

M. R. Hyker's Latest Adventure



08/04-06/11, Dolly Sods Trans-navigation: Up to this point in time I have hiked nearly every trail in Dolly Sods, many of them multiple times. I can count the number of trails I haven't hiked on two fingers; the Beaver Dam and Beaver View Trails. (We would take care of the latter this weekend.) I've completed two different circumnavigations and a series of circuits and out-and-backs forming somewhat of a loose chain stretching from Laneville to Bear Rocks. Ever since the addition of DSN to the Wilderness I've had this desire to "trans-navigate" the venue, hiking from some point in the south to its northern boundary. Considering that this was an August weekend I'd have to say the weather was pretty cooperative. This is not to say that it didn't rain. To the contrary, we got plenty of that but it seemed to rain when we most didn't mind, when we were hiking in lush forest with a dense canopy. As we approached vistas, waterfalls, swimming holes, lunch spots and camps the rain backed off just enough to allow us to enjoy the trip. The temps were in the high 70s on Saturday and Sunday and never saw 75 on the hike out on Monday.

Even with some delays Dick, Andre, Speedy, Judge-N-Amy, Tater Tot and I managed to meet Doc close to the appointed time, 12:00 noon, at the Bear Rocks parking area. We stowed her gear in my truck and made the 16 mile drive down FR75 and 19 to the Rohrbaugh Plains Trailhead. We were on the trail by 1:00. Through the course of the weekend rain gear was constantly going on and coming off so I won't mention the rain that much anymore. Just assume that for the first two days we were mostly wet.

Except for some slippery rocks today's hike was pretty easy, flat and downhill. We spent a while at the Un-named Vista taking in the mystical view of Red Creek valley until the clouds totally shrouded it from our sight. We could hear the roaring of Fisher Spring Run well before we crossed it, a sign that all of the recent rain had revitalized the area which until about a week ago had been wrung dry like a sponge. We followed the trail by the same name down to Red Creek, reaching our campsite on a hidden railroad grade north of the ford with time to spare. We quickly set up camp and continued along the grade to a nice waterfall with a deep swimming hole below it. It felt good to rinse the day's funk off of us. With all of the wood on the ground being soaked, the rest of the evening consisted of eating our dinner, hanging the bear bags and retiring early to listen to the white noise of a fast flowing creek.

Almost everybody loves camping next to a stream but the cumulative lack of group sleep led me to think that perhaps there was a bit too much white noise that night and the volume control was broken. Still, we all arose pretty cheerful, ate a relatively dry breakfast, packed up our wet tents and began the day's sojourn by fording a wide but relatively safe Red Creek. We passed several more nice campsites before the trail turned away from the creek and climbed steeply, passing the Rocky Point Trail, before depositing us on a relatively flat railroad grade high above the creek. The hiking was quite easy for the next hour as we listened to the creek climbing up faster and faster towards us. We took a prolonged break at the Forks and took full advantage of the swimming hole. Even though it wasn't raining at the moment a person could still smell rain in the air. We all had a lot of gear to dry out so I decided to re-route us, losing about 1.5 miles and 1000 feet of elevation gain, to give us extra time preparing our camp. As the last swimmer exited the water it began to rain again. We mounted up and began the climb up to Blackbird Knob. Did I mention that I received a new camera for my 30th anniversary on the job? While at the Forks I figured out how to shoot in the automatic panorama mode. This thing is awesome. Most of the photos I took from then on were in that mode. The hike along the Upper Red Creek Trail was very scenic offering views of windswept, grassy meadows with a back drop of continuous mountains. At one point, just before a descent we caught a glimpse of the bogs of DSN with the edge of the Allegheny Front beyond them. This is the third time I've hiked this trail. While discussing previous trips, a hiking friend, Hollowdweller, would ask me if I ever saw a really nice camp site just before reaching Dobbin Grade and I never could recollect it. Today, as the lead group stopped to wait for some picture takers to catch up I looked to my left to see this nice site under a shade tree with grass all around. This must be his site!

We descended to find that what was once an easy rock hop across what I call Dobbin Run, for lack of an official name, was now almost a swim across. I proceeded without hesitation and crossed the new beaver pond as quickly as I could, water lapping at my thighs. I've found in the past that if the leader forges ahead at difficult parts of the hike the rest of the group will eventually follow. If the leader hesitates so does the group and the group confidence factor weakens significantly. We all made it across safely save one who slipped in the mud and promptly sat down ever so briefly in the pond before the rest of the group pulled him out. We continued up Dobbin Grade, not so concerned anymore about keeping our feet dry, and "cameled up" at a piped spring. The hike along Beaver View Trail was exquisite, first through mature hardwood forest with ferns and Lycopodium covering its floor and then expansive meadows edged with Red Spruce groves. As we approached the junction with the Rave Ridge Trail I called out to Tater, who was on point at the time, to stop and return. She was a bit perplexed since an obvious trail junction was at hand. I waited for the rest of the group to catch up and directed them to make a 90 degree turn and walk through the grass and blueberry patches to a large copse of Red Spruce. I stayed back and enjoyed the "ews" and "ahs" as each person entered the hidden campsite of Raven Ridge. I do not have a photo of it and I don't think I would share it now if I did. You see, even though it is still one of the best campsites in the entire wilderness, people who I don't consider to be

“real” backpackers have taken to chopping down small live trees in the grove and breaking off branches from living trees for the sake of a fire. Anyway, on a more upbeat note, It took very little time to dry out our gear with the wind gently gusting across the treeless ridge. We ate our dinner and hung the bear bags early so we could sit in the tall, dry grass and take in the scenery as we looked westward toward Cabin Mountain.

We awoke to a brisk and breezy morning with a dense fog hanging over the ridge. Most of us wore our rain gear while we broke camp just to trap our body heat. By the time we were ready to go the fog was beginning to break up. Speedy led us in a rousing rendition of the Wizard of Oz song as we proceeded along Raven Ridge and then the Bear Rocks Trail. It was a nice way to end the trip, less than 3 miles of mostly open rolling terrain, low temps and humidity, blue skies with fluffy white clouds racing to the east, a constant light breeze keeping you cool and mostly sweat-free and sweeping views. As we reached the forest road I turned around and walked back a few yards to take one last panoramic shot before returning to the plant vehicles. Once again we made the drive back to the Rohrbaugh Plains Trailhead to recover the rest of the vehicles. After freshening up and saying our goodbyes to Ann we headed to the Family Traditions Restaurant in Petersburg to replace some sorely missed calories before making the drive back to the real world. In my mind, this was one of my best trips in a very long time.