

Crossing the Mississippi on thin ice.

It was a wonderfully cold day in January.

I liked to hunt alone, especially on days like this.

A sharp wind in my face has always made me feel refreshed and exhilarated.

I do not know why.

I meandered east toward the

Mississippi after morning chores.

It was too cold for squirrels, but I hoped to kick up a rabbit or two.

I hunted through the two small woodlots at the ends of Schwab's Pond.

Then I crossed the road into Ben Buick's butternut woods.

I startled two deer out of Ben's woods. I was not interested in deer.

I crossed highway 101, a small field, and then into the woods of the river bottom.

The channel that defined the west border of Big Island was dry.

That was normal for wintertime.

I hunted that 60-acre island for maybe an hour.

I jumped and shot a cotton tail.

Nothing else stirred.

When I reached the main river channel on the east side of the island, I was surprised to see the river frozen to the Far Island.

The only times I had been to the Far Island were in summertime, when my horse Nevada and I swam over.

It occurred to me that it would be grand to cook my lunch on Far Island.

Of course, I did not trust the ice, I proceeded cautiously.

The attached map starts when I reached the river ice, then follows my wanderings until home.

If you have walked on enough thin ice, you can judge it by the sound of the cracking, not only how thick it is, but whether it is getting thinner or thicker.

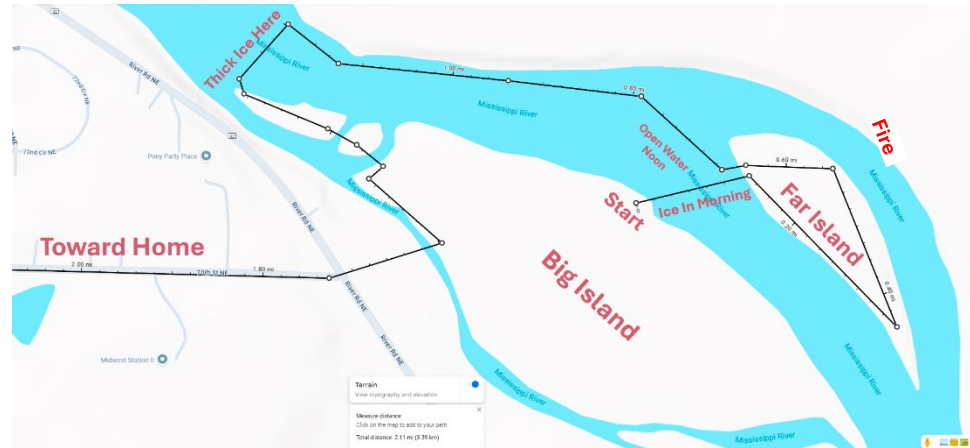
I crossed the wide main channel on thick enough ice.

I explored the Far Island.

I resisted the temptation to cross the final narrow channel to Sherburne County.

Instead, I decided to settle for rabbit lunch on Far Island.

Cooking a fresh game is exceptionally easy, and surprisingly quick.



First build a small fire with a mix of soft and hard wood.

Nothing over an inch in diameter.

While the fire is burning down to hard wood coals, prepare 6 to 10 green sticks, 12-inch-long of around $\frac{3}{4}$ inch diameter.

Butcher the warm rabbit carefully. Keep the carcass clean.

If you need to rinse the carcass in water, do it, but that will cool the flesh, causing a longer cooking time.

When your small fire has burned to coals, set the green sticks to separate the rabbit from the coals, but leave spaces to get maximum heat to the flesh.

Turn the carcass from time to time.

The green sticks won't dry enough to burn until your rabbit is done.

Ubiquitous poplar is best for green sticks.

Rabbit will be ready to eat in ten minutes, more or less.

Squirrels take less time, but you will need several.

Never try to cook a big buck squirrel; too tough.

Pheasants are too thick to cook whole.

Cut pheasants and grouse into strips.

Cottontails are ideal.

I dined on rabbit then headed back to the Big Island.

Scooting along, feeling good, sliding without lifting my boots, as can be done on clear, new ice.



Suddenly a gust of wind produced a thousand tiny ripples fifty feet ahead.

Open water!

The current was opening the river.

I froze; no pun intended.

The ice was on was not even cracking, but now I could not depend on anything.

I reasoned the current would be slower upstream, above these islands, where the river was wider.

Now, with extra care, I listened for cracking sounds and watched for the shimmer of open water.

It was after noon.

As far as I knew the river might open from end to end.

I had depended on the extreme cold to keep the river frozen, but obviously that was wrong.

Traveling upstream as quickly and as cautiously as possible, I reached what I gauged to be the widest channel of the river.

I believed the current would be slowest at the widest place.

Slowly and quickly, I crossed the river.

Well, that is how it felt.

That was a long half mile upstream from my first crossing.

Because of that, I reached the west shore at Arrow Island.

That was fine with me.

I took a safe and casual route home. (I walked on the road.)

Home in time for chores. Tom.