

M. R. Hyker's Latest Adventure



05/07-10/2011, Car Camping and Day Hiking in Coopers Rock State Forest, WV: It was a great four days in the woods. It's nice to just get away with the wife and dogs once in a while. Except for a few showers on Saturday night the weather was perfect for camping and actually the rain turned out to be a good thing. There was some kind of kids/parents group outing going on and the rain prematurely forced the kids into their tents making for a relatively quieter than expected evening. I brought my new lap top in hopes of working on my book when not hiking but it never saw the light of day. We were in total relaxation mode for the entire trip, complete with power naps.

We had hiked the more popular trails in the forest last fall. This time we set out to explore "the path least traveled". The first hike was almost 7 miles. I was looking to do about 8 but some bad math got in the way. The route was a loop starting with the Scott Run Trail and ending with the Clay Run Road. Vdeal was right. Scott Run with its massive moss covered boulders, pretty stream lined with Rhododendron and Hemlock and mature hardwood forest was a delight to hike. And for a beautiful Sunday morning we saw very little traffic. We were never out of ear shot of the stream and if we wanted to visit a pretty little ripple it was seldom a little more than a short open woods bushwhack to the stream. Precious made sure she thoroughly investigated every pool. We crossed the park road and began a gradual descent on an advanced ski trail. As with most ski trails it also

makes for a pleasant walk in the spring. For the most part it was a wide haul road with little in the way of erosion. The "mature Hardwood Forest" theme continued until we reached the Henry Clay Furnace. See the Coopers Rock State Forest loop-1 on my website for information about the furnace. After a jerky break P-Hyker and I took the Clay Run Trail/Road back to camp. At first the trail was mostly flat, following Clay Run and its Hemlocks until the trail became a service road. The magnificent Hemlocks continued to our right but the Forest Service had widened the power line swath by about 30 yards on either side of the road to prevent power outages from storms. In an attempt to let the forest slowly rejuvenate the slashings were left behind. While this might be sound forestry practice it created an eye sore about 0.5 miles in length. After that, however, the power line continued straight while the road plunged back into the forest until we reached the forest reservoir. Since we were ahead of schedule we lingered here just a little bit before finishing our trek. Janet was surprised to see us at 1:30. I had approximated a 3:00 o'clock return. (Can you say "power nap time"?)

The next day's hike was in the much neglected northern section of the forest, above I-68. I had originally planned to do a 6-7 mile loop there but after talking to the forest superintendent, Matt Baker, I added an out-and-back starting at Trout Pond, making the trek a 9 mile "lollipop" hike. Except for parking on the wrong side of the pond we had little trouble finding the Glade Run trail. All we had to do was follow the shore fishermen's rubbish. They apparently haven't heard about or care about "leave no trace". After hiking halfway around the pond we joined an old logging road. The trash disappeared and we were once again back in our element. The Glade Run Trail is another old haul road, as straight as a ruler with a very gradual gradient. We barely noticed we were climbing as we crossed the stream several times. We crossed Chestnut Ridge Road and began an equally slight descent along the Lick Run trail, another haul road. It was a good trail with lots of mature forest and moss covered boulders but the stream was always well below us. We didn't even begin to here it until we were almost through with that section of the hike. About 0.5 miles of the right side of the trail had been recently harvested but at least I can report that it is recovering nicely with typical hardwood forest species: several kinds of oak, maple, beech and poplar. I saw no trace of striped maple, black cherry or stag horn which, all too often, will permanently ruin a clear cut, making for no more future harvests or natural forests for that matter. Throughout my adventures in CRSF I had been using a map published by the Coopers Rock Foundation. I've found a few possible errors but for the most part it is pretty accurate.

