

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



04-25-2009 – Morgan Run Natural Environmental Area: I had read about hikes in this venue in two old books. Neither seemed that appealing to me since they were mostly on wide grassy equestrian trails, short and open to the sun. But the more I tried to correlate what the authors were talking about with by mapping software the more I got a sense that one could plot a nice hike that was at least half in the woods and followed pretty streams. MRSHyker was eager to try out her new boots so volunteered to join me on the first really warm day of the year (84 degrees).

The sky was clear when we arrived at the trailhead. Initially the area was as advertised ... a wide open expanse, once a farm, now being overrun by invasive Fall Olive bushes with a labyrinth of large swaths of mowed grass. We followed the "cut" as they are called that was farthest to the right. One author mentioned a stream being this way and my mapping software was in agreement. We hugged the left side of the cuts and kept making left turns whenever we could until we descended on a footpath to a little stream but the trail seemed to disappear. We crossed a seep and found it again. After crossing a couple of small streams we found ourselves on a wide woods road with a beautiful stream to our left. It was a pleasant walk along the trail lined in wildflowers. There were some blowdowns but nothing major. We forded the stream and climbed up to a road where we found some old farm buildings mentioned in the books. Next we descended to Morgan Run and found a well worn trail. We headed down stream and visited a nice pond which is currently the home of a young Goose family. As we proceeded the trail hugged a clearing but seemed to be heading away and uphill from the run. We found a faint junction and veered left. There on the other side of a log was a nice footpath. We were able to follow it all the way down to Flee Mill Road. The run was absolutely beautiful with alternating rocky sections and deep pools. The going was relatively easy until we got near to the end. Here the gorge got narrower, the blowdowns harder to traverse and the trail rockier. Still we made it to the road with little difficulty.

From here we had two options. As we walked down the run I kept looking up through the mostly naked trees and could tell there was a flat, clear plateau at the crest of the low ridge to our left. It must be part of the fields of the NEA. We could either road walk in an attempt to find it or follow our steps back. I gave MRSHyker our choices and she opted to try the road walk for a while. Fortunately, in less than a half a mile we found ourselves looking at the now familiar cuts of the NEA behind a house. As we walked along the edge of the field we got lucky once again. Descending into the woods was an old woods road that paralleled the field at a slightly lower elevation but totally in the woods. We followed it back out to the fields just above where we found the hidden stream trail. We had made a bit of a dumb bell or figure 8 circuit.

We continued upstream to explore that area. One of the authors described a trail that went almost to Rt 97 and a connector trail that led back up to the fields thereby increasing the distance and the amount of time spent in the woods. The run was still pretty but had lost most of the roughness below. We passed a couple of large clusters of pretty Bethlehem Star along the way. The trail looked like it crossed the stream at an obvious deep ford. We took off our boots and crossed it but there was no trail to be found. We bushwhacked up the stream through the sharp thorns of dense Cherokee Roses and Skunk Cabbage swamps until we could see the whites of the eyes of the drivers on the road. There was no trail or cross connector. We accepted this slight failure, re-crossed the run and retraced our steps back to what I call the backbone trail. From below it starts as a wide road but eventually turns into another cut that runs through the center of the NEA. When we got home we checked each other for ticks like two chimpanzees in a zoo (six on me, three on MRS), took our showers and enjoyed a feast of slow cooked barbequed baby back ribs and Diseno wine ... very tasty. After downloading my GPS data I estimated the figure 8 loop is about 6 miles in length. Adding the out-and-back to the dead end stream crossing will make it about 7.5 miles. This is going to be one of the better "sleeper" hikes on my site!