

M. R. Hyker's Latest Adventure



09/03-04/2011, Reddish Knob Summit, VA: At 4397 feet, Reddish Knob (Yes Bobby, you can drive to it!) is the highest point in Northern Virginia. There are no taller peaks between it and the Adirondacks to the north save Spruce Knob (4863 feet) and Mount Portre Crayon (4770 feet) to its west in WV. Gadget Gyrl, Speedy, Bubbles, Keith, Andy, Paul and I set out from Hearthstone Lake around 11:00. The first 2 mile segment of the Buck Mountain Trail was relatively flat as it wound its way through a narrow valley with the Little River (parts of it reminded me of Ramsey's Draft) to the south and the base of Hearthstone Ridge to the north. There were some overgrown, brushy areas early on including some dense patches of stinging nettles but these disappeared as soon as we crossed the now bone dry river and began a steep climb. From here on out the trails were in pretty good shape. We climbed almost 2400 feet in 6.3 miles with about 2200 feet of it compressed into 3 miles of hiking. Although the climb was tough I still had enough interest to notice a nice patch of Pine Sap (a parasitic plant w/o chlorophyll related to Indian Pipe) and two carefully stacked piles of rock. We had been hearing thunder coming our way during the

entire climb. It culminated in a brief refreshing shower. The rest of the walk on Buck Mountain was quite gradual with a soft tread of leaf mulch to comfort our tired feet. It seemed as if Buck Mountain was saying "Thank you. Come again soon!" We were all ready to call it a day but the first clearing we came to had an awfully bad list to it. A brief walk on a dirt road lead us to a perfectly flat area with a magnificent old White Oak whose limbs were just right for hanging a bear bag line on. We went to bed as the Katydids began their noisy lullaby. They usually keep me awake but nothing was going to stop this hiker from sleeping tonight.

We got started around 8:30 the next day. The plan was to hike an easy 4 miles on mostly dirt roads to the summit while gaining about 800 feet in elevation. We took a break at the intersection with FR 85 before proceeding to the summit. Despite the graffiti on the parking lot and guard rails the views were astounding ... not quite 360 degrees ... maybe 330. There is a sliver of forest preventing a full panorama. We made this an early lunch and spent time taking several shots of the mountains, snacking, rehydrating and talking to Mountain Bikers who were curious as to how we got there. One pointed out Hearthstone Lake to me. It gave me a sense of gratification to see what the group had accomplished up to this point. We retreated down the road to the Timber Ridge Trailhead. You probably haven't realized that I haven't mentioned anything about water sources up to this point. That is because there were none. The area had been in a severe drought until recently and all of the springs and streams were drier than a wrung out sponge. We knew this going in so I had driven out there on Thursday and cached 24 quarts of water about 10 yards down the trail, enough to get us through the night and the next morning. After filling our containers with fresh, cool water and taking great enjoyment from crushing and packing the plastic bottles we proceeded down the ridge. We soon traversed a talus slope that allowed us to look back at a pretty knob, not Reddish but a slightly lower one that sits at the end of the same ridge. From there the hiking was mostly downhill on a trail that is obviously used more often by mountain bikers than the Buck Mountain Trail. For the most part the trail was wide, soft and well groomed with only a few overhanging branches. Although the elevation trend was generally downhill there were a couple of sneaky climbs that ascended a couple of knobs, adding a few more 100 feet of E.G. to the hike. The last of us rolled into the prescribed campsite at 2:00 o'clock. I was OK at this point except that I was feeling pretty tired. After a 15 minute break we made the decision to push on and finish the trip today. I new that I would be totally wiped out by the end but the thought of a hot shower, drinking wine with Janet and sleeping

in my own soft bed was too compelling. We finished the descent of Hearthstone Ridge by about 4:30. By the time I had reached the trailhead Bubbles and Andy had already taken off without their packs to recover a vehicle to shuttle the remaining drivers back to the Lake. I appreciate their decision because I don't think I had one more step left in me. It would have taken me forever to complete that uphill 1.3 mile road walk. What was supposed to be an 8 mile hike ended up being 12 miles! We said our good-byes and parted ways. The drive home was long and we missed the exit off of I-66 which delayed my arrival by another 20 minutes or so but the wine, hot shower and talking to Janet was well worth the extra efforts of the day. I'd gladly do it again.