

Alas, time to cast away the Carte Réseau as the SKINET website for the 11 major x-c ski centers variously advises:

CT = Closed Today

WO = Weekend only

and with finality XX = Closed for season

...but then of course there is always the fall-back Viking clubhouse for which a half dozen Vikings made the 10:30 rendez-vous, refusing to cast off their ski gear, and reach for their bicycles...too early they declare! And so we set off on the remaining 1 meter plus of snow base still in tact.

Icy conditions were feared, but thanks to the blazing sunlight, trail surfaces were softened to a sort of firm granulated sugar like condition, getting even softer as the day progressed.

Our 16 km loop took us on the Viking Red, Crown West and Blue Ridge trails. Noted that on the initial stretch of the Red trail, a busy skidooring land owner has maple syrup on his bucket list, and rendered the trail from narrow classic to wide birth skating!

Just past junction "G" on the Crown West, it was evident from an area of freshly nibbled bushes and trees that the beavers had emerged for a spring gorge, inspiring us to do likewise and stop for our lunch.

Our return took us along the delightful Blue Ridge trail with its lookout point across Lac Diez-d'Aux; a Nature Conservancy sign confirmed that we were enjoying "aire naturelle!"

It has to be confessed that downward trail inclines were not exactly slow...or "tumble free!"

Just how long can we stretch this ski season? Some snow solvent, called "rain", is on its way!

