

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



05/29-31/10, Frosty Gap-Cowpasture Backpack, MNF, WV: Last August Precious and I did 2 long day hikes, The Pocahontas-Cowpasture Loop and Frosty Gap-Pocahontas Loop, with the intention of melding the two to form a 25 mile, 3 day backpack, something that might be short on scenery but high on solitude.... in other words, a good holiday weekend trip away from the hordes that would be descending upon the usual hiker magnets like Dolly Sods, Otter Creek and Seneca Creek. Once again we succeeded.

I was joined by Carol, Andrea, Tim, Janet, Gadget Gyrl, TreebeardIM, Hank, Bad Penny and Bubbles. Nine of us set off heading north on the Pocahontas Trail (Hank would catch up to us about 3 miles in.) The switchbacks that took us around the summit of Blue Knob made the climb near effortless. The hike down to RT39 is typically a pleasant stroll on old jeep and haul roads but we encountered several large blowdowns that had to be negotiated. The portion beyond Rt39 is far less traveled and is very overgrown and hard to follow in places even though it is, for the most part, also an old haul road. The frequency of trail blockages also increased. It seemed at times that more effort was being spent on getting beyond these than spent actually hiking. Still we managed to roll into camp around 5:30. Although very pretty the ground surrounding the forks of Left Branch is not very good for camping. Our tents were nearly on top of each other but we managed to squeeze them all in. Eight o'clock found us all heading to bed in anticipation of an eleven mile second day.

We got on the trail by 8:30 the next morning, wanting to get the majority of the elevation gain out of the way before the sun got high in the sky. It took us less than an hour to reach Frosty Gap Road. After a brief break we started the 5 mile forest road walk, each at our own pace. Just as drudgery and boredom began to set in we reached the gate marking the end of the road and found a shady spot for lunch. The descent down the remainder of the Frosty Gap and Kennison Mountain Trails was pretty pleasant but trail conditions degraded rapidly after we turned onto the South Branch Trail. Not only were the blowdowns many and difficult to negotiate but portions of the trail were quite wet, more than I remember the previous two times I used it. After crossing the Cranberry Forest Road it was a much easier walk to our camp. Tonight we settled down in a palatial Red Spruce grove off of the Cowpasture Trail. Our hiking day was finished by 3:00. I set up my tent and, yes, I took a power nap before completing my camp chores. Threatening thunder drove us to our tents early but it never did rain.

Monday proved to be the best hiking day of the weekend, not just because it was short at 5.5 miles but because the trail was mostly old railroad grades in deep forest with exceptional views of Cranberry Glades. We were on the trail by 8:10. I think that's the earliest we've ever gotten on the trail. Perhaps visions of brunch at the Biscuit World in Lewisburg provided some extra impetus. Whatever it was that put an extra spring into our steps got us back to the Nature Center by 10:30. We cleaned ourselves up, said goodbye to Gadget Gyrl (who was heading in the opposite direction) and soon found ourselves sitting in a cool restaurant and chowing down on some of (at least for the moment) best food around.