

On the Path

The Humbling Nature of Krause Basin

By Keith Hammer

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After a half-hour of skiing or snowshoeing from Foothill Road, one encounters the humbling peace and quiet of Krause Basin, nestled between Peters Ridge and Strawberry Mountain. It is as though a corner has been turned, though no particular corner is distinguishable in terms of landmarks or terrain.

The humbling nature of Krause Basin slowly encircles those who venture here in winter, often catching them by surprise no matter how many times they have visited. Perhaps it is the hush that has fallen or the gentle press of deep snow all around. Perhaps it is a heightened awareness of being in the presence of something big, something whole, something of great mystery and discovery.

Over Christmas holiday, my 16-month old grandson crawled up in my lap with his favorite picture book and we set about exploring the pictures one-by-one. He knew the pictures well and yet it was to him a whole new exploration. He leaned back into my chest, cradled by my arms and crossed legs, and we journeyed through that book in the sanctity of our little enclave.

In Krause Basin it is as though one has crawled into the lap of all creation and been invited to listen to its stories. It is a book fully open with lines written in the tracks of snowshoe hare, lynx, and wolverine. It is a place humbling in both its comfort and its wildness. It is a place fostering quiet and respect in return for the same.

In "Inevitable Grace," Piero Ferruci notes "the word 'humility' (also 'human') is derived from the Latin 'humus,' meaning 'the soil.' Perhaps this is not simply because it entails stooping and returning to earthly origins, but also because, as we are rooted in this earth of everyday life, we find in it the vitality and fertility unnoticed by people who mostly tramp on across the surface, drawn by distant landscapes."

Though blanketed in deep snow in winter, the underlying fecundity of Krause Basin is felt all around, as is our humility. Large, fallen trees lie in one's path, as do numerous springs and streams fed by upcountry avalanche chutes, presenting challenges to travel whether on skis or snowshoes. One realizes a person could perish here if left to flounder in waist- or chest-deep snow. Indeed, I've found elk that have perished here, apparently exhausted by efforts to recover from plunging through a snow-bridge over a stream.

But it is humility, not fear, that underwrites one's experiences in Krause Basin – and in many other backcountry areas. There are gifts that descend upon us when we have traveled far enough into the backcountry to no longer hear the distant drone of highways. We are left in a quiet that is pregnant with mystery, opportunity and discovery. We are blessed to cross the tracks of the elusive wolverine instead of the tracks of the common snowmobile - and we are left to our own wit and wisdom to find our way about.

Here we read in snowy tracks the stories of predator and prey, the movements of other wildlife and, at times, other people. The layered snow on a fallen log records the

history of the winter's storms and thaws. The relative difficulty of stream crossings due to open water reveals the temperatures of the last week.

Krause Basin is a destination and book unto itself. It is much more than just a thickly forested bottomland that must be traversed to reach the high, wide and handsome avalanche slopes above. It is a wholesome chunk of cake to which the avalanche slopes are but the icing.

Krause Basin and other public wildlands afford us increasingly rare opportunities to meet nature on her own terms and to be humbled by the experience. We each deserve to find places like this that are special to us and it falls upon us to keep them special so others may experience them as we have.

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Swan Rangers snowshoe across a snow bridge in Krause Basin. Keith Hammer photo.