This weekend Alex and I took a trip to a remote region in eastern Finland near the town of Koli. The area has two small ski resorts – both about the size of Marshall Mountain near Missoula, i.e. small – and a national park. The Koli region is well-known among Finns, having been voted the official “Finnish national landscape” in a country-wide poll. It is a region with few people and many lakes, forests, and wildlife – even some wolves of late. As a lover of wild places, I felt a particular kinship with the area.

The highest mountain in the region has a very nice hotel near the top from which the ski slopes drop to the lakeshore, and it is here that the scenery is best. You can see from the picture below that even on an overcast day the views from the mountain top are beautiful. Several of the heroes of Finnish history – from the time of independence in the early 1900’s – spent time in the Koli region and at the mountain hotel in particular. They came for solitude and inspiration; even then it was seen as an ideal example of natural beauty Finnish style.

Looking from the mountain top hotel out toward the lake.
The reason for our visit also had something to do with inspiration, as I was there for a two-day meeting with a group of researchers from Lappeenranta University of Technology, and inspiration is at least a part of the reason for such meetings. We did, more or less, an equal measure of work and skiing. Alex got in 2 ½ days on the downhill slopes, and I cross country skied a total of 60 km. (I have sworn myself off of downhill skis for the season in order to focus my energies on training for a supported ski tour that I am doing in March: 7 days from the Russian-Finnish to the Finnish-Swedish borders.) We all had some great skiing.

Finally, perhaps the biggest highlight of the trip for me was the opportunity to do it with Alex. It was a memorable experience for the both of us.
A picture from one of my cross country ski excursions;

And another.