

I put in a few more miles on my homemade white ash skis today. I have had them since sometime in the 1980s, and it still gives me pleasure to glide through the woods on skis that were once a part of that woods. Today, I skied mostly in open fields and pastures, taking a look at the bee yard along the way. I wish I knew just how many miles these skis and I have traveled together. Some winters see very little skiing, especially with the erratic weather of a changing climate. During other winters, I have skied every day for weeks at a time. This year, it has been up and down, but right now, anyway, the snow is good and the going is easy.

I don't go to the woods and through the fields looking for thrills. If there is a hill on my desired route, I ski down it, but I am just as happy slogging across level ground, pushing my way through brushy woods, or exerting myself on the upward slopes. I am skiing to "look."

There is a lot to see on new snow and in the quiet spots where roads and people—and snowmobiles—don't intrude. Today, there were no tracks of wildlife to mar the smooth whiteness. I saw a few birds—some crows, a rough-legged hawk, and a large flock of snow buntings—but I mostly looked at trees. The rough bark of cherry, the graceful sweep of the soft maple canopy, the sadness of dying white ash trees, the sturdy sugar maples and the adaptable aspen—all part of the landscape that changes from year to year.

On my way home, I skied along the road for a stretch until I came to the gate on the corner that would give me an easy way to the barnyard. The snowplow had piled up a bank on the corner, and when I skied down it and into the ditch, my right ski dropped suddenly into a hole or a patch of very soft snow. I was not prepared for this, and I fell down, my ski stuck in the snow. As I floundered around, trying to extricate myself and get up, I was grateful that I had not heard a car or snowmobile approaching. My awkward escape from this prone position left me covered in snow. I was laughing, too, but mostly annoyed at having gone down so close to home after several miles of skiing that had all been in the upright position.

But, at least, I reasoned, nobody saw me. As I finally got on my feet again and headed across the field, I glanced to my left and saw a smiling face and a waving hand from one of our Amish neighbors going home from church. I had listened for engine noise, but I had not heard the horse and buggy in the quiet of the snowy

road. So much for keeping my clumsiness to myself.