

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



05-25 to 26-09: I was joined on this three day trek by Single Malt, Good Golly Miss Molly, Everybody Loves Raymond, Indiana Moser, Bubbles, Dr. Mike and Jack and Jill. It was a great weekend for a backpacking trip. We passed the Seneca Creek Trailhead around 11:00. The parking lot was packed and cars and trucks lined the shoulders of the road. We continued on to the Allegheny Mt./Big Run Trailhead, as planned, and found that we had the entire place to ourselves. We waited for the others to drift in and got under way a little after 12:00. I wanted to do something different and this was the third year in a row that it's been scheduled. I've been wanting to explore some of the western flank of Allegheny Mt for quite some time but weather and ill health kept getting in the way. As my mother always told me "Son, threes a charm!" and on this Memorial Day weekend it was going to happen.

We set off descending down the Big Run Trail. After crossing 2 tributaries we eventually crossed Big Run itself and followed it down stream. Initially we were in the woods but we soon found ourselves passing through some marvelous meadows with the stream oscillating down their middles. At about 1.6 miles we turned right to follow the North Prong of the stream up to the top of Allegheny Mt. I consider this stream to be a miniature Seneca Creek with little rapids and slides crossed multiple times by the trail that was formerly a railroad grade. It too has its meadows. The upper most one is by far the most impressive. At this point the trail becomes a double track road that passes through a couple of hunter's fields. Once on the top of the ridge we turned left and made good time as we hiked along the ridge of the

mountain. We turned onto the Horton Trail at the end of our ridge walk and began a steep descent on a footpath, constantly listening to the sound of the creek grow louder with every step we took. We forded Seneca Creek and approached the first of three campsites below the waterfall. We couldn't believe that, despite the number of cars we saw at the trailhead parking lot, that it was vacant. Indiana and Single Malt explored further and found that all three sites were empty. We weren't about to argue with fate so grabbed the closest site to the falls. We set up camp, collected fire wood and prepared our dinners. Some of us refreshed ourselves in the chilly water of the creek. Bubbles got to test out his new saw as we built a pretty nice fire. It did a good job of keeping the bugs away, some of which were insistent on having human flesh for dinner. By 9:30 we had all turned in for the night.

Sunday was "Adventure Day". Besides visiting the High Meadows we were to also visit the "Lost Meadow" we discovered last Labor day and attempt to find even more. We got under way at around 9:00, first ascending the Huckleberry Trail to the Lumberjack Trail. We stopped along the way for obligatory visits to two very attractive meadows. It was easy but wet walking along the Lumberjack Trail. I don't think it ever dries out. We made good time to the junction with the High Meadows Trail. The old grade that serves as the entrance to the "Lost Meadow" was blocked by some blowdowns but these were easily circumvented. As we crossed the first of the previously discovered meadows we found two empty large canisters of propane under some spruce trees, the kind you use for car camping stoves and lanterns. This could not be the work of backpackers. We don't use these kinds of cylinders. They are too heavy and bulky to backpack in. Then at the end of the trail that opens up to the primary "Lost Meadow" someone had built a fire right on the trail, scaring it for many years to come. Again, this is something a backpacker would not do. It seems as though our secret meadows were not very secret!

After taking in the view for a bit Indiana and Bubbles found the continuation of an old railroad grade that I thought might be the route to even more meadows. We followed it for a mile, negotiating several blowdowns and pushing through heavy brush, before giving up. Along the way we passed and abandoned blue tarp that is now the home for a garter snake. It's good condition told us it couldn't have been left there too long ago. This was way too big for us to carry out so we left it. After a brief lunch we backtracked to the primary meadow and hiked up to the crest of the hill where you could see views to the east as well as to the west and took it all in for about fifteen minutes. As we hiked up, we all noticed ATV tracks in the grass. This might explain some of the trash we found. As we began to return to the main loop for the day a light rain began to fall. This lasted a total of about ten minutes. Single Malt found a heavy metal tree stand. It was then we realized this tuff was not being carried in on someone's back. While hunting is allowed in Seneca Creek Backcountry, ATVs are not, except in designated areas. The Allegheny Trail is not one of them and it is the only way into the "Lost Meadow" that can be traversed by an ATV.

The "Official Meadows" are still very nice to look at but they pale in comparison to what we visited earlier. As we neared the bottom meadow we could look back and see most of what we visited earlier. Once back on the Huckleberry Trail we leisurely retraced our morning steps back to camp. Our little adventure was over by about 3:30. The rest of the day was a repeat of the night before except we all turned in earlier in hopes of breaking camp early the next morning. As we sat around the campfire we wondered aloud how the ATVers got to one of our favorite spots and how they could be so thoughtless with their trash and harmful ways.

We managed to break camp at 8:30 and began our day with a chilly wade of the creek above the falls. Once across this first one we were able to rock hop the rest of the crossings. No matter how many times one hikes this trail you never get tired of it. It is perhaps the prettiest streamside hike in the Mon with the possible exception of Otter Creek. We took in a set of falls I like to call the "Three Amigos", "The Grist Stone Campsite" complete with its grist stone and falls and the slides just below the old Judy Springs campground. Since we parked at a different trailhead than most we had to make a gradual climb back to the ridge of Allegheny Mountain using the Tom Lick Trail and then Following the Allegheny Mountain Trail (a jeep road at this point) back to the cars. We changed our clothes and began our drive back down the mountain. We passed the now nearly empty Seneca Creek Trail lot. As we approached the Lumberjack Trailhead we noticed quite a bit of police activity. There were two U.S.F.S. Law Enforcement SUVs, a State Trooper SUV with empty ATV trailers and a State Trooper sedan. Perhaps a rescue operation – but next along the side of the road were several civilian pickups, two with empty ATV trailers. Is it possible that some illegal ATVers were about to have a very unhappy Memorial Day. We all hoped so!

We continued down Briery Gap Road and stopped at the Gateway Restaurant for one last meal together before parting ways. It was truly a great trip even though we never found more "Lost Meadows". That adventure is still ongoing.