

M. R. Hyker's Latest Adventure



Exploring the Beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains

04-19 to 21-2008 - Sunset Field to Punch Bowl AT Shuttle Hike, JNF/GWNF, VA. Maps, Trail Notes and GPS data to follow:

Day 1(9.89 miles and 2400 Ft Elevation Gain):

I was joined by Hardcore, Bryce, Pathfinder, Skywalker, Barbara, Stacy (NO E) and Over and Out. We met at the car drop-off point at MP 51.7 on the Blue Ridge Parkway (BRP) and drove south for approximately 27 miles to the starting point at Sunset Field and the Apple Orchard Falls Trailhead. We hit the trail under threats of bad weather at around 12:20.

We started with the climbing right away with an 864 foot ascent on Apple Orchard Mt. We had to share the socked in view with a retired FAA/USAF Radar station. This and the climb up the backside of Highcock Knob would be the hardest part of this 9 + mile day. There really are no Apple trees on Apple Orchard Mt. They are actually stunted White Oaks. After passing under the guillotine everything else was a nice ridge walk. Shortly after passing by the Thunder Hill Shelter we arrived at the Thunder Ridge Overlook. (Yes Mildred we could have driven there!) That patch of white rocks on the distant ridge is The Devil's Marblyard. I did a nice day hike up there 2 years ago. We managed to set up camp and eat just before the skies opened up. We hung our food and were all cozy in our tents by 8:00.

Day 2 (10.04 miles and 800 Feet Elevation Gain):

By 6:30 the rain had stopped and we arose to the call of a Barred Owl: "Who cooks for you! Who cooks for you!". We were on the trail by 8:30 but the fog rising out from the surrounding valleys precluded any good views. I had hoped to show the group the almost 360 degree view from an area called the "Helicopter Landing Pad" but you couldn't see your hand in front of your face. This is what it looks like on a clear day" Helicopter L.P.-1 and -2. As we descended from the top of the James River Face Wilderness the fog lifted and offered a nice view of the James River. At the bottom we took an extended break at Matts Creek Shelter and dried out our tents. The 625 ft, 1.5 million dollar James River Foot Bridge was something to behold. You can see Little Rocky Row in the far distant center and Big Rocky Row to the right. We would climb them the first thing tomorrow. We arrived at Johns Hollow Shelter around 4:00 and enjoyed a nice evening and a fire before the rains came again.

Day 3 (9.39 miles and 3100 Feet Elevation Gain):

It rained all night until just before it was time to get up. We ate in the shelter, broke camp and humped all of our wet gear up to the top of Little Rocky Row and then Big Rocky Row. After that we had a nice long stretch of rather flat ridge hiking on a smooth tread until we hit the bottom of Bluff Mt. It seemed like the trail builders were determined to take the most circuitous route to get to the top. Once there we saw the memorial to Little Ottie, a lost 5 year old who died on the top of the mountain. After a gradual descent it was an easy flat and/or downhill walk for the last 1.5 - 2.0 miles back to the plant cars. We were done hiking by about 3:30. We recovered our cars at the southern trailhead and began the long drive home.