

Chautauqua Watershed Notes
From the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy
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Focusing in on Nature
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For the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy



Capturing images with her camera, such as this interesting composition of dangling spruce cones against a bright blue sky, gives Sue Weaver a great reason to explore the Chautauqua Watershed on a snowy winter's day.

This time of year lends itself to reminiscing. As a child, I can remember the anticipation, waiting for summer vacation with no homework, so I could play outside. Then, in high school, assignment-free summers became even more important as I spent time at area lakes with friends, eagerly awaiting graduation. When college rolled around, time away from the never-ending work was essential as I balanced school and family obligations while trying to enjoy some precious time outdoors.

Little did I realize that as a teacher, my days would be totally immersed in planning, giving and checking

assignments and I would come full circle – feeling like a kid again waiting for summer vacation. Now, one would think I would “naturally” relish my homework free lifestyle as a retiree...wrong. I'm right back getting assignments. But now, I'm enjoying my self-inflicted workload immensely as it revolves around two of my deep-rooted loves, nature and photography. I am a member of the Jamestown Audubon Society Photography Club and we get a different photography assignment every month. Because I love being outdoors, I always try to weave my natural surroundings into my work. Our current assignment is to capture pictures of snow and/or winter for the January meeting. We live in a good place for this job. Isn't the Chautauqua Watershed synonymous with snow? Eager to get it done, I loaded my snowshoes and cameras into the car and headed to our woodlot on Big Tree Road. Alas, another benefit to this adult homework business – outdoor exercise!

Our property in Busti is wooded wetlands and snowshoes are the best form of transportation in the winter. On snowshoes, I can traipse quietly back into the hardwoods through the swampy areas without too much trouble. This piece of land is always wet, even with six to eight inches of snow. There aren't many trails and the undergrowth is so thick with briars, willow and poison ivy that cross country skis just don't work.

On this day, the woods were a winter wonderland. Snow hung on the branches of the hemlocks and the sun's golden rays made the whiteness glisten, creating a scene off an old Currier and Ives

calendar. I clicked away, trying to capture the essence of what I felt and saw. The quiet stillness and the cool, crisp air added to the peacefulness. I searched for bits of color like red rose hips or nightshade berries; wild grapes frozen on the vine; or wilted, tangerine-colored apples dangling from branches to add some contrast to the whiteness. My snowshoes served me well, allowing me to venture into wet overgrown areas that were inaccessible during times of milder temperatures. Hmm, I realized, snowshoes - another set of “tires” for my outdoor excursions.

Back home, I thought about the cattail-filled swamp on the other side of the railroad tracks. I had often wished I could explore it, just to see what was there. Now with my snowshoes, poles and camera, I set out. The water in the swamp was frozen but I poked around with my poles to make sure it would be safe walking. Touring the swamp, stepping from hummock to hummock, I saw where the deer had been, where the birds had hidden their springtime nests and followed rabbit tracks. What an adventure!

Being active and positive is hard in the winter, but going outdoors with a purpose and a job to do, make things easier and more fun. Because of my photography club, I’m out in nature, looking for the extraordinary in the ordinary everyday things we look at but don’t really see. So, if winter is getting you down, click away those winter blues by focusing in on it – with your camera and your snowshoes. You’ll be amazed at what Mother Nature has to offer, right here at home.

The Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy is a private, not-for-profit, 501(c)(3) organization with a mission to preserve and enhance the water quality, scenic beauty and ecological health of the lakes, streams and watersheds of the Chautauqua region. Its urgent focus is to conserve the endangered natural shore lands of Chautauqua Lake, which provide fish and wildlife habitat and pollution filtering functions essential to a healthy lake. Only four miles (10%) of the lake’s shoreline remains in a natural, undeveloped condition. The Conservancy is funded primarily through membership donations. Its annual membership campaign is currently underway. It is presently raising funds to conserve the Chautauqua Lake’s most important remaining natural shoreline habitats, undertake programs to address the root causes of the conditions that fuel lake plant growth, and manage its preserves. It is the only local organization conserving lands in perpetuity for these purposes. Please contact the Conservancy at 664-2166 to join!