

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



04-02-2011, Pinchot Trail, PA: Earlier in the week the weather forecast included several inches of new snow, chilly temps and lots of rain on the last day. Except for the cold temps Saturday night and some light rain Sunday night none of it happened. We had decided to make the first day short so Sparky and I started hiking around 3:30. This was our first time here so weren't quite sure what to expect. The initial climb to the plateau took us through a pretty wrecked forest. I don't like to use the words, sick, dead or dying but it was in pretty rough shape. Most of the tall trees were dead and there were several others with their tops snapped off. Patches of White and Silver Birch dotted the landscape. The descent to the headwaters of Spring Run took us through a more typical hardwood forest before hiking through a large Blueberry bog and swamp. (Before I go on any further, I should note that the Pinchot Trail actually consists of 16 named trails, one unnamed trail and Tannery Road. They are all spliced together with orange blazes. Some name changes occur w/o any rhyme or reason.) The hike along the North Line Trail was as straight as a Lowe's 2X4, initially lined with pine trees. We missed the turn to Hayes Run Trail but Sparky soon brought it to my attention. We reached a splendid cove of Hemlocks at Painters Creek and proceeded to scrap about 4 inches of snow off of our tent pads. We were behind schedule so found ourselves eating in the cold and dark w/o a fire. As soon as the bear bags were hung we hunkered down for a chilly night.

We awoke the next day to some pretty nippy temperatures. I stuffed some frozen Power Bars and Snickers into my pants to thaw out so I could eat them on the trail. Breaking camp served to warm us up. By the time we had hiked out of the hollow we had stripped off a layer. I don't remember much about the Scrub Oak Trail except that it was pretty rocky, something that would be par for the course on many other trails on this hike. We made the obligatory hike up and down Pine Hill Road to the Vista. It truly boasts a 360 degree view. You could see Bear lake and a line of wind towers on a distant ridge. (I don't want to get into a political discussion here but there is just something about them that turns me off.) It was too windy up there to linger so we retreated to tree cover for a break. My Snickers had thawed out nicely and had taken on the shape of my thigh. The hike back down to the orange blazes was much easier since we had broken the snow on the way up and I let Sparky lead the way on the way down. The White Line Trail was much like the North Line Trail the day before but a lot rockier in places. Boardwalks helped across one section that crossed Bear Swamp. We crossed Bear Pond Road, joining Behler Swamp Trail, and had a casual lunch under one of the biggest Hemlocks in the forest. As if someone had thrown a switch most of the snow disappeared and the forest understory became dense Mountain Laurel. The trail then turned hard left and took us through a grove of giant spruce to Tannery Road. We followed the road for about a mile before turning right onto the only un-named section of trail on the circuit. The trail starts as straight as a ruler through tunnels of Rhododendron and Mountain Laurel but begins to oscillate wildly as it avoids a swamp to the right. The trail is a lot more distorted than what is shown on the map, at one point turning totally around toward Tannery Road before making an abrupt final correction to the south. The Mountain Laurel, Rhodo and Red Spruce continue to line the trail until it reaches a feeder stream that flows into Choke Creek. We counted 6 campsites along the creek. We thought the fifth one, nestled in a dense spruce grove at waters edge, was the one recommended by JMitch. Regardless of whether it was or not, after 12 miles of hiking, we were both ready to call it a day. We set up camp and had plenty of time to relax before dinner. I hung the bear bag line while Sparky collected fire wood. There was a fire band on but the ground around us was saturated with water so we decided a little fire would make up for the cold night before. I tried to stay up til 8:00 but 7:45 found me in my tent. Sparky was in her tarp tent soon after. I was tired and relaxed but sleep didn't come easy. The rain the weatherman promised started just when promised, 10:00, but only lasted until 1:00.

The next day was overcast, a bit warmer but devoid of the promised all day soaking we were supposed to get. Once again we were on the trail by 8:30. In fifteen minutes we arrived at JMitch's preferred site and it was indeed a nice one. It was positioned atop a short rock cliff with a giant Hemlock as a center piece. The area had several separate "rooms" making it possible to comfortably fit a large group with a fair amount of privacy. From there we proceeded up the Choke Creek Nature Trail to the Butler Run Trail. We took a break at our "plan B" site which we would have stayed at should we have pushed ourselves harder the previous day and were glad we didn't. It is a very suitable site but nothing like the ones on Choke Creek. From the Kellers Swamp Trail to the end Sparky did sprints from trail junction to trail junction as she trained for the HAM (Hike Across Maryland) and I just sauntered along, frequently checking my map and GPS. The trail went through a pine plantation before ending once again at Tannery Road. The next two trails, the Birchstill and Sunday Trails, are the rockiest and hardest to follow in the entire venue. I was never so happy to see a grassy woods road as when I set foot on the Stone Lookout Trail/Road. As we approached the top the trail left the road for a short rocky climb to the summit. I'm not sure if the pile of rocks we found was the remains of the tower or if it was some artist's conception of what it was supposed to be. Continuing on we passed a partial view of Bear Lake before descending on a steep rocky snow covered slope to the McClintock's Gate Trail. (This is one of those places where the trail just changes its name.) In a few steps I was on a smooth grassy road. From here it was an easy walk around and across Balsam Swamp with its fields of Blueberry bushes, contrasting stands of White Birch with a backdrop of Red Spruce. The last 1/2 mile before exiting onto Tannery road for the last time was mostly through more Rhodo Tunnels. The final 3/4 mile was a non-eventful walk on Bear Pond Road. We quickly got out of our boots, threw our packs in the car and headed for the Dutch Kitchen for something to eat before heading home.

Has anybody ever eaten at Bobby Ho's at the junction of Bear Pond and Rt315 in Wilkes-Barre? It looked like an intriguing greasy spoon to visit.