

M. R. Hyker's Latest Adventure



08-28 to 30-2010, Bald Eagle State Forest, Mid-State Trail Backpack: First I need to than KiOH. My initial plans included the use of the Buffalo Path to get down to the Hook Natural Area from the Mid-State Trail. He hooked me up with a trail overseer who advised me against. Come to find out, the only think that looked like a trail on its northern end was a sign post and one faded blue blaze. It was obvious that no one had used that section of trail in years. For sure it hadn't been maintained. Such being the case I quickly rearranged the itinerary to form a figure 8 circuit, totally by-passing the Hook Natural Area. That will have to wait for another day.

I was joined by Sparky, Shortstack, Ted E. Bear, Single malt and Indiana Moser. We parked at the Raymond B. Winter Park Office, filled out the necessary form and got some last minute suggestions from the ranger. We walked down the road past the lake and turned NOBO on the Mid-State /Bake Oven trail. The initial climb was a bit steep at 400 feet over less than a mile but short. Most of the forest was hardwood but we walked through several dark coves of Pine and Hemlock. We passed a power line vista and climbed a bit more for the next 2 miles before turning north and passing an old lookout tower. From there we descended rapidly to Spruce Run. It had water flowing 9one of our main concerns)! We continued along the MST looking for a place to camp for about ¼ mile. The Mountain Laurel and Blue Berries were just too dense to allow one tent let alone six. We returned back to the junction of the Old Tram Trail (our route for tomorrow.) Sparky and Single Malt dropped their packs and checked out the east side of the trail with no luck. We decided to head west on the trail, maintaining contact with our water source, until we found anything close to a campsite. We stopped at a junction with the very overgrown Cracker Bridge Trail. While I was checking the maps (It took 4 of them to do this trip.) and my GPS Single Malt dropped his pack and began exploring the north side of the trail. First we heard him shout that he found a bridge and then a campsite. He returned and lead us to a cozy little site not far from the stream. Andy broke up a few branches that were cluttering up the place and we all staked out our own little flat piece of earth to pitch our tents on. That evening was as

usual. I had a pretty bad pinched nerve in my neck so took some Advil and got horizontal around 8:00. The night time temperature was in the 50s. The Katydids tried their darnedest to keep us up but we all slept well.

The next day we were on the trail by 8:30. The walk up the Old Tram Trail was a very gradual climb out of the valley on a trail as straight as a ruler. In a few places the old stone ballast was still in place but, unlike other such trails I've hiked, the stones were smoother and held in place by dirt, forest detritus and moss, definitely easier hiking. Eventually the valley widened quite a bit and we found ourselves at an unsigned woods road shown only on the park map. It was the Boiling Spring Trail. I knew it would take us to the park but we wanted to find the Overlook trail. After some head scratching and walking up and down the road I decided to follow the cross-country Ski signs down the power line. I ran into a mountain biker who assured me that I was going the right way. We regrouped and turned off of the power line onto an obvious footpath. It didn't take long before we reached a pretty nice view of the park (Yes, we could have driven there.) After a prolonged break we descended into the park and walked through one of the densest Hemlock forests I've ever been in. Even though this was in the middle of the park it was one of the real highlights of the trip. We stopped at the bath house on the lake to water up and use the facilities. Indiana opted to take a dip. Single Malt quickly sniffed out the concession stand. The next thing I knew we were all eating burgers and ice cream in the shade. After we recovered Indiana from the lake we returned to the van, dropped off our trash and dirty closed and picked up the rest of our food and clean clothes. We jumped on the MST SOBO for a short distance until we reached Brush Hollow. From there we used the Brush Hollow trail, a little bit of road walking and a hike on a recently built snowmobile trail to reach a gravel forest road. We turned right onto it and connected with the Fallen Timber Trail and climbed gradually for 4 miles on another old haul road that was as straight as a ruler to the junction with the MST. Now it was decision time. Plan A called for following the MST NOBO for 60 yards in hopes of finding water in Horse Path Spring and then seeking out a place to camp nearby. Plan B was to descend SOBO for another mile (losing 1000 feet of elevation in the process) to a known campsite on a fairly reliable stream only to have to climb back up the next day. We all decided on plan A and soon reached a dirt road. My GPS unit said we were right on top of the spring. What we found was a hunter's cabin with what appeared to be a dry spring box under a large rusty pipe. While I returned to the road to study the maps and decide what to do next Single Malt returned to the cabin. He climbed up a little hill upstream and found a cistern full of cold mountain water. I don't know how the man does it. He just has a keen sense for where things should be. We all breathed a sigh of relief and filled up all of our containers (not wanting to backtrack in the morning) and drank as much of it as we could. Sparky scouted around for a place to camp but, once again, either the understory was too dense or the ground was too rocky or slanted. We continued northbound with plenty of daylight left knowing that whatever extra we did today would be that much less to do the next day. After about a mile Single Malt came through again although this time it was a little more obvious. He came to a junction with a grassy old logging road not shown on any of my maps. To the right was another grassy road lined with Black Birch with a fire ring in the middle of it.... home, sweet home. The fire ring was occupied by ants but we would not be making a fire anyway. It was just too hot and, besides that, we didn't have a water source to douse the fire. We all called it a pretty early night and retired to listen to the chorus of Katydids.

Everyone was eager to break camp the next morning. We were on the trail by 8:15. The morning air was a little cool and we wanted to get finished before the sun got high. It was a pretty easy 5 mile hike mostly down hill through more mature forest than what we encountered yesterday. We found a couple of more springs, one still flowing, and some more potential campsites where, for some reason, there was little understory. Once again we passed through Brush Hollow on our way back to the park office. The packs came off around 10:30. We made use of the facilities, change our clothes and headed out for some greasy food at the Creekside Inn on Route 104 in Mifflinburg.

