

M. R. Hyker's Latest Adventure



12/11/2010, Thousand Steps/Standing Stone Trail Out-and-Back: First a word of warning – parking at the large and empty Motel 22 lot is no longer allowed. It is posted "No Trespassing" and the owner told us that violators will have their vehicles towed.

I was joined by Bubbles. Cognac Jack, Single Malt, Tom and Jerry, the Mad Hatter and Dimitri Tundra. All but the last were "1000 Steps virgins". The above parking issue temporarily threw a wrench into our plans of hiking some of the Standing Stone Trail below the steps in an attempt to capture a couple of extra vistas and to get our legs loosened up before the big climb. Fortunately as we drove back down toward the legal parking lot we noticed a pull over area with a couple of parked cars and a spur trail lined in snow connecting to the SST. We circled back and in a matter of minutes found ourselves walking on the old railroad grade. There was several places where huge cliffs were blown away to make way for the grade. The two extra vistas, although from a low elevation, did not disappoint. Just before arriving at the steps we passed a ruptured old dam and the remains of a brick building, their past purpose unknown to us at the moment but must have had something to do with the quarry operation on Jack's Mountain. The steps looked to be the challenge that you read about but in reality, given the cool weather and heavy cloud cover, were not all that bad. To help the hiker, every so often, there were "landings" to help him/her catch his breathe and get psyched for the next set. As you looked back you could see views of the Narrows, becoming more and more impressive as elevation increased. It didn't take all that long to get to step # 1,000 but as we were fore-warned found an additional 30+ steps before reaching the first RR grade. We climbed about 800 feet

in less than 0.5 miles! Once there we turned right on the blue side trail to check out the view at the Mount Union Incline. Although hazy it was awe-inspiring.

We retraced our steps and continued on the SST to the Dinkey House, a facility where the dinkey engines (small locomotives) were maintained. After checking out that industrial artifact Tom and Jerry returned to their car while the rest of us climbed steeply to the next grade in search of more vistas. The next, looking toward Mapleton Depot, came in 0.5 miles and then another in 1.7 more miles. We thought this was the turn around point so dropped our packs for a brief lunch. I looked over my right shoulder and noticed a huge pile of rocks a short distance away. This must be the quarry site shown on my map! I grabbed an oatmeal raisin cookie and camera and set off to find the mother of all Jack's Mountain vistas. Jack was right behind me. It took longer than anticipated as the dinkey grades switchbacked up to the vista. It was well worth the effort. We were greeted by a 180 degree view. We could see from Mapleton Depot to the south and to Mill Creek to the north. There is one more vista on the map but it was over a mile away by my estimation. We didn't want to get caught descending the steps in failing light so returned to our lunch spot where we picked up the rest of the crew and rapidly retraced our steps. The hike down the steps was probably tougher than the hike up. All of us were complaining (mildly) about having a slight case of Jell-O knees. By the time we returned to our vehicles that feeling, for the most part, had subsided.

The steps were a real challenge but not too terribly difficult. Adding the extra mileage and vistas before and after them made it a worthwhile trip, one worth doing again, perhaps in the fall.