

M. R. Hyker's Latest Adventure



04-11-2009, SNP-Jones Mt-Staunton River Loop (Hike page to follow.): Cognac Jack, HykerDog and I met Single Malt at the Bootens Gap parking area at 11:00 o'clock. We all put on extra layers because of the fierce wind and heavy fog and headed north on the AT with the wind pounding us from the west. In less than a mile we turned off onto the Laurel Prong tr and soon found ourselves walking under the cliffs of Hazel Top and totally out of the wind. We stopped briefly to shad our outer layer since the ridge was now protecting us from the wind. We did some ups and downs, mostly with the help of stone steps put in place by hard working trail maintainers.

The climb up Cat Knob was pretty steep but it was only 0.5 miles in length. By the time we hit the Jones Mt tr things were nearly flat. From there to Bear Church Rocks we hiked through alternating open forest, rock gardens and Mountain Laurel tunnels. This trek must really be awesome in June.

I had always thought that Bear Church Rocks was just one big pile of rocks that one has to climb up on to get a view but it's not. It is essentially the entire eastern edge of the Jones Mountain ridgeline. Initially there may only be partial views for the trees and once the trees leaf out it is probably almost totally blocked during the summer. As you descend via switchbacks you will find an un-marked but obvious trail that leads out to a large flat rock with a nice view of the Staunton River valley. Immediately to the right is a rock garden begging to be assaulted. From there you can get sweeping views towards Warrenton. Since the views were still pretty socked in we didn't attempt the assault but opted instead to hike down to Jones Mountain Cabin for lunch.

After a 30 minute break we continued on descending to the river. It's one of the prettier streams in the park with lots of cascades, waterfalls and refreshing pools. There were also a couple of slab piles left over from logging operations over 100 years ago. There wasn't much in the way of blooming wildflowers but we found several patches of Trillium and Lyre-leaved Sage popping out of the ground. The hike up the river was probably the hardest part, getting steeper and rockier as we neared the Fork Mountain Fire Road. Once there we had an easy 0.8 mile walk to recover from the climb. Although a lot of the fog had lifted it was easy to see that Fork Mountain was still in the clouds and would offer no views today. We started down the yellow blazed Fork Mountain Trail by mistake. John pointed out to me that there was also a blue trail at the road so we backtracked and took the Jones Mountain tr through the Sag. (You have to hike through it to understand where the name comes from.) We then descended the Cat Knob tr and retraced our initial steps back to the vehicles. We were out of the woods by 6:00 having hiked 12.5 miles with 3000 feet of elevation gain.