

M. R. Hyker's Latest Adventure



03/25/2011, Martin Hill Wild Area, Buchanan State Forest, PA: First I'd like to thank KiOeh for his GPX files. They proved essential for completing the trip although we did not cover all of the areas I wanted to show the group. (More on that later.)

I was joined by Aegis III, Sixteen Penny, The Mad Hatter and Youness. It was a cool but sunny day with barely a cloud in the sky. We started the hike by walking NOBO on the MST, climbing ever so gradually through a majestic pine forest. In about 0.6 miles we exited the canopy and descended to cross the headwaters of Wildcat Run. We then climbed up to a power line right of way where we commenced to climbing 800 feet over 0.8 miles. It got incredibly steep and rocky as we approached Tower Road. Some of us stopped a few times to take in the view of the easterly ridges beyond Tussey Mountain. We could even see the gap in Sidling Hill, almost 20 miles away. Once at the communication towers we turned off onto the Jackson Trail. It was overgrown with Mountain Laurel in some places but generally quite navigable. Right on cue my GPS unit flashed an alarm when we came to the junction with what I'll call the Green Trail on the left. Some of us call it the Holy Grail Trail because it is the only known trail, besides the MST that connects the northern part of the Wild Area with the southern part. This trail, blazed with two-tone green paint that looks a lot like lichen at times, is kind of unique. For the most part it is not a scratched out, heavily used trail but a barely discernable path lined with old logs and fallen branches. Some of it goes through Blueberry

patches and might be hard to follow in the summer. About halfway down the trail we were treated to a view through Bean Cove between Martin Hill and Martin Mountain. Wild Cat Run was flowing pretty well but there were two large trees down over it that we used for its crossing. We took a break at the Fetters Trailhead before beginning the second nose-to-toe climb of the day. The trail was barely perceivable but marked frequently with red blazes. Near the top it joined an old haul road that was easier to hike on. The next 2.5 miles was an easy walk along the Old Tussey Mt Road (now part of the MST) to a lunch spot at Big Pond. From there we retraced the old trail KiOeh found along Pond Branch almost to the point where the bushwhack was to start when we found a new set of orange surveyor tapes on the trees to our left. Perhaps this was the route to Little Pond that neither he nor I could find but I'm pretty confident they weren't there last week. We all decided to give it a try as we plowed our way through Laurel thickets. I kept an eye on my GPS. It showed that we were climbing back up to the old road. In a mere 0.2 miles we found ourselves right where we weren't supposed to be. The junction was marked with a large cairn that we had passed earlier. I hope there are not plans to put an official trail here. It would merely be redundant to all the other East/West trails in the venue. Pushing a trail northward to the Johnson Trail would seem more logical to me but then I'm not a trail builder. I just hike on them. Anyway, the previous steep climbs and rough trails had already taken a toll on most of the group and this last little bit of needless energy consumption was pretty much the exclamation point for an already tough hike. We voted 4 to 1 to follow the road back to our vehicles and call it day. It was OK by me because I had already seen what we were supposed to do last week. I just wished I could have shown the crew the rock formations and vista along the Gap trail. Our final mileage was still about 12 miles (What we were supposed to accomplish.) with 2100 feet of elevation gain. It took us about 6 hours to cover it including breaks so we managed to average a pretty good pace over all.