

THE SALMON IN WINTER

The nature of the Salmon in winter depends on where you are enjoying the river. Where I live, near the head of the main river, the high water of October-November is pouring mightily over August's beaver dam. The downstream rock garden is canoeable once more and the music of the new waterfall is soothing.

Take Care Skiing & Skating

Like many other runs of the river that maintain a current, this run of the river never freezes completely. As temperatures fall, the ice advances further and further into the fast water and retreats back upstream as mild air moves in.

Where there is little current, an ice layer may form when water is high and later when the water drops, that ice may have only air for support. It won't carry much weight. If the water rises again later, it may partly fill that air gap but it still won't hold you. When your skis break through adding snow to the mix, you can become 'glued' in place.

Many runs of the river are no place to travel on the ice even in extreme cold. Especially if you break through in extreme cold. It is a good plan, when skiing (or skate touring) on any ice, to carry an easily reached coil of rope. Very handy to lend to rescuers!

Watching Beaver, Mink and Otter

Air is common under ice. Sometimes one can watch muskrats swimming just under the ice from air bubble to air bubble, using nature's scuba system, to go between 'pushups' where they can get a good long breath.

Beavers are moving under the ice, too. Their dams assure a critical depth of water under the ice so that they don't need to expose themselves to coyotes on the ice surface. By anchoring their food pile into the bottom and having a sufficient depth of water, the beavers can commute to the food supply safely under the ice and breath comfortably back in the lodge.

Slow water fishes that stay active under the ice often find water containing more oxygen around beaver lodges where the ice fails to form a perfect seal around the edges of the lodge.

Mink are still patrolling the shore and into patches of open water all winter long. Sometimes when they forage far up into the woods, they meet their mustelid cousins, the long-tailed weasels and the least weasel or ermine.

My favourite winter mustelids are the otters. They forage along the edge of the ice where they will sit and observe you between dives. They may dive for dormant green frogs from the muddy bottom or actively pursue fish, leaving a trail of fine bubbles as they go. Otters are completely at home in or out of the water and finding their slides or their cross-country trails from the Salmon to a nearby lake feeds the imagination and the spirit completely.

By Gray Merriam