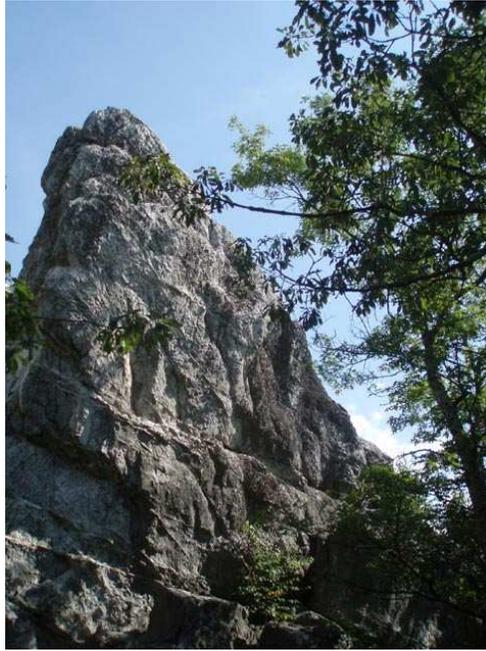


M. R. Hyker's Latest Adventure



09-05 to 06-09, VA Triple Crown (Aborted). So I have to start this trip report 10 days ago. Janet and I were eating our dinner on the deck when a storm suddenly roared through. We grabbed our food and wine and ran into the kitchen where I promptly slipped and fell on my back. I was in pain the entire weekend. Monday the company doctor diagnosed the pain as coming from either bruised or broken ribs. Regardless of what the X-rays would reveal treatment would be the same: heat, rest and pain meds. The boss gave me the rest of the week off to heal. I had scheduled this trip, visiting the Dragon's Tooth, McAfee Knob and Tinker's Cliffs over the Labor Day holiday weekend, a long time ago. It was to be the apex of my hiking season and I had a great cast of hikers chaffing at the bit to go. By the middle of the week I was feeling better and I thought I could pull it off. Boy, was I ever wrong.

I re-arranged the trip to make a base camp 0.25 miles in and do the Dragon's Tooth w/o packs. We did so and began the long climb to this monolithic rock outcrop. I did pretty well until we got to the rock scramble part. I have never felt such excruciating pain in my entire life as I tried to push and pull my way up the rocks. Any attempt at exertion on the trunk of my body forced all of the air out of my lungs. I almost stopped short of the final goal, handing my camera off to Pam, but word of a nice vista right above me and the end on the major rock scramble compelled me to finish the climb, reclaim my camera and walk out to the primary vista.

"The Tooth" stood high above us, more like a piece of a jagged meteor that fell from the sky than a rock pushed up from the earth's surface due to some cataclysmic event millions of years ago. Regardless of the source it was still truly amazing to look at. I walked around its base, satisfied to take photos from there, while several in the group attempted to summit this piece of rock. As expected, Saki was the first to make it. He was soon followed by Norma and then Pam. There is barely room up there for one person to stand up on!

After a substantial break we headed back down. The pain returned as I had to leap and step steeply down the rock scramble, putting more pressure on my ribs. I new right then there would be no hiking for me the next day. Things were easier after the rock scramble and I elected to lead the group back to camp via the AT. Here the hiker follows a narrow ridge as it quickly descends to Catawba Valley with even more views. There was one place where I had to carefully slide down on my butt for about five feet before returning to a smooth trail but it was rather painless. We passed one more view point before we connected with the Scout Trail and returned to camp. We had hiked about 5.5 miles and climbed about 1800 feet but to me it felt as if we had hiked 10+ miles with packs. I was beat. I took some pain meds, rehydrated and munched on trail mix before retiring for the evening around 7 o'clock. It was a restless night as party campers from VT came in to spend the night, then there was the constant howling of dogs in the distance and an un-forecasted storm that lasted about three hours. The next day I broke camp and returned home with John and Chuck. Others also opted out but I believe five others were determined to finish the trek. I hope to hear from them tonight.