

M. R. Hyker's Latest Adventure



02/21/2011; Four Ponds/Rock City Loop, Frederick Municipal Forest, MD:
This was my second excursion into this wonderful hiking venue. Once again I owe Ed Stobeneau my gratitude. It was an extremely enjoyable outing with just the right mix of casual walking and challenging exploration. I also take my hat off to the PATC, DNR, Off Road Enthusiasts and the city of Frederick for the wonderful job done restoring parts of the Catoctin Trail and totally replacing more severely eroded sections of it. It was a job well done.

I was joined by P-Hyker and 16 Penny on this 11.5 miler. The forest was encapsulated in fog when we arrived and the moisture was dripping off of the Mountain Laurel. We left the parking area on Hamburg Road, taking some un-named woods roads that roughly paralleled the Catoctin Trail to its west until the two came together at the first of four ponds we would visit. The ice was melting off of it rather quickly. We descended on the Catoctin Trail for a bit before it reversed directions to climb up and over a shallow knob full of dense laurel thickets. This section must really be beautiful in June when they are in bloom. We crossed Delautter Road visited a second pond we were not expecting to see. After climbing over another shallow knob we began following a repaired section of trail that had been badly eroded in the past. New erosion dams have been put in place and back-filled

and pot holes and ruts filled in and tamped down. We came upon a five way intersection. The old Catocin Trail was signed and blocked off with brush. We followed a new footpath to its left along a serpentine course as it wove its way down to a haul road which eventually crossed the headwaters of Fishing Creek. The trail crossed Fishing Creek Road and climbed up to the next easterly ridge. We turned right onto another old woods road, following it back down to Fishing Creek Road in a couple of miles. Turning left on the road we soon found the footpath we needed to use to complete the loop. We explored a little further down the road just to make sure we had the right one. Crossing Fishing Creek was going to be dicey and we didn't want to have to do it more than once. After confirming our findings we descended to the rapids. 16 successfully practiced her balance beam, P-Hyker wanted to lie down in the creek and I did a combination rock hop/splash across. The trail was exactly where it was supposed to be ... at the top of a large boulder. I called this a footpath but actually it is a mountain bike path ... a very technical one at that with sharp turns and boulder jumps. It is also well constructed with just the right limbs trimmed away from the trail, cribbing both above and below the trail to prevent it from collapsing, erosion dams in key places and cairns and surveyor flags marking every significant change in direction. The only issue we had (and this is how I know this had to be built by a mountain biker(s)) is that the trail architect went out of his way to make sure the trail went around or over every boulder on the side of the mountain! Although the climb was a little hard it was well worth it as we worked our way up the slope through an interesting maze of outcrops covered in all kinds of moss and lichens, all under a canopy of Hemlocks. Eventually it ended as we reached Fishing Creek Road. We turned right onto it for just a few steps before turning left back into the woods, negotiating a miniature version of rock city. We soon found ourselves at the first pond we visited that morning. The rest of the hike was an easy 1.6 mile walk on the Catocin Trail, visiting two smaller ponds, before arriving back at the truck. Just as we reached I-70 it began to rain in earnest. We couldn't have timed it any better.