

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



03-05-11, Sand Flat-Salamander Loop, FMF, MD: I thought about inviting others on this hike but decided to have “a man and his dog” trek – No pressure getting up a certain time or being some place at a certain time. I know it’s that time of the year but once again we found ourselves driving on Gambrills Park Road in very dense fog. The fog was so dense I didn’t even bother to look at the first couple of photos we took of the twin ponds on Sand Flat (literally a sandy, flat area.). The place was full of open, grassy meadows begging a hiker to enter them in search of a trail and P-Hyker and I proceeded to oblige one of them. We were looking for a connector to the Catoctin Trail and found nothing but some overgrown animal trails. We backtracked to the last 4X trail junction where we found a group of cooperative mountain bikers who graciously showed us the way. (Of course it had to be the well worn path that I eschewed mere minutes ago.) In five minutes we were hiking NOBO on the Catoctin Trail, a section we had hiked on President’s Day with Sixteen Penny. Since we were familiar with this section we made great time. We passed two more ponds before exiting the Frederick Municipal Forest (This place should be re-named Pond Forest. We will pass yet one more before the day was over and the map says there are even more that we have yet to visit.) and stopping at a vista over looking the Piedmont Plateau (No real mountains between here and the Atlantic Ocean!). The cloud cover was thick and low but the view was still nice.

We retraced our steps to the last trail junction and turned right onto what the mountain bikers call the Salamander Trail. This is, in my opinion, one of the best trails in the venue. It alternates between giant mountain laurel tunnels, rock

outcrops and open woods. Some sections are carpeted with a thick mat of pine straw, my favorite hiking surface. There are several places where the trail forks. Generally speaking the trail that goes to the left heads out to gravel Gambrills Park Road while the right fork is the continuation of the trail. We found this out the hard way after negotiating Mo's Cut (succinctly defined by a mountain biker we had met as a steep pile of rocks that must be traversed.). We made a left turn to visit a very interesting rock sculpture. We continued in that direction until we ended at the road. We backtracked, crossed over a bike jump which I had earlier misinterpreted as a trail closure indicator and continued on. The trail straightened out for a bit as it skirted a private property boundary. After two more right turns and a slight climb up a hill to the remains of a stone house and a comms tower we followed a power line swath for a short distance before re-entering the woods. Here the right hand turn rule does not apply but the "follow the bike track" rule does. After passing through more laurel thickets and a section of forest that had been logged and invaded by Striped Maple we found ourselves on Gambrills Park Road. I had initially planned on road walking from here but after a while we found a gated woods road. We took it and visited the last of the ponds for the day. According to the map I had the road veered away from our destination but we found a trail that led us directly to the twin ponds we saw at the beginning of our trek. We passed about 10 DNR crews that were getting chain saw training before arriving back at the truck. We had hiked about 10.5 miles but had less than 1000 feet in elevation gain.

This is the last hike that I had planned to do in this venue for this year but, thanks to Ed Stobenau's help, plan on bringing groups back here in the fall to enjoy the trifecta that we have explored to date.