

M. R. Hyker's Latest Adventure



05/28-30/2011, MST/Brush Ridge Backpack, Rothrock State Forest: I was joined by Dot Com, Rusty Bucket, Bubbles, Single Malt, Dr. Mike and the Bird Nerd (the hiker previously known as Stacy-No "E"). Scott Adams of PAhikes.com and Ben Auer, both from State College, had given me some good beta for campsites and routes but a premature burst of hot, humid summer weather had me adlibbing off of our original plans almost from the get-go. Two weeks ago we were backpacking in 65 degree weather with night time temps in the low 50s and no bugs. I knew my out of shape body was going to have issues so I had to adapt on the fly, something I've become pretty good at. The climb out of Penn-Roosevelt was pretty steep but relatively short. Most of the rest of the day was a nice ridge walk with only a few small rock fields to negotiate. We got a window sized view of Stone Creek Valley and Brush Ridge which we would be hiking tomorrow. The trail then crossed over to the north side of the ridge with a couple of views looking north and north-west. As we began a steep, rocky descent we caught a nice easterly view looking down all of the gaps in the mountains that U.S. 322 weaves through. As we reached the bottom we found an old woods road on the right. Mr. Garmin said it was close to the Ben Jacobs Trail. So we started heading up it. It didn't look like the photos on Scott's website so I had the group fall back and

we followed the MST for a few more yards where it joined the real double track road. It was pretty muddy in spots. We decided to camp at the first hunter's cabin we came to instead of proceeding down Muterbaugh Gap beyond the next cabin. Oh, before I forget, the PA State bird, the biting Black Fly, was at its best this weekend. Everyone was lathering up with Deet, including myself, but I think it was more like putting ketchup on a hamburger or chocolate syrup on a bowl of ice cream to the little *****s. We all hit the rack by 8:00 but were rudely awakened by a pair of raccoons trying to gnaw their way into the outhouse. What they wanted so badly that was in there we don't know, especially when the cabin owners had thrown a bunch of melon rinds in the bushes a few feet away from them. Their sense of smell definitely needs a tune-up! This went on for about 2 hours when they finally decided to give up for the night. Could it have been their way of flossing after eating the rinds?

We were awakened the next morning by the pelting of a light drizzle on our tents. Not wanting to carry around wet tents all day we broke them down and stored our packs on a covered porch while we ate our breakfast under the protection of a second. The skies cleared as we began our descent through the gap with naked talus slopes on either side and a pretty stream with moss covered rocks, Rhododendron and Hemlock running through the middle. The stream was over its banks in places making the trail one with it while in one place it almost went totally underground as we stood in a rock field listening to the rumbling below our feet. Camping at the second cabin indeed would have been nicer but, as usual, I had underestimated the first day's mileage necessitating an early stop.

Scott had recommended that we not do the entire Brush Ridge Trail but interrupt it with a pleasant hike in a valley. This was going to make for a 14+ mile day. Even though the skies were crystal blue the humidity was extremely oppressive. I made the decision to keep us on the ridge as much as possible minimizing both distance and elevation gain. I think I made the right decision and the group agreed. It was a pretty nice piece of trail with only a couple of major blowdowns in Otter Gap that we slowly worked through. We took our lunch break at another cabin by a refreshing stream before continuing on. I found the lower part of the Chestnut Spring Trail to be one of the highlights of the trip as it followed a stream to its confluence with Standing Stone Creek. There were loads of Hemlocks and Rhododendron blocking out the sun. We were supposed to road walk for 0.75 miles before turning off onto the Ross Trail but we could not find either a trail sign or obvious trail where the map and GPS said there should be one. After

walking a quarter of a mile past the waypoint we decided it was best that we avoid that last elevation gain of the day anyway and take the front door into the Alan Seeger Natural Area. The Memorial Day celebrants were out in droves but I was still impressed with the giant Hemlocks, some over 500 years old, Rhodo tunnels and streams. After this obligatory side bar we hiked up the Greenwood Furnace Spur to an out of the way flat area a little above an abandoned cabin along Detweiler Run. We were a little short of the primo campsite that Scott and KiOeh have been telling me about but everybody was totally out of gas. I might never get to see it now having come within 0.2 miles of it twice already. Everybody freshened up in the stream. It sure was refreshing. I soaked my feet until the tips of my toes burned. We all ate and called it an early night retiring around 7:00. It was so hot in the tents. It took about 2 hours before things became bearable.

We all awoke early knowing we had a short but challenging day ahead of us and were anxious to get the worst of it over before the sun was at its peak. The 1 mile hike back out to Alan Seeger Road seemed to require a lot less effort than the hike into camp but then we hit the Long Mountain Trail. This is one beautiful trail, double track up to a gas line then a footpath on its steep descent to Thickhead Mountain Road. For most of the time we were under a thick hardwood canopy with a few open areas that would make great birding spots. This was the only spot during the entire weekend where we saw the Mountain Laurel blooming. At this point I was totally out of gas so I let the group go ahead as we climbed a steady 1400 feet over 3+ miles. This might not seem like a lot but when your tank is empty and you're running on the last fumes..... Rusty Bucket stayed behind with me, counting 200 steps and then waiting for me to catch up. We did this until we were almost to the gas line when Bubbles came down and helped me with my pack. I didn't want to give it up but I also didn't want the group to spend any more extra time in the muggy, buggy heat than necessary. They all helped me lighten my load and we finished the hike off with a steep downhill on a footpath and then a nice cool down stroll on a grassy forest road. By the time we got to Red's Diner in Lewistown I was ready for that sausage gravy and biscuits.