranger thermometer). Our thoughts coincided with this reading so we feel we were fairly close with our other mentioned temperatures. A tree had fallen across the cabin roof. There was no way of knowing of any interior damage.



Friday, February 9, 2007

At Bear River Mercantile (recorded by Sandy Phillips) –

- On the lake there is 3 inches of new snow and then a hard crust, it holds me up without snowshoes now. Dug down to find layers - 3 in. new snow / hard crust about 1 in / slush layer 4 in. with water pooling on the ice surface.

8:00am - max -5 / pres -10 / min -10

- overcast no falling precip

- RH 72%, only 1mm new precip.

Trip Notes –

We awoke at 6:00 a.m. to a temperature of -8° and no wind. We scouted for a place to cross Babcock creek and opted to cross just downstream from the beginning of the portage route trail. We left at 9:08 a.m. and crossed in about 10" of water to the other side of the creek. We crossed on snowshoes and traveled the trail with them, as there were moose tracks and hilly sections. We arrived at Babcock Lake at 9:48 a.m. and changed to skis. We remained on skis for the full day. The temperature did not change much throughout the day, but there was about a 10 km/hr. headwind. Ice on Babcock, Skoi and Spectacle Lakes was strong, like all the others and there was 2" – 3" deep and fine granular snow. It was ideal for skiing. There were only occasional icings of the skins which required some stopping and cleaning. This was from penetration of the hardening but still slushy layer below the snow. We arrived at Spectacle Lakes at 11:30 a.m. We

lunched from 12:35 to 1:35 p.m. as we had lots of time to make it to Pat's Point cabin. We arrived at the cabin at 3:00 p.m. and again started the fire to dry things out.



The cabin is large and spacious. We appreciated the white walls as it made the whole thing brighter. The temperature stayed the same and the wind continued to blow.



Saturday, February 10, 2007

At Bear River Mercantile (recorded by Sandy Phillips) –

8:00 am - max -7 / pres -8.5 / min -10.5

- sky is broken (more the 50% cloud) some sun, light snow falling

- RH 71% / 1.5cm snow on board / 1mm new precip

4:00pm readings - max -1.5 / pres -1 / min -8

- sky is now overcast, no snow currently falling, though had another 1.5 new snow on board

Trip Notes –



Once again we awoke at 6:00 a.m. It was -5° and snowing lightly. By the time we left at 9:05 a.m., the flakes were large and there was about 2" of powder snow on the lake. As there was a solid base, we were able to ski the centre of Spectacle Lake in the quiet of the fresh snow. We saw another moose near the end of Spectacle Lakes and took the right arm (E) around the island. We stopped for lunch at the end of the island at about 11:30 a.m. and spent an hour. Just before stopping, we were hearing wolves howling. During lunch, one wolf came out on the lake, howled at us a few times, walked back and forth out of curiosity, and then went back into the trees.

Gary walked further along after lunch and saw a moose running to the north – away from the direction of the wolf. The snow had quit and we trekked on. The sun began to come out for longer periods on the trip to the Bowron River cabin, making the snow soft and hard to travel at times. Skins were icing up again. We saw 4 more moose running N bound at the end of Swan Lake. We arrived at the cabin at 1:15 p.m. and gladly dropped our gear. It was sunny and nice for a ski without gear. Several trumpeter swans flew by to land in the open water at the end of Swan Lake.

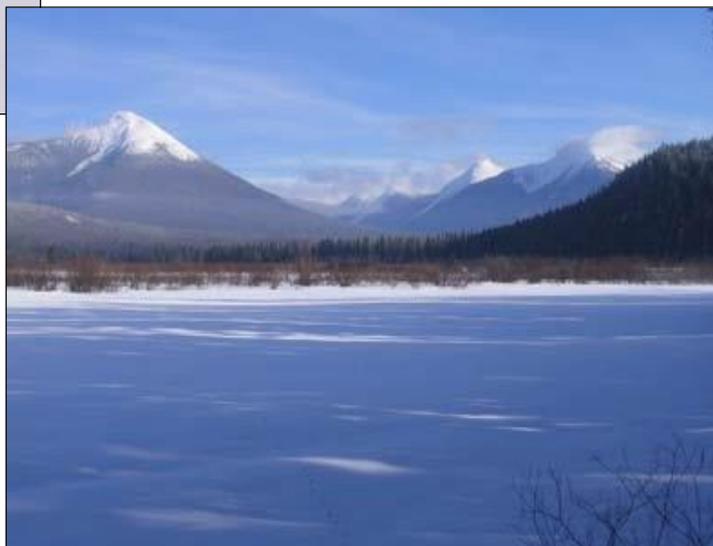
Rick was skiing down river (on the river ice as it was frozen with 2" of fresh snow) and wolvers were howling all around him. No sightings though. Gary and I skied upstream and discovered that the sloughs would be best for skiing out as they were flat and relatively clear of snow. The temperature was approximately -2° .



Rick was skiing down river (on the river ice as it

Saturday, February 10, 2007

*At Bear River Mercantile (recorded by Sandy Phillips) –
7:45am - max -1 / pres -5.5 / min -6
- overcast but no snow currently falling
- RH 70%
- trace of snow on board but none registered in precip gauge*



Trip Notes –

We awoke at 6:00 a.m. with the temperature still below 0° at about -2° to -5°. Overcast skies. We left the cabin at about 9:00 a.m. and arrived at Bear River Mercantile at 11:45 a.m. The lake ice was relatively clear of all but surface snow on top of smooth, but strong ice.

Overview –

The whole trip of 8 ½ days could have taken 1 day less, but we decided to enjoy it while we were out. The last 3 days were easy ones. We had to camp in tents only 1 night out of the 8, but were prepared for more. It all depended on the progress in relation to the location of the cabins. We had to melt snow for water for 6 out of the 9 days. Some of the melting was able to be done on the cabin/cookshelter stoves. We took one white gas stove each and approximately 6 litres of fuel each. On the average, we came back with 2 litres of fuel each. This would have been used up if we had to melt more water using our stoves.

Our ideal desired temperatures would have been between -5° and -15°C, but it got warmer than that. We did not run into anything for which we were not prepared and we had contingencies planned for things which did not occur (falling through the ice, etc.). The trip, on a whole, was not difficult. But, at times it was very strenuous. Once a decision was made or goal decided upon, we set our minds on achieving that goal. Our fortunate long distance travel days were a bonus. The short distance days were not necessarily unexpected.

We could have done without skis, even though we used and appreciated having them. We could not have done without snowshoes! Having liners in our boots which could be taken out and dried was a bonus and they are recommended for this type of travel.

Tony Bouwmeester
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