We had one problem with it here. As described in the trail notes, the Lick Run trail stops abruptly at a power line right of way with no signage. The foundation recommends simply turning left onto the right of way and following the poles as you weave in and out of Mountain Laurel until you reach the parking area on Rt 73. After 10 minutes of trying to walk on large busted rock (I think there is either an underground cable or pipeline through here) and being eaten alive by wild roses, blackberry bushes and Green Brier P and I both decided that we had enough of this torture. We made an abrupt 90 degree right turn and climbed a steep but scratch-free hill up to the road. We could see the parking area from the guard rail. In order to complete the hike I knew we would have to hike about a mile on Rt 73 in the constant shadow of I-68. It was so close I could probably hit the eighteen wheelers with a rock. I started to wonder if it was worth it. I had heard some great things about the next little section of the hike so I forced myself to refrain from casting a final judgment before the hike was over. We made quick work of the road walk and turned onto the Virgin Hemlock Trail. Simply put, it did not disappoint. In a couple of minutes we descended on some steps and crossed the previously elusive (and pretty) Lick Run on a bridge just above its confluence with the equally pretty Laurel Run. The trail was encapsulated by Hemlocks blocking out the sun. Initially I doubted the "virginity" of this grove since most of the tree trunks were no where close to being considered "mature" let alone virgin. Our first of several visits to the stream caused me to quickly re-evaluate my analysis. There were many trees between 30 inches and 36 inches in diameter with several others exceeding four feet. There were even more moss covered mammoth trunks lying on the ground, returning nutrients to the soil, restarting the cycle of life. One pretty section of the stream bed was one large flat rock with a mere sheen of water flowing over it, like one of those interior decorating waterfalls that were "in" a few years back. Above where the stream forks we crossed one fork and followed an old haul road and then a gas line right of way to what I think is an unofficial trail that the above mentioned foundation calls the Kens Run/Hemlock trail Connector. Ranger Matt had forewarned me about following unofficial trails but I knew with just few steps onto the trail there would be no problems. The trail was very serpentine as it followed Little Laurel Run up a shallow hollow. Often the bends in the trail made no sense whatsoever. This is the tell tail sign of a trail constructed and maintained by mountain bikers. They are meticulous when it comes to keeping their trails in good shape and for obvious reasons. One unexpected trail blockage encountered at high speeds can ruin a biker's entire day. A few tire ruts in a wet area confirmed my observations. It took little time or effort to hook up with Kens Run Trail.

Oddly there is no Kens Run on the map. The trail continued to follow Little Laurel Run on another haul road. About halfway up the trail we had the option of taking the wide and grassy Weir Road out to paved Sand Springs Road. Both ended at the same abandoned archery range so we opted to stay on the Kens Run trail enjoying the deep forest and many bridgeless crossings of the stream even though we had to circumnavigate some serious trail blockages along the way. Eventually the trail left the stream and began the only thing to seriously resemble a hill over the entire weekend up to the archery range parking lot. From there we hiked past the Forest Headquarters and retraced our steps on the Glade Run Trail back to Trout Pond. We were back at camp by 3:30. After drinking some sweet tea we commenced to making sure we didn't have to bring any adult beverages back home.

Bed time came early this last night in camp. I think all of the power naps and extended sleeps helped a lot because a foursome of Harley driving Hebrew bikers complete with their Kippots (beanies) arrived. I think they were trying to be quiet but I don't think there is any such an animal as a quiet hawg and voices travel in the night. They also decided they should play music (although it was high quality stuff like Chicago.) on their I-pods. After setting up camp 3 of the 4 riders went out, one by one, in search of food and staggered back in through the course of the night. I couldn't tell you when the last one came in. Shortly after 11:00 and after finally putting an end to dealing with a monster chipmunk (AKA coon) that kept knocking the lid off of the trash can, I was dead to the world. The dogs got us up early the next morning with obviously full bladders. We looked around the campground and found that the three remaining campers, except for the Rumbling Rabbis, were already awake. After sipping on some hot coffee we commenced to tearing down camp making no effort to mute the sounds of our slamming truck doors and trash can lids. I think the other campers caught on as we created an orchestral extravaganza of crashing cymbals and pounding drums. By 7:30 we were headed down I-68 toward Bruceton Mills and a filling breakfast at Little Sandy's Truck Stop.