

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



04-30 to 05-02/2011, AT Shuttle Backpack from Dismal Falls to Bluff City, VA: Tater-Tot, Gumby, Single Malt, Shortstack, Gadget Gyrl, Bubbles and myself rendezvoused at the small town of Pearisburg where we meet two trail angels, Tina Muncey and her friend Kelly. After parking our vehicles at the old Wade's Supermarket at the New River bridge they shuttled us and our gear down to Rt 606. It was already warming up so we took off a layer, put on our packs and began a gradual climb up and over what the locals call Dismal Mountain. Spring flowers were all over the place. The litany of names is too long to mention here. After descending into the valley we made the 0.6 mile round trip to beautiful Dismal Falls. All of the recent rain had the falls at their prime. After taking some photos we returned to the AT and began a pretty gradual hike up the valley. The first couple of miles were along the very attractive Dismal Creek with its crystal clear water and min-falls and chutes. The trail was incased in near endless tunnels of Rhododendron, Hemlock and pines. The trail eventually curved away to the east away from the creek and passed through some fabulous stands of old growth pine. The sunlight barely penetrated the forest here. Eventually the trail returned to the creek and followed it until we turned off on the spur that led to the Wapiti Shelter. There was loads of good flat ground to set our tents up on so we left the shelter to a couple of ladies from Massachusetts who were doing a section of the AT.

Our departure the next day was delayed by an unpredicted rain storm. We were able to break camp before the worst of it but huddled in the shelter until the lightning left the ridge we would be hiking on later. Finally, around 9:30, the rain reduced to a drizzle and we decided to begin our hike. The first mile or so was a continuation of the previous day's creek walk. The trail then climbed and made a sharp left turn away from the creek. We regrouped at a point where

the grade was nearly flat and then proceeded to the first of several vistas we would visit this weekend. It was a nice view of Wilburn Valley. The trail then descended onto an old haul road which it follows for a couple of miles before cutting between two knobs to reach Sugar Run Gap. Everyone was ahead of me at this point and I was running out of gas. I thought I had gotten past the worse of it until I made the last climb to the ridge only to find a Pennsylvania-esque scene. Although nearly flat the entire trail was through a never-ending rock scree. It was obvious that the trail builders labored hard to try to build rock bridges through it all but the need to take irregular steps for about a mile was very taxing and made my legs feel like Jell-O. I could hear my friends down in the hollow so, after a brief rest stop, mustered up the strength to meet them at Doc's Knob Shelter. The shelter was in great shape but the ground around it was not all that hospitable to tenting. Three of the men took the shelter. Gadget was hamocking so it didn't matter to her. The rest of us did the best we could to find reasonably flat areas without too many rocks. That night, as we were finishing our dinner, three young through hikers from Penn State came into camp to get water and eat dinner before continuing on for a couple of more miles. At this point they were averaging 18 miles/day. We introduced ourselves and shared trail names: Bean, Drum Solo and Brain Frog. They were putting down the food like there was no tomorrow. We were leaving the trail the next day and only needed breakfast and some trail snacks so we donated the rest of our food to them. They needed it and we were trying to jettison any extra weight that we could. Their eyes got huge as we gave them Power Bars, crackers, chocolate, trail mix, coffee packets, marshmallows and other assorted stuff. We all retired shortly after wishing them well.

The next morning we arose to an orchestra of song birds. The sky was blue and the humidity relatively low. We broke camp a little earlier than usual and proceeded to follow a pleasant logging road through more Rhodos for 2 miles when the AT finally left it and climbed back to the ridge, this time without all of those nasty rocks. There was supposed to be about 450 feet of elevation gain over the next four miles but it was so gradual it was barely perceivable. I caught one nice view at a power line swath but an even better one along a cliff just above Angels Rest. It was a miniature Tinker Cliffs, with a pastoral view of the valley with a backdrop of more mountains behind it. We hiked through an impressive rock city and took a long break at Angels Rest. The view was nice but included not only the New River and surrounding mountains but also the "urban sprawl" of Pearisville and Narrows, VA. We could see our vehicles parked in the closed market next to the bridge. The rest of the hike was along mostly smooth switchbacks lined with all kinds of flowers. We dropped 2000 feet in 2 miles. Once back in civilization the spell was pretty much broken so we road walked back to our vehicles by-passing the Pearis graveyard that was on the last segment in the woods.

I consider this hike to be one of the best VA-AT hikes I've done yet. The creek, waterfalls, mature forests and views were all above average. If you want to attempt this hike or otherwise need a ride contact Tina Muncey at the Clover Dew (540-921-1943) and she'll take care of you. Tell her Mike sent you.