

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



**06-13 through 16, 2009 – Grayson Highlands car camping and day hiking trip: Wesiana Sunshine and I loaded up the truck and headed down the road with the dogs a little before 8:00 A.M. We had about a seven hour drive ahead of us. We arrived at the State Park about 3:30 and began setting up camp. We were soon joined by Ted E. Bear, Cognac Jack, Single Malt, Indiana Moser, The Mad Hatter, Shaz, Dot-Com Rusty Bucket, Luke Skywalker and Rocky.**

The next morning we set out on a [10.5 mile circuit hike](#) starting at the [campground store](#). We used the Stampers Run Trail to reach the visitor center and then the Twin Pinnacles Trail to visit [two fantastic vistas](#). After taking in the views we descended to [Massie Gap](#). Our initial plan was to climb up to what I call the lower Wilburn Ridge but an x-Sierra Club leader we met at camp highly recommended adding the Cabin Creek Loop to view some waterfalls. I'm always a sucker for water works so off we went. [The falls](#) and rapids were indeed impressive. The loop wasn't difficult at all but stopping at each falls took a little time. The return leg of the loop was along a wide, grassy and slightly uphill grade and made for easy hiking. In about 1.5 hours we were back at Massie's Gap.

A quick climb up the Rhododendron Trail found us being met by an official greeting party of three ponies. From there we headed NOBO on the AT until Dot-Com found a trail that lead up to the top of a fantastic rock outcrop that offered a 360 degree view. (There are several of these in the Highlands. The difficult part is deciding which one to have lunch on.) We stayed there for about thirty minutes, spending a lot of our time observing the rocky peaks of the main Wilburn Ridge. We would be climbing them tomorrow.

We left the AT at the Apple Orchard Road/Wilson Creek Trail and started our final leg back to camp. The road with its horse dung was a bit boring if not down right unattractive at times but the Wilson Creek Trail was a fantastic way to end the hike. Most of the trail stays in close proximity to

the creek and offers great views of slides, rapids and too many deep pools to count. P-Hyker was quite content to linger at one for a while. Indiana, our resident king of water rats tried to stay in but couldn't and yielded his crown to Precious. The hike ended after a steep climb up to the Campground Store. We all returned to our sites, took showers and ate our dinners. We had some slight showers but they ceased before campfire time. We met at our site and discussed today's adventure and the strategy for the next day.

The plan was to meet at Ted E. Bear's and The Mad Hatter's site at 8:30 then hop in Ted's van for a quick ride to the trailhead but heavy rain delayed us. For a while it looked as if we were going to have to hunker down for the day but by 10:00 the rain had stopped and we made the short drive to the AT Spur Trailhead in an attempt to complete a 12 mile strenuous loop before more rain moved in. We climbed through alternating meadows and dark woods reaching the AT in about 0.8 miles. As on the previous day we were greeted by another party of ponies. We would pass even more and a colt as we climbed towards the highest parts of the ridge. By this time there were thickets of Catawba Rhododendrons in full bloom everywhere you looked. (I'm still seeing pink and it's been three days since I last saw them.) The trail was pretty rocky during the main ascents but in between the going was pretty easy. At one point just before our highest elevation for the day we walked through a natural tunnel. We found another great rock outcrop to have lunch on. Again we had a 360 degree view. To the north we could clearly see Thomas Knob with Mount Rogers peaking out behind it. To the south we could see the Pinnacles that we explored the previous day as well as our old lunch spot.

After lunch we made an easy connection with the Pine Mountain Trail. For the next two miles we literally walked through a tunnel of Catawba Rhododendron. At times the walls would open up, offering vast views filled with never ending displays of this beautiful flower. It eventually ended as we connected with the AT and began a gradual descent to The Scales. Back when the Highlands were used for cattle grazing the herds would be brought here for shipment. The climb up the next ridge was totally different from what we've been experiencing so far. Instead of a rocky trail surrounded by huge boulders, scattered Frazier Fir and fields of Rhodos we found ourselves walking through fields of Hay-scented Fern and what we think is Whorled Loose-strife (a pretty yellow flower). We once again descended to Wilson Creek but this time we crossed it and the trail of the same name and climbed back up to the lower Wilburn Ridge. Once at the top it was a matter of retracing our initial steps on the spur trail back to our cars.

The weather pretty much fell apart on us shortly after returning to camp but by that time we had accomplished what we set out to do. Despite the rain we were still able to get a fire started and huddled under the picnic canopy for one last time. The next day, we broke camp with wet gear, said our good-byes and headed back home. This was one of the best hiking adventures I've had to date.