



Discovering Nature in Winter on the Crazy Horse Trail

Become a Carp Hills Nature Steward

It may be winter, but there is still much to discover on the Crazy Horse Trail. This is a great activity for families with children. You can find everything even with snow on the ground.

Rules for Discovery – Be a Good Nature Steward!

1. Stay on the Trail – You can find all of these items beside the trail. Don't go out onto ice.
2. Don't pick or break the plants – You can touch them, but please let them grow.

1. Find a White Pine



Eastern White Pine is our Provincial Tree. It is one of the dominant trees in the Carp Hills, able to grow in the acidic soil of the Canadian Shield. Most of the trees in the Carp Hills are no more than 70 or 80 years old, including the tall pine trees, due to recent fire, cattle grazing, and logging.

Identify a White Pine. There are 5 needles in each bundle. You can remember this because there are 5 letters in “White” (et “blanc”). The cones are long and elliptical.

Did you know? The tallest White Pine in Ontario is located at Gillies Grove in Arnprior in an old growth forest. It's 47 meters (154 feet) tall.

2. Look for Evidence of Red Squirrels

Many birds and mammals stay active during the winter. Red squirrels live in burrows and build a network of tunnels in the snow. The tunnels are warmer than the winter air, often slightly above freezing, and keep them hidden from predators.

Red squirrels prefer to live in conifer forests of pine and spruce like the Carp Hills. In winter they feed on nuts and seeds. They particularly like nutritious seeds in pine cones. They store pine cones in underground caches to eat during the winter.

Look for piles of pine cone scales, called “middens”, on top of the snow under pine trees. A red squirrel has been eating dinner!

Did you know? Red squirrels can eat mushrooms that are deadly to humans.





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3. Find a Red Oak Tree

Like White Pine, Red Oaks are a dominant tree in the Carp Hills, able to thrive in the acidic, rocky conditions. You will find them growing on the dry uplands and never in swamps.

Identify a Red Oak. Red Oaks retain some of their leaves in winter. So do young Beech and Ironwood trees. Don't be fooled! Red Oak leaves have many pointed lobes. Beech and Ironwood leaves are elliptical and have no lobes.

Did you know? Red Oak acorns are an abundant and rich food source for deer, mice, chipmunks, squirrels, and some birds like Blue Jays.



Red Oak (left) and Bur Oak leaves

Bonus Discovery. Bur Oak is the other type of oak tree found in the Carp Hills although there aren't as many as Red Oaks. It loses its leaves in the fall. There are a few Bur Oaks beside the trail within the first 750 meters.



Bur Oak Twig (Photo by O. Clarkin)

Identify a Bur Oak. The bark is very furrowed. The twigs are "winged". If you can find a leaf, its lobes will be round, not pointed.



Bur Oak on the Crazy Horse Trail.

Photo by O. Clarkin

4. Find Tracks in the Snow



Fisher Tracks

Many animals are active in winter. In the Carp Hills you may find tracks of: squirrel, chipmunk, deer, coyote, fox, beaver, weasel, fisher, porcupine, snowshoe hare, birds, and even racoons and skunks, who come out during mild weather.

Take a photo of the tracks with an object (like your feet) to show scale. Use one of many guides available online to identify the tracks.



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5. Look for Beaver Activity

The beaver is Canada's national animal and an official emblem. In the Carp Hills beavers are responsible for enhancing the landscape of wetlands and ponds that benefit many plants and animals. Their dams deepen ponds in natural depressions, create new ponds, and expand marshes and swamps.

Beavers remain active in winter. They live in a lodge, which is a mound of branches and mud with a den underneath. They enter and exit their lodge underwater. They keep a separate food stash of twigs to eat during the winter and may venture out from their lodge into the water to eat roots of pond lilies and cattails.



What to look for. There are many clues that beavers are nearby: gnawed stumps and downed trees; an open channel of water in an iced-over pond; a lodge on a pond covered in snow; a dam that may have water seeping through it. The trail crosses many beaver dams.

Did you know? The beaver is the largest rodent in the world, except for the capybara in South America.

6. Find Winterberry

Winterberry, also called Canada Holly, is a wetland shrub with bright, red berries. It thrives in the acidic conditions of the Carp Hills.

The berries are eaten by birds, so it may be difficult to find it in late winter. (Do not eat the berries; they can make you ill.)

There are two places on the trail to look for Winterberry: along the boardwalks beside the snowmobile trail and near the bridge on the beaver pond loop.

Did you know? Winterberry plants are either male or female. The female plants have the berries.



Photo by O. Clarkin.





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7. Find Birds

Some birds inhabit the Carp Hills forests all year.

Woodpeckers eat insects found under the bark of trees. You can often hear them tapping on tree trunks.

Large, deep, rectangular holes are evidence of Pileated Woodpeckers. You may also find a pile of wood pieces beneath a tree. Smaller Downy Woodpeckers and Hairy Woodpeckers also make the Carp Hills home.

Listen for Chickadees and Nuthatches. They eat seeds during the winter and are more common among conifers.

Did you know? The more *dee* notes in a *chickadee-dee-dee* call, the higher the threat level.

Ravens and Crows are also active in winter. Ravens are larger than Crows and make many unusual sounds like “*tok*”. Crows say “*caw caw*”. Both are scavengers and will eat almost anything.

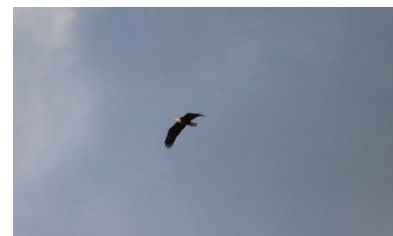
Look up in the sky. You may see a soaring hawk or eagle. Red-tailed hawks are common. A Bald Eagle has been seen in the area many times in the last two years.

Look up into the trees. You may find a roosting owl. Barred Owls are the most common. They are distinguished by their dark eyes (not yellow eyes).

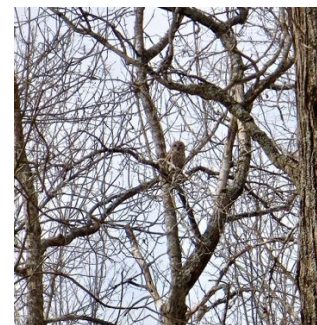
Did you know? You can often attract birds by saying “*pish, pish, pish . . .*” for a few minutes. The sound is a distress call and birds come to see what’s happening.



Pileated Woodpecker.
(Photo by A. Wong.)



Bald Eagle. (Photo by A. Wong.)



Barred Owl. (Photo by J. Makin.)

Did you enjoy discovering nature in winter on the Crazy Horse Trail? Please consider donating \$5 or \$10 to help us cover costs to operate the trail.

We are all volunteers so every dollar funds the work that we do. You can e-transfer your gift to info@carphills.com. Thank you!

- Friends of the Carp Hills

You might also consider becoming a member.

See our web site: https://carphills.com/?page_id=781