

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



07/02-04/2011, Allegheny Trail-South Backpack, MNF: We were originally scheduled to do this outing in May but a 70% chance of rain throughout that weekend caused me to reschedule. For the first time in years we didn't have anything scheduled for this holiday weekend so we decided to give it a shot. The weather was clear to partly cloudy with highs in the mid 80s in the mountains and little chance of precip. Shortstack, Speedy, Single Malt, Troy and I rendezvoused with Tracy Asbury of Outdoors Adventure at the Jerrys Run Trailhead exactly at 12:00 noon. (If you ever drive past Covington, VA on I-64 you'll see the sign.) As he shuttled us to the ALT crossing on Rt92 he gave us a quick history lesson on the area and the section of the trail we'd be hiking.

The boots hit the ground right at 1:00 as planned. The hike began by crossing Rt 92 and walking through a couple of meadows full of wildflowers including some deep red lilies. After crossing nearly dry Anthony Creek the trail seemed to disappear at the fringe of a very overgrown meadow. Single Malt found the continuation of the trail on the far right side. The 1,000 foot climb seemed more gradual than show on the elevation profile. Window sized views of Middle and Beaver Lick Mountains were had as we neared the top. Once on the ridge the trail merged with the Meadow Creek Mountain Trail, an old

grassy jeep road lined with fields of chest high Black Cohosh. I'd like to say that the rest of the day's hike was flat but in reality it had a series of horizontal undulations that would eventually take its toll on all of us by the end of the day. (This would be a recurring theme throughout the entire trip: a nice climb followed by a series of undulations and this repeated multiple times.) Shortly after the Meadow Creek Mountain Trail left to the east we caught a view of Lake Sherwood, a place I had camped at several times before. As planned we stopped at Dilley's Run to load up with enough water to get us through the evening and the next morning. The stream was nearly dry but there were enough clear pools to do the job. The original plan was to hike three additional miles beyond this point but we decided to stop at two, preferring instead to drink the extra water while sitting or laying down instead of carrying it on our backs. I should note here that there is not one established campsite along this 29 mile stretch of trail except for the shelter area at Smith Knob. This is not to say there are no places to camp. In several places the understory is relatively thin and the ground flat and free enough of rocks that finding a place to throw down a tent or two should not be difficult. We found such a place and bedded down for the night.

We got an early start the next morning knowing that we had to tack on an additional mile to an already long and difficult day. The old jeep road continued to the southern tip of the mountain where we took a long break as we looked through the gap between Meadow Creek and Little Allegheny Mountains. From there we descended along a series of sidehill switchbacks to a refreshing pool on Meadow Creek along side of CO Rt 14. The water was clear and cold. We filled up our water containers, splashed around in it and took a long break before continuing. We crossed the road and picked up the continuation of the trail. Initially it was an old grade cutting through a hardwood forest but it soon plunged us into some of my favorite kind of hiking: Rhododendron Tunnels and Hemlock trees. At first it was a foot path but, after crossing Laurel Run on a standard USFS bridge, soon joined a wide, grassy woods road. We again had some minor problems navigating through some overgrown grassy areas and we missed one turn where a sign had fallen down. My GPS unit immediately picked up the mistake. We retraced our steps and found the sign, propping it up with rocks, and continued on the correct path, an extremely sharp, uphill turn easy to walk by in either direction. There were a few perplexing sections as we climbed out of the hollow as the tread totally disappeared. There were blazes but no obvious signs of a trail. Fortunately we were able to spot them and spent a minimum amount of time floundering around. We passed a sign marking the Eastern

Continental Divide (Water on the eastern slope flows to the Atlantic Ocean while water on the western slope flows to the Gulf of Mexico) and a memorial plaque to the Perry family. (They allowed the ALT to pass through their property, thereby connecting the Monongahela National Forest with the George Washington Forest). After a short but steep climb we reached the spur trail that lead to our next water source, a silty pond. SS and Speedy had already collected some water, clogging one filter in the process. By the time I got there Single Malt and Troy had gone down with a collapsible bucket and empty containers to collect what we hoped would be enough water to get us through to the next watering hole. (Scratch Single's filter. It blew out and was passing the sediment through the filter.... Not a good sign.) We made it to the Smith Knob Shelter and called it a day, having hiked 13 miles and climbing 1900 feet. We were all exhausted but Single and I were so much so we decided to sleep in the shelter and not set up our tents. This would be my first, and probably last, experience in a shelter. Although I slept OK the mosquitoes kept pulling be off of my mattress even though I had hosed down with Deet. The critters figured out how to get under my clothes and bite me where I have never been bitten before. The best part about this area is the wonderful view to be had from a farmer's open field directly in front of the shelter. It was a real "Sound of Music" moment with mountain ridges stretching from the left to the right and all the way to the horizon. I was expecting to see Julie Andrews and the Von Trapp family come running up the hill. I walked out there the next morning to catch an inspirational sunrise and I did. At this moment the photo is my computer's desktop. Breakfast for me consisted of a Snickers and some trail mix. I experienced severe calf cramps throughout the night and was more interested in water at the moment and there wasn't a lot of that to be had. I grabbed my filter and began to pump water for the group out of the bucket. After a couple of liters it seized up. I forced it. The handle broke. Scratch filter # three. That left Troy's old pump, one of the original "Pure" filters (now Katadyn) and Speedy's Steripen. We managed to clean up about a liter of water for each hiker before Troy's filter slowed down. We decided to stop there and save what was left of his filter and the pen for cleaner water some four miles further along in the day. Except for a couple of overgrown areas the day's hike was pretty nice, even though the undulations continued to be an annoyance. We were all nearly out of water as we completed the first steep climb of the day. We took a long break before descending into Westvaco (a regional paper company) land to replenish with sparkling, cold water from the confluence of two streams. The rest of the group had preceded me by several minutes and had already collected water for me upon my arrival. I mixed some "lytes" and enjoyed a refreshing

cooling down from a sooping wet bandana prepared by SS (Thanks Ellen!). We had made good time up to this point (There was really no other choice) but lingered here as long as we could. We had one more long climb to go. Fortunately this was mostly all on old woods roads. We took another break at the top where there was a sign announcing that the trailhead was a mere 3 miles ahead (2.6 according to the official trail notes). On our descent we caught a few more window views of the surrounding mountains. Here the trail was mostly a nice footpath as it gradually descended along the spine of a ridge. A couple of Mountain Laurel and Blueberry thickets proved to be minor annoyances. In season – flowers in the spring and berries later in the summer - would be a joy to behold. For now they served to irritate the mosquito bites and Nettle stings acquired earlier in the trip. Once at the bottom the trail skirted the backyards of some homes and threw in a couple more of those undulations as if to say “Goodbye!” to us before depositing us at our vehicles. The skies had been rumbling for about the last fifteen minutes and the first rain drop hit me as I was putting on my sandals for the ride home. As we turned onto I-64 the torrential downpours began and followed us all the way to Strasburg, VA before easing up. Our timing was impeccable. Happy Fourth of July!!!