

M. R. Hyker's Latest Adventure



07-11 to 13-2008 – Hammersley Wild Area, PA: I've often read how this area was considered one of the crown jewels of PA hiking. It took a couple of years of planning and working around conflicts but we finally got to explore it. I was joined by Hardcore, Judge-N-Amy, Bubbles, Single malt and Indiana Moser. We began hiking around noon from the Forestry maintenance shop in Cross Fork. As we hiked past Deb's Cross Fork Inn I promised everyone we'd stop there upon our return and try out "The Bubba Burger". We walked down Rt 144 and walked right past the turn off for the STS. The sign was hidden by some large weeds. We found the southern terminus of the Twin Sisters Trail and used that to get back on track. We were all sweating bullets climbing up to the plateau. The air was thick with humidity. Rain was expected in the afternoon. It was all a matter of who was going to get to camp first, us or the rain. Once up on top we enjoyed a pleasant stroll through a thinned out forest with a lush understory of ferns and blueberries ... some of them ripe. The pace slowed down for a while as everyone began to graze. The descent along Elk Run was punctuated with stands of Bee Balm and Wild Mint. As we crossed the run we found a nice cluster of Shinleaf growing on an old bridge abutment. It was about then that a light rain began to fall.

I should make a note here. From the reading that I've done I got the impression that the STS along Hammersly Fork was mostly on old railroad grades. It is not. Over the course of the trip we hiked about 6 miles of that section, some of it twice, and I would estimate that less than a mile of that section was on railroad grades. The rest was on slanted and narrow sidehill trail. At times it was near impossible to enjoy your surroundings as you had to focus so much on the trail. One slight misplacement of your outside foot meant you were in for a pretty significant tumble.

We reached "The Pool" just as the skies really opened up. We set up our tents as best we could and stood around waiting for the rain to stop. After about an hour it ceased. We had a nice window of time to dry out, eat dinner and get ready for the next wave of storms. We even got to scout some of the next day's route. There is supposedly a trail that runs up Dry Run between Hammersley Fork and the Twin Sisters Trail. I can honestly say it no longer exists. Still we decided we would use the stream as a

bushwhack route and remove the previously planned long road walk. On cue, at 7:00 o'clock the rain drove us into our tents. A series of strong thunder storms rolled through until 10:00.

We awoke the next day to clear blue skies and cooler temps. Most of the humidity was gone. We ate a leisurely breakfast and hung things out to dry. Four of us then set out on a day hike. The sidehilling was much easier without our heavy packs and we could enjoy the many meadows created by past beaver dams. We left Hammersly Fork at a gas line right of way and began a 1.5 mile roller coaster shortcut with about three steep climbs to a forest road. From there it was an easy 0.3 miles or so to the Twin Sisters trailhead where we had lunch.

To me the best part of the trip was the Twin Sisters Trail. It was mostly through a thick, mature hardwood forest with occasional stands of beautiful Hemlocks. I had to resist the urge to stop for a break under each one. A couple of miles in we came to a sign noting this area as a site of a 1964 forest fire. A few steps later we were looking at one of the nicest vistas I've seen in all of PA (except for those along the BFT and the Grand Canyon perhaps). We could see almost all the way down to the fork over a hillside of grass and Hay-scented fern, dotted by the occasional tree and surrounded by the forested ridges of the Susquehannock State Forest. We all wanted to sing a couple of verses of "The Sound of Music". The rest of the ridge walk was similar to our hike in across the plateau except the ferns were overtaking the trail and hiding those deadly blowdowns that laid beneath them. We were constantly sounding alerts as we took turn tripping and stumping our toes. As we approached our turnoff point I kept an eye on the preset waypoint on my GPS unit. When we reached it there was, as expected, no obvious trail junction. About three steps further there was a rock cairn. Someone had come this way before. We made a sharp right turn and crossed a seep. Within about twenty steep steps we found ourselves standing in a deep trench that corresponded exactly to the route on the GPS. This must have been a skid road or trail that was used to drag logs down to the valley to be loaded onto trains. It was too difficult to walk in it since it was crossed multiple times by fallen trees but made for a perfect reference line as we easily walked to the headwaters of Dry Run. For the last 1.5 miles the going was pretty difficult as we climbed over or crawled under logs, dodged large Stinging Nettles and made our own sidehill routes above the more difficult parts. We made it back to camp a little after 3:00, tired and sweaty but pleased with the hike. The rest of the day was spent taking dips in the pool, sunning on a big ol' rock, eating and thinking about Bubba Burgers.

The next day we packed up and began to retrace Saturday's route back to the cars. The climb out of the valley was steep but we made it nearly to the plateau without a break. As we walked through the blueberry patches all I could see were hiker butts sticking up in the air in front of me as everyone began to graze. We eventually made it to the correct turn off to Rt 144 and were back at the vehicles and cleaned up by 12:00. There are really nice restrooms open to the public there. We drove around to Deb's, salivating, as we all thought about the Bubba Burgers **THEY WERE CLOSED!!!! The sign said they were supposed to be open but ... **THEY WERE CLOSED!!!!** We walked across the street and Ken's bar was closed too. Oh well. After collecting ourselves we got in our vehicles and drove to Loch Haven for a nice lunch at Ruby Tuesday's. The food was good but it still wasn't a **BUBBA BURGER!!!** I will probably never get to find out what one is really like now.**