

M. R. Hyker's Latest Adventure



Signal Knob/Meneka Peak, Massanutten Mt, VA, 03-06-2010: I was joined by Sparky, 16 Penny, The Mad hatter, Clark Kent, Single Malt, The Coca-Cola Kid and Judy. We found Judy at the trailhead. She had arrived late to hike with the Northern VA Hiking Club so we extended an invitation to join us and she graciously accepted. We stepped off at 10:00. This hike starts with a long, gradual 4 mile climb to Signal Knob. For the first two miles the trail was clear of snow. We stopped to enjoy clear views of the eastern ridge of the mountain, taking our first break at the Buzzard Rock Overlook. From that point the trail switchbacked hard to the left as it continued its climb offering yet more views of the eastern ridge. Here we began to encounter long stretches of packed 3 inch snow. It was actually easier to walk on than the rocky tread that lie beneath it. The Fort Valley Overlook was nestled in a nice patch of pines. The snow became more consistent from this point. It was about 8-12 inches deep but well packed making for relatively easy hiking. Shortly after passing the junction with the Meneka Peak Trail (part of our return leg) we passed a window-sized view of our primary objective, Signal Knob. We reached it by 12:00 and took a relaxing lunch as we enjoyed the panoramic view of Strasburg, The Shenandoah River and Valley and Great North Mountain to the west. After donating a map to an ill-prepared couple of backpackers and explaining the trail system to them we returned to the Meneka Peak Trail. The next 1.5 miles, although primarily flat after the initial rocky climb, was probably the hardest section of the hike to traverse. The snow was a foot deep, not well packed and becoming slushy as the sun beat down on it. We were all relieved when we hooked up with the Tuscarora Trail. Almost immediately after turning onto it the trail snow disappeared even though there was

still snow all around us. The remainder of the hike (about 3.8 miles) was mostly all down hill with a couple of rolling hills between switchbacks just to remind us that we were still in the mountains. After the last switchback nearly all of the snow was gone. We made it back to the cars by 3:30. That was pretty good considering the degree of difficulty of the hike plus just enough snow hiking to add to the challenge. We said good-bye to Judy (I think we'll be seeing her on more trips.) and headed back to Columbia.