

# SOME THINGS YOU DON'T SEE EVERYDAY ...

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By Kevin McGill, Cambridge Bay, Nunavut, Canada, 6 December 2008

Well, how about Frosted Ravens!!!

A couple weeks back I was walking between the Annex Building and the Post Office. I spotted this Raven flying towards me and it seemed to be sparkling. As it flew past, I noticed that it had a light coating of frost on its head and shoulders. It was headed towards the airport. So I figured it was going out to get de-iced along with the planes. Couldn't you just see it lined up behind the cargo jets?

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Now I have seen Robins before covered in snow from an early spring snowfall but this was the first time that I have seen anything like this. Since then I've seen a couple more. The winter has been slow in coming to some extent this year so that's what creates the extra frost.

Another thing that you don't see very often up here is a calm day.

Cambridge Bay is often a bit colder than other Arctic Communities even though it is more south than some. That's because there is usually at least some wind each day. However, over the last month, there have been several windless days in a row. It's kind of disconcerting but the warmer weather has been nice. I have been walking around with just jeans and a parka and my hiking boots until two days ago. Then a cold snap settled in and the long underwear went on.

And, cross our fingers while we say this, there really hasn't been a blizzard yet. People are driving their snowmobiles across the tundra and there are all kinds of rocks sticking up. I guess that way they'll know where the rocks are but I'm guessing that the rough terrain is awful hard on the machines.

I have been out several times on my snowshoes for long walks. I have been studying up on Way-finding on the tundra and I have learned a few things. One thing, don't trust the idea that you will be able to follow your own tracks back home.

I went out a while ago and turned back expecting to follow my rather distinctive snowshoe tracks only to find that in many places they were already covered in. This was with only a light breeze blowing but the snow was so fine it just drifted right in. It was also

~~just coming on to sundown and in the dusk it was hard to make out the soft imprints that were available. Good thing that I wasn't~~  
beyond sight of the big tower up here or even a small blizzard could have presented a big problem.

I learned that one way to tell your direction is that the prevailing wind comes from the northwest and it moulds the snow so that it has a "tongue" sticking back from the snow dune in the direction of the northwest. So you just orient yourself to that natural northwest compass. Isn't that special!!

Another thing that you don't see everyday is a baby fox moving in next door. A little one got separated from its mom and wandered into town to take up residence underneath the shed just outside my window. Cute little thing! At least it was a cute little thing.

Last week I was sitting at my computer and a rifle went off just outside my window. Peeking cautiously out my window, I witnessed that the local bylaw officer had summarily dispatched the little critter to fox heaven. The thing is cute little baby foxes grow up to be adult foxes and aren't quite so cute anymore inside the hamlet itself. Since then another little one has moved in. I expect that he or she will be mitten material by Yuletime. There has been over 40 foxes shot this year and there are still all kinds left ... hopefully..

Speaking of Yuletime, best wishes to you all. We were going to stay here for the season but have decided to join Joe and Lani in Kelowna and stay at a ski lodge. It's something we have wanted to do for many years. Go to a ski lodge, that is. We, of course like to see Joe and Lani any chance we get.

Okay, so back to the Arctic.

I put some new pictures onto my website. Unfortunately, they are a small format and don't do the adventure justice. It is just hard to upload pics with such a slow internet up here. Large format pictures are available on request.

One of the pictures kind of shows how big Ravens can get up here. I was walking along the road and saw some black bumps out across the tundra about 2 to 3 hundred yards away. So I headed across thinking that I could add to my collection of Musk ox pictures. As I got closer, I was surprised to find that these big bumps were Ravens on top of a hill, measuring a good two to two and a half feet tall.

Apparently there were no ravens around Cambridge Bay about 15 years ago and now they are all over the tundra.

I also added to my Arctic Hare photo collection.

As I was walking back to the road, I noticed a little flutter to my left and there was a lone bunny just sitting there watching me from about two feet away. I stopped. He looked. I looked. He looked. I looked and he got bored and started to stroll way. I got out my camera again and just leisurely followed along.

He headed over to one of the local graveyards for breakfast. I got some nice shots of him or her nibbling on some arctic cotton and other plants with the graveyard crosses as the background. It was kind of neat actually but not as neat as the next photo op.

I got to the road and was wandering along enjoying the freeze up of the river. I decided that I wanted to get a picture of the ice and rapids and the sun shining down but couldn't get it all in from the road. So instead of walking up and turning right across the bridge, I decided to walk straight and a bit to the left so that I could back track up a ridge from its base instead of climbing straight up it.

Lucky for me! As I crossed the gully, I surprised another of nature's creatures, an Arctic Fox in full winter whites. It trotted across another gully and joined its mate to do some posing for me. They just sat there posing for about five minutes, not more than about 100 feet away. So I got some great pictures. The website doesn't do them justice. If I get the chance I'm going to put some full format pictures on the website next summer and create a kind of lasting gallery of the best of the first four years in the Arctic.

The other interesting sights that I have experienced this fall couldn't be photographed really. One experience is trying to get shots of Muskoxen and recognizing that you aren't getting any closer, yet they don't seem to be moving. It's because their fur reaches down so far, you just don't see their legs. They kind of look like that video game where the icons look like badminton birdies just floating along the screen. Or maybe they have some kind of hovercraft thing going. They just seem to float out of the picture.

Then, of course, the bunnies often they look like cotton batten being blown about in the wind. They just seem to swirl around on the tundra at times bouncing here and there.

I still haven't seen a wolf yet, although other people are saying that they are running back and forth through the hamlet. I am now taking my shotgun and some cartridges with me when I am out on the tundra. Sometimes I even put the cartridges into the shotgun just for practice. Then I take them out before I hurt anything, including myself.

One thing I haven't seen in Cambridge Bay is a Ptarmigan. I saw a couple with Andy back in Clyde River but none here yet. People say there was some just up the street last week. I'll have to keep my eyes open because they are very hard to see at this time of year. About all that you'll see is a pair of beady red eyes and only if you are patient and have good luck.

So that's been my photo ops for this fall. The weather hasn't been too cold until two days ago but it hasn't necessary been pleasant either. It's been kind of like November for three months. The dark season is upon us, yet it isn't really all that dark here. There is light from about 10 AM to 2 PM. Can Global Warming change the sun position? The sun wasn't supposed to clear the horizon as of November 25th yet there was that little bit of red cresting the hill just last week. Hmmm?

And, in about two weeks, the sun starts coming back. It should prove to be an interesting winter weather-wise.

So take care, bundle up, find a fireplace and a buddy and some good movies and we will see you in the summer.



