

## ***M. R. Hyker's Latest Adventure***



10/15 to 17/11, Quehanna Trail-West Backpack, PA: I'm a bit late posting this but two days after the hike I had hand surgery. It was a little more painful than expected and the huge dressing made it very difficult to keyboard and work a mouse. The dressing has been greatly reduced and I am mostly pain-free so here we go.

Nine of us piled into Ted E. Bear's van and made the 3.5 hour drive to Parker Dam S.P. The colors were quite promising as we drove through the mountains but as we reached our destination we found the canopy being ripped off at a rapid rate by a forty mph wind and a bone chilling rain shower. By the time we were ready to roll the rain had, for the most part, ceased but the wind continued. The younger Beech and Maple trees still provided ample color for this last backpack of the year. The first 2.5 miles was nearly flat and followed Little Laurel Run, initially from high above but later along its banks. The water was coursing strongly along all of the streams this weekend. We crossed Laurel Run Road and picked up the old Goodyear Logging Railroad grade which we followed for another 2 miles, finally arriving at the

intersection of McGeorge and Wallace Mine Roads. We enjoyed an abrupt change in scenery as the trail paralleled Wallace Mine Road for a bit, passing through a beautiful Red Spruce grove, just before depositing us onto the road again. Here the QT continues straight across the road. We turned left as the road became part of the West Cross Connector Trail (W.C.C.T.). It is my understanding, and we found it to be true, that the previously blue blazed trails are now carrying yellow paint.) After a quick 0.8 mile road walk we turned left back into the woods and climbed ever so slightly over a highpoint and then crossed Caledonia Pike. The forest map shows the trail nearly touching the headwaters of Shagger's Inn Shallow Water impoundment but it actually veers to the right before it and descends to Trout Run. Immediately upon fording it Sparky found a great campsite nestled in a groove of Hemlocks. With the sounds of the owls, coyotes and the babbling stream it was a peaceful night.

The next morning's hike started as a gentle climb along the run passing several small bogs which have become the epitome of Quehanna Wild Area hiking. The understory of the hardwood forest was a floor of bronze hay scented ferns. In 0.7 miles we crossed Shakers Inn Road and picked up an old gas well road, a lot of which was lined with White Pine and American Larch, obviously planted as some kind of reclamation program. The road ended in 1.5 miles at the abandoned gas well but the trail continued on a rocky footpath along the ridge. We stopped for a break in a miniature rock city where we could both get out of the cool breeze and soak up the sun like so many turtles. As the trail began to descend we passed a dry campsite. The original trail builders must have realized that the grade was becoming too steep, even for PA standards, and added some switchbacks, first short and somewhat steep but becoming progressively longer and flatter, until the trail finally joined an old grade that paralleled Little Medix Road for a bit before eventually merging with it. After crossing a run on a recently constructed road bridge the trail turned up another old gas well road, crossed a tributary and followed it steeply to the next plateau. The E.G. was about 700 feet over about 0.3 miles but thankfully it was the hardest thing we would have to for the entire trip. We followed the edge of the plateau for 1.4 miles. Here the trail made an abrupt left hand turn and descended to and then along an unnamed tributary of Laurel Run. Unlike yesterday, the woods were full of still green ferns, obviously a different variety than the acres of Hay Scented Ferns we had passed through to this point. Of special note is the fact that the Saunders Run Valley was still holding on to some magnificent colors. Here the West Cross Connector ended and the Q.T. continued. All so often road walks can become pretty boring but, to me

anyway, this one proved to be one of the highlights. We must have been on the leeward side of the mountain and this allowed the trees to hold onto their leaves a bit longer. We left the road at the driveway of a hunter's cabin, picked up an old grade and found a beautiful campsite along the run in a stand of mature Beech. Although we were a mere 4.5 miles from the van at a little after 2:00 we stopped for the day, holding true to an old adage: "Never pass up a sure thing!" ,especially if you don't know what is in store for you if you continue. It ended up being a good decision. By 4:00 o'clock it was raining and it didn't let up for several hours. It would have been a long hard drive for Ted to get us all back to our meeting point. Sparky had erected a tarp so we were able to finish our dinners in relative dryness. While some stayed up for a while others sought out the comfort of their tents immediately after the bear bag hanging ceremony. I was in the latter group. The rain stopped around 3:00. As often happens, nature called. I slipped on my boots and exited my tent as quietly as possible (which really isn't all that quiet) and stood before an amazing site. The Harvest Moon was shining through a thin cloud and the stars shown brightly, illuminating the fall foliage. The leaves seemed silver and the limbs and trunks appeared to be black. It was as if I was standing in the middle of some sort of 3-D photo negative. I briefly contemplated staying up for a while but my 20 degree bag was beckoning me to return and so I did.

The next morning found us packing up wet gear as the sun fought its way through some low lying clouds. By the time we hit the trail it had won the fight and we enjoyed blue skies for the rest of the trip. The trail soon left the grade, crossing the run on a stout foot bridge. For the next 1.5 to 2 miles the trail undulated up and down on rocky tread as it avoided falling into the stream. Just as this was getting to be old we landed on another railroad grade, giving us time to recover while still hiking. We stopped briefly at the northern terminus of the Cut-off Trail. Here the stream formed many mini-cascades as it tumbled over large boulders. By this time my camera battery was dead but I thought to myself that Gali could do wonders with this scene. Although this was an ideal break spot we pushed on, completing the last climb and taking our break under the sun. The last 1.7 miles was a veritable stroll in the woods as we passed through hardwood forest, Quehanna bogs, Hemlock groves and then a final piece of road walking along the park's Fairview Road.

In total we covered 20.5 miles, climbed 2020 feet and saw 0 other humans along the way. I have heard others say that this route is not nearly as nice as the eastern section and they might be right. Still, it is

a good trek, one that I will probably repeat but the next time I will add more of the Q.T. to it via a short road walk on Medix Road. This will add some additional vistas.