



The beckoning white birch corridor.

A Walk in the Woods: I Answered the Call

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Sunday morning, November 27, 2022, the sun is shining and the woods beckoned me. Yes, I live on the shores of Pawtuckaway Lake with the woods behind it. As I slowly recovered from a hard 'cold', my energy level was returning. I heard the call to walk to my beloved white birch corridor. I answered it. With poles in hand and my camera in my pocket, I set off into the woods.

As I put one foot in front of another, I discovered that the trail was hard to find. Yes, the frequented path that I call the Northwest Passage in sections had become elusive and obliterated. The reason was that the brilliant, vibrant, and splendid leaves of the fall foliage partly or completely hid the trail.



Find the trail 😊

My hike featured two Robert Frost moments. But first I must tell you about my Robert Frost experience. While I was a student at Tufts College, the Hill Class of 1964, at Cohen Auditorium, I heard him speak. He recited *Death of the Hired Hand* from memory. As I entered the woods, the trail bifurcated. It is the idea and spirit of “To roads diverged in a wood,”. I took the one toward my objective, the white birch corridor. As I advanced farther into the woods, I saw the annoying and threatening yellow POSTED sign informing me that I was trespassing and could be prosecuted. That reminded me of his poem *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*. It began “Whose woods these are I think I know. His house is in the village though; He will not see me stopping here.” Fortunately, I have met the owner. He did live in a distant hamlet but in these very woods. I not only had his permission to wander in his woods but I also stopped by to thank him.



The POSTED sign

Here is the POSTED land sign problem. Not only did this sign appear on my Northwest Passage route, but it is seen too frequently about town. In the last year, it was placed on a great hiking/jogging path from NH Route 156 to Nottingham town beach. It means keep out. That translates into fewer places to ramble. On one hand, I can appreciate the owner's rights and concerns. The noted poster in my area came about because of abuse of the land by now-called trespassers. These infractions included intrusions by ATVs, the cutting of hunting paths, and the stealing of wood. On the other hand, it is still less open land now available. It points out the need for more open areas, more conservation lands, and for users to be more respectful where they walk.

Once I reached the white birch corridor, I had to make a big decision. What was that? Whether to take a loop route along a dirt road home or retrace the way I just came. Both have pros and cons. I often prefer a circle path as it offers new and different vistas. Going back the same route brings with it things you may have missed along the way and new views of the same area. I elected to follow the *yellow brick* trail I had just traversed.

My decision was immediately rewarded. Behind my beloved white birch corridor, I discovered a white birch cemetery. Yes, I had been so focused on how tall the birches stood, I had failed to look down and their fallen comrades. The dead birches were a reminder of the cycle of life. How the forest can be not only the survival fittest for animals but also for plants and

trees. I could see how the decaying trees nurture new growth. How dead trees nourish the soil. It is the playing out old idea of from dust to dust and ashes to ashes. Woods provides a continuous landscape of life and death It reminds me of Laura Gilpin's poem. *Life after death*. She writes, These things I know: "How the living go on living and how the dead go on living with them so that in a forest."



The white birch cemetery



The white birch's stump speech

By retracing my steps, there was another reward. Remember the too often cliché, "don't forget to smell the roses"? In my speedy quest to reach the white birch corridor, I paid little attention to the terrain. In taking the same trail back, I noticed many things I had overlooked. It was like the old joke, "the ball kept coming toward me, then it hit me". I discovered this neat Partridge Berry plant in the middle of the trail and also in the adjacent woods.



Partridge Berry plant

The [Partridge Berry](#) is "a member of the Madder Family (*Rubiaceae*). The genus name *Mitchella* was given to this plant by Linnaeus for his friend John Mitchell, a physician who developed a method of treating yellow fever. The species' name repens refers to its trailing or creeping habit. Partridge Berry is found throughout eastern North America from Newfoundland to Ontario and Minnesota, south to Texas and Florida." I found it to look festive and just in time for Holiday Season.

I returned home renewed, excited, and fulfilled. The white birch corridor welcomed me. The woods had shown me some of its wonders. The forest exhibited the cycle of life. As Henry David Thoreau said, "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived." I went to the woods deliberately and found out many things. Thank you to the woods.