

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



06-05 to 08-2008: This was a scheduled 4 day car camping trip to Loft Mountain. I was joined by MrsHyker (camping only), Skippy (camping only), Waffles, MTM, The Mad Hatter and Hardcore (2nd hike only). While the chance of T-Storms were less than 40% for the entire trip the heat and humidity were unbearable. I've been in the SNP many times and I've never recalled it being so stifling. Add to the misery these pesky little black flies that drew blood, things were not ideal. Fortunately some spray on OFF took care of the latter problem. Nice showers and cooler night time temps helped us get through the former.

The first hike was supposed to be a 12.6 mile strenuous loop - Austin Mountain-Furnace Mountain Loop (I know the origin of its name now.). The climb up to the Ridge of Austin Mt wasn't too bad. There were views of Furnace Mt dispersed in between the tunnels of beautiful Mountain Laurel. There was also lots of trail crossing open talus rock formations exposed to the sun. Four miles into the trek I was already feeling the effects of the heat. We stopped at Madison Run for a refreshing break before climbing to the top of Furnace Mt. There was even more exposed talus on this segment of the hike. We finally reached the summit spur trail but due to the heat and haze we opted to bypass it this time.

After another 600 feet elevation gain we finally reached Blackrock. The views of Trayfoot Mt and the surrounding area were still pretty good but the haze precluded a rock scramble to the top of the rock pile. We had discussed aborting the hike at the Blackrock Parking Area. Now, with 3 out of 4 hikers being out of water and this fearless leader being totally out of gas, it became imperative that we get off of the

trail as soon as possible. We took the detour and hit the lot just in time to find a local resident in his car to give Mary and me a ride back to her car. We were back in camp by 5:30 and heading for the showers with handfuls of quarters! With another tough hike scheduled for tomorrow I took it easy on the "refreshments".

The second hike was supposed to be a 10 mile circuit of Rocky Mount with similar topography and trail conditions encountered on the previous day's hike. I didn't think I was going to be fully recovered from what I hoped was nothing more than a serious case of dehydration and could tell that the group wasn't too totally enthused about doing another really tough hike with a 100+ heat index. I changed the venue (wisely I hope) to a short version of the Doyles River Loop. A 6.6 mile waterfall hike seemed more appropriate for the weather conditions and my fellow hikers agreed.

With all of the recent rain the falls were near their best. A deep plunge into the gorge brought us to the upper Jones Run Falls and then the lower falls. There were magnificent rock faces along both walls of the gorge.

Once we reached the confluence of Jones Run and Doyles River a steep and steady climb began. Fortunately it was broken up by many views of some fantastic waterworks. Primary focal points were the semi-horse tail lower Doyles River Falls and the triple cascades of the upper Doyles River Falls.

Once we hit the Browns Gap Fire Road the hike back to the cars was a lot easier. The final 1.2 mile AT segment (which covered most of what we missed the previous day) passed through more Mountain Laurel tunnels. We were finished hiking by 1:30 but our adventure wasn't over quite yet. Mary's car wouldn't start! After several attempts she called AAA. We all road back to camp in Betty's car who then shuttled Mary back to her car. After about 6 hours Mary returned with her vehicle. The problem was nothing more than a corroded battery terminal! The day ended with more quarters in the showers and an early night to bed.

Betty, Skip and Waffles broke camp that night. The rest of us left the following morning. We stopped at the Thunderbird Diner (Hey, where's the Fonz!) for a nice breakfast before the long ride home.