

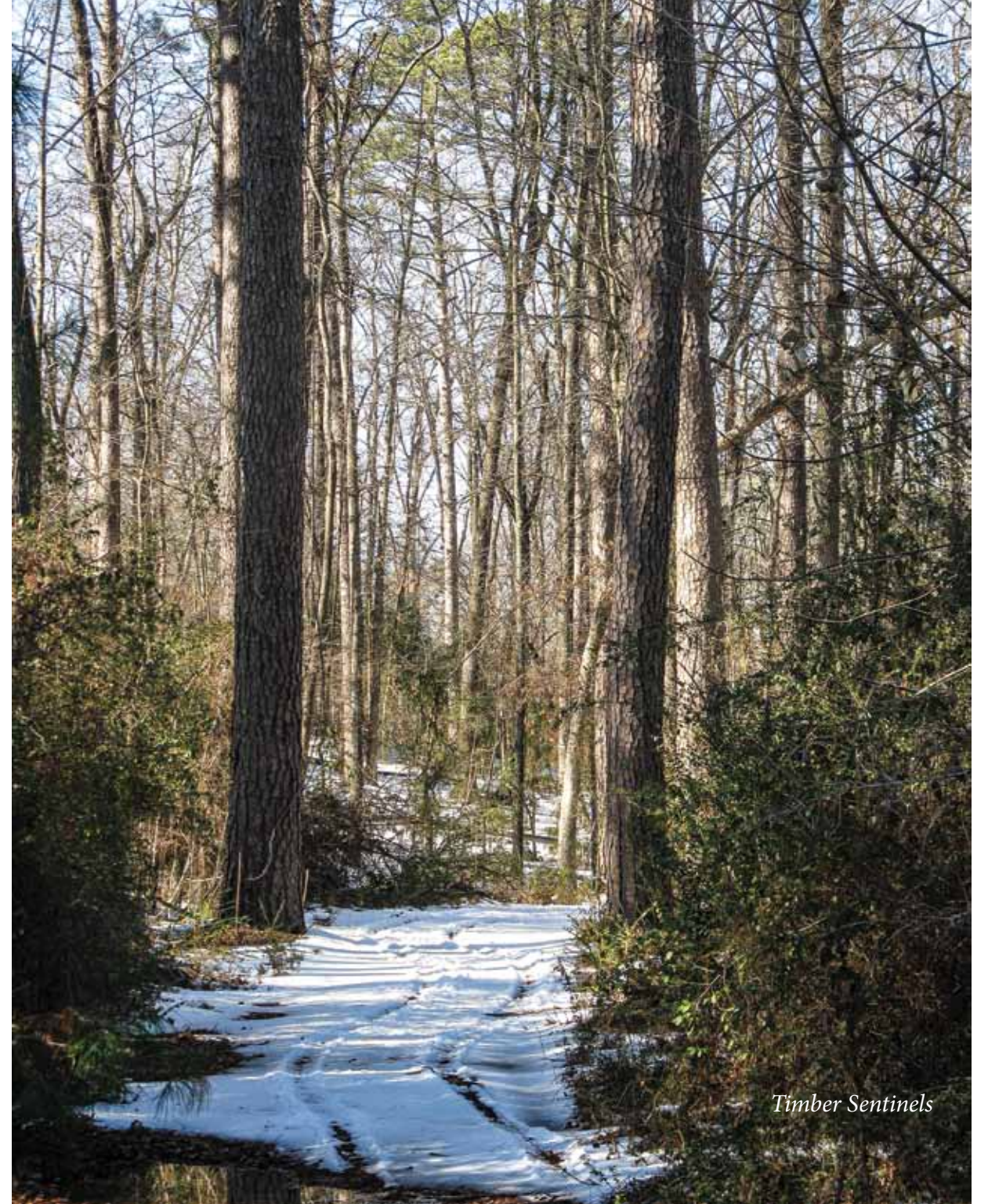


Winter Wondrous Woodland

*A photo essay
by Y. Hope Osborn*

Snow—pure white mounds of confection!

In Little Rock, Arkansas, cold precipitation is generally ice. Ice that heavily weighs branches to the breaking point, cutting off power and our own movement.



The ice, though destructive, is also a means by which new, healthier branches replace the old. This, though, was that lovely white sun-sparkling snow through and through.

The biggest reason I moved into my apartment complex is because it is full of that rare commodity in these places—trees. Squirrels who keep trying to remember where they hid their nuts make holes in my garden, and on milder days I open my patio to the sound of doves and other birds.

However, I needed to be in wild, wooded country to fully appreciate this snow. I went where the winter wonderland was natural and untouched except by patterns made from shadows of tall green-crowned pines and presence-heavy oaks. Footprints crunching in the snow like a dull hole puncher through a stack of papers, I wondrously walked Boyle Park, which forms a wooded island amid the city.

I enjoyed berry-bright cardinals among snow-laced branches and fallen

leaves and trailing ripples of Canada geese backdropped by dark trunks. Perhaps the geese felt the urge to fly further south for the winter, or perhaps the trees ringing the pond were fortress enough.

Against the snow, sun-backlit tall pines seem as black as the shadows they cast. The only sign of human life is a set of tracks through timber sentinels of a trail curving away from sight. What grand adventures and sights do they behold?

I saw deer and rabbits in previous jaunts here in Boyle Park. Perhaps these trekkers stand still for a few moments to listen for the telltale sound of the wildlife that refuges in these woods. In one place, split-hooved deer tracks cross the path from one copse to another.

A creek burbles through the loop I trace in the snow. At the top of one of the little falls in the middle of the water is a lone tree I watch change with the seasons. It holds onto life during snow, flood, or castoffs from upstream.



Snow muffles all sound except the crackle of tree limbs, and the dense, brush-skirted woods completely block out the city many acres away. I feel invigorated and peaceful, shut off from the responsibilities of life.

The woods always still me. It is where thoughts are simple and light, as if mimicking the easy whispers and creaks and slowing of time of the forest. I am

at home here—the forest always my hideaway in rough times.

Snow replaces Arkansas winter browns, purifying the ground and showing off the grandeur of the variety of trees with their fauna guests. As if unburdened by the grey depression of barren branches of a colorless winter in Arkansas, the snow among the trees is a peaceful, quiet sigh of contentment. ✧