

## ***M. R. Hyker's Latest Adventure***



03/19/11, Martin Hill Wild Area-South: Precious and I drove out to scout the trailheads for Fetters and the Holy Grail Trails (discussed in a previous thread). I'm sure I found the first and am corresponding with KiOeh to confirm the second. That all took about a half hour. We then drove up to the main trailhead parking area and did a loop in the southern section of the Wild Area. The first 3.5 miles on the MST was on a nearly flat woods road – nearly straight as a ruler and full of a sameness throughout its length. If there was ever a trail that one could hike while sleeping this would be it. Things improved as soon as the re-route of the MST turned onto a footpath. We soon reached a trail junction. According to KiOeh we were to turn left and follow some surveyor's tape down into a hollow, possibly a new trail project. We saw surveyor tape and fresh purple blazes more straight ahead (I need to learn to turn my head more at trail junctions.) and thought that we had it made. About a half mile down (not in a hollow) the trail, blazes and tape suddenly stopped. We walked up and down looking for a continuation of the trail to no avail. I began to feel that the purple blazes were an extension of the Morris trail not shown on the MST map. Not wanting to get caught up in an impenetrable tangle we backtracked to the trail junction. After downloading the GPS data this morning I found that we were a mere 200 feet from the Gap Trail when we turned around. We were probably looking at it but did not see it. AegisIII had said that that section was severely overgrown.

Upon reaching the junction I immediately saw my mistake and turned right, following a series of pink tapings. KiOeh thought that this was a new trail project but the old trail sawyer cuttings across the faint path tells me there had been a trail here a long time ago. Perhaps this is a reclamation project in progress. Pond Branch was full and gurgling along as it tunneled through Mountain Laurel. We found at least three springs bubbling up cold, sweet water from the ground. Just as the stream turned hard right to plummet through a steep gorge we experienced the same problem that KiOeh had during the summer. The surveyor's tape and any semblance of a trail suddenly stopped. It would have been fool hardy to try to follow the stream down with all of the laurel thickets and steep walled gorge so we continued on the course I had loaded into my GPS, giving way only to extremely rocky areas, blowdowns and thickets. Once my Garmin said that we were within 250 feet of the Johnson Trail we simply pushed our way through to find ourselves standing on that old mossy haul road. We turned right and soon connected with the blue blazed Gap Trail. We turned left to face the first of several blowdowns. We took our time working around and through them. P misjudged one jump and landed flat on her face. That had to hurt but she bounced up, ready to go. As we continued north trail conditions improved greatly. We had to descend and ascend a couple of steep hollows with gushing streams for Precious to cool off in. As we climbed out of the first there was a very large outcrop which appeared to have a cave or animal den in it. Neither of us wanted to investigate it. Towards what was supposed to be the end of our trek we climbed up on a rock shelf and enjoyed a prolonged view Black Valley, Warrior and Pine Ridge and even more distant ridges. Unlike KiOeh we could not find the Connector Trail. We were both growing a little trail weary at this point so I decided to expend our energy walking along a well marked trail to Beans Cove Road and taking that back to the parking lot. I'll look for the Connector trail next week.