

M. R. Hyker's Latest Adventure



It's been a while since I've posted any adventures. That's not to say I've been sitting at home on my duff doin' nothing. Quite the contrary! I and several of my friends have been spending our weekends traipsing through Penn's woods. Our camping trip to Blue Knob and related hikes within the park and the John P. Saylor trail was a great success despite a nasty thunderstorm during the park hike. The latter has become one of my favorites despite the lack of views and waterfalls. As a matter of fact, I'm hoping to lead a group of novices on a 17 mile JPS backpack next year.

This past weekend we began our initial exploration of the Mid-State trail and its side trails in Rothrock State Forest just south of State College. The weather was glorious for the first two days but turned hot and humid on Monday. We began the trip at Penn-Roosevelt State Park. First we started by hiking 0.5 miles in the wrong direction while climbing about 500 feet. Fortunately I looked at my GPS and realized the error. My cohorts seemed to take my mistake in stride as we corrected our course and hiked another 4.5 miles with some more serious climbs in the right direction to our base camp. We left the Mid-State trail and climbed out of the Detweiler drainage on the Shingle Trail and descended steeply to join the John Wert Path. What started as an old gravel road passing some hunter's cabins turned quickly into a beautiful trail through Hemlock and Rhododendron tunnels following the southern bank of Sinking Creek. After crossing a gas pipeline we ran into a pair of day hikers who insured us that there was some good camping on water just before reaching Bear Meadows Road. We found the giant Hemlock they told us about and the campsite just beyond. After setting up camp several hikers went out to gather blueberries while the rest of us lounged around. We spent the evening in the usual fashion with dinner and fireside chat. Ted E. Bear led a group on a star gazing expedition while I and others turned in for the night.

It dropped down into the 50s that night making for some pretty good sleeping weather. It was a little hard crawling out of the sack the next morning but a 14 mile day hike awaited us. We ate breakfast, prepared our packs and hiked out to Bear Meadows. The view was pretty impressive. I was a little disappointed in the trail

though. That's not to say it wasn't a good trail with all of the Hemlocks and Rhodos we walked through but I was hoping for open views of the meadows as we circumnavigated it, something more like the Cowpasture trail around Cranberry glades in WV. At its midpoint we took a break at a nice, grassy, "illegal" campsite near a spring. A short walk along North Bear Meadows Road led us to a very long and gradual descent on the Lonberger Path followed by a short climb up Spruce Gap Tr, a level hike along Three Bridges Tr and its very refreshing piped spring. That was some of the best water this hiker has ever drunk. We took an extra long break there before we started a steep climb up the Old Laurel Run Tr to Fire Tower Road. We opted to take the road to the tower instead of the Mid-State Trail knowing that we would be experiencing a rocky tread soon enough. After another break at the tower we finally began our hike along the narrow ridge of Greenlee Mountain with great vista after vista, the Tom Thwaites Memorial and an overabundance of blue berries. The best and rockiest view was probably Indian Wells where we could see almost everywhere we had hiked up to this point. As we entered the Big Flat Laurel Natural Area the tread improved greatly. We passed three charcoal flats that have been used as campsites before descending to N. Bear meadows Road once again. A quick and steep descent soon found us back on the Bear meadows Trail where we regrouped before returning to camp, each at his/her own pace. Everybody was impressed with the quality of the hike. I enjoyed it a lot but unfortunately began suffering the symptoms of severe dehydration over the last two miles. I am very familiar with the feeling but haven't experienced it in two years. I knew I would have trouble on the final day. Upon returning to camp I drank a couple of liters of fluids, nibbled on some junk food and called it an early night.

On the final morning I made the decision to truncate our hike out by about a mile by walking Bear Meadows Road to the Mid-State trail crossing. We did so easily and descended quickly into the beautiful Detweiler Natural Area. I wish I could have enjoyed it more but it was here, at the junction of the Greenwood Furnace Spur Trail that I hit the wall. You know ... that wall that I think all hikers have hit at least once in their lives? Most of the group was eager to get back to the cars. Dottie and Mark were having battery problems and were probably going to need a jump start and find a mechanic soon, Short Stack blew out the heels of both boots on the rocks and Judge N. Amy and Indiana Moser could just plain "smell the barn" as we say. They had a couple of maps and the trail was well marked so I sent them on there way with a few basic instructions. The Daryl brothers, Jeff and Rob were kind enough to stay back with me. It was really slow going for a while, especially the mile plus after crossing the gas pipeline. It wasn't steep but, being an old RR grade with ballast intact, was damned rocky. I think it is the only trail in my entire hiking experience that I've cursed (repeatedly). I was so into just getting off of that trail that I couldn't begin to tell you what my surroundings looked like. Finally we made it to the turnoff that takes you up and out of the Detweiler Run drainage. We took a break there and mustered up the strength to make the final climb. After the initial steep descent on the other side of Detweilder Run Road the hiking became easier and I once again began to enjoy the hike. It took us 2 extra hours more than the lead group to make it out of the woods but we did it.

Overall this was a great trip with a bunch of great people. I'm sure I would have enjoyed the final day more if not for the dehydration issue and probably would have scoffed the "Devil's Highway" instead of bemoaning it (not really). I'll just have to get back to doing the things that I preach to newbies to prevent/limit dehydration in the future. After seeing the area first hand I will probably publish three separate

hikes on my site and give the visitor the option to combine them to make their own day hike or backpack. I will be back!