

M. R. Hyker's Latest Adventure



08-14 to 16-2010, Car Camping and Day Hiking at Trough Creek SP, PA: This was supposed to be a five day vacation but because of the recent heat and humidity we shortened it to 4 days with the option to shorten it further if necessary. Even though we tried hard to take our time we still found ourselves leaving the house only 30 minutes later than usual and arrived at a very nice primitive campground at Trough Creek SP before 1:00. We ate lunch and took our time setting up and still had plenty of time to kill before dinner. We grabbed a park map from the kiosk, loaded up the dogs and took a driving tour of the main sites off of Trough Creek Drive. First we visited the Ice Mine (very cool, literally), the bridge across the creek at picnic area #5, The suspension bridge, Rainbow Falls (just a trickle this time of year) and the ever popular Copperas Rock (The yellow stains are from Iron Sulfate leaching from a coal seam somewhere above it. Ancient Latin for this chemical compound is "Copperas"). We arrived back at camp just in time for a brief happy hour followed by a very casual Filet Mignon and salad dinner. It was pretty cool that night so the sleeping was pretty good.

We awoke the next morning to some light but steady showers. We ate breakfast and hunkered down until the rain stopped. I had prepared my hiking gear in advance so was ready the moment it stopped. We had our own private trail at our site that led to Terrace Mountain Road which Phyker and I had planned to use to join the park's trail system. In just five minutes we discovered an almost intact Iron Furnace or some other structure related to the iron industry. It's my understanding that several such structures dot the mountainsides in this area. We soon descended on a spur trail that took us to the Laurel Run Trail. Although a small stream it cuts its way through a dark, steep, rocky gorge filled with Rhodos, Hemlock and Mountain Laurel. The trail

is severely eroded in places and all eight of the bridges mentioned in the park brochure have either rotted away or have been otherwise destroyed. The abutments of some are still easily recognizable while others have been knocked down to form rock crossings. I doubt that bridges are really needed here since the highest water stains I could find were only 3-4 inches higher than the present level. The absence of these structures adds a more boreal feel to the hike. Where the gorge is the narrowest there is a high water route that can be taken should the crossings prove difficult. After the last crossing the trail made a sharp turn away from the top of the gorge and very gently climbed to Terrace Mountain Road. For a moment I thought I was in Kansas but then I awoke and realized that a PA trail builder accidentally used a switchback during the construction of this trail. I'm sure he was severely chided by his trail building compatriots for doing such a thing in the Woods of Penn. The trail then crossed the road on an angle and joined an easy to walk on haul road that took us to the Boulder Trail and subsequently to the Ice Mine we visited yesterday. We continued on to the creek where we took our first real break. We crossed the bridge and turned right onto Old Forge Road. In a few minutes we could see the old park dam on the right and then a guard rail blocking the road. We had somehow missed our turn off onto the Brumbaugh Trail. We slowly retraced our steps and found the signs high up on the hill above eye level. We began a long moderate climb up the east flank of Terrace Mountain.

Two notes about the park map here:

1) As shown on their map the east side of the Brumbaugh Trail is a very bad approximation. In actuality the trail climbs gradually somewhat paralleling the Terrace Mountain Trail and Trough Creek Bay before turning left and making a direct assault at the steepest part of the mountain.

2) The brochure and trailhead signs indicate that the blazes should be yellow. This section of the trail only had about 3 faded blazes (due to a lack of suitable trees probably). Two were yellow and one was orange. Once beyond the crest of the ridge the frequency of blazes increase and they are all made of fresh yellow paint.

During our climb I was beginning to wonder if this part of the hike was really worth it. A long ago attack by Gypsy Moths had permanently left the canopy naked, allowing trail-crowding thickets of Striped Maple, Beech and thorns to replace the previously healthy Oak forest. We were almost at the top so stuck with it and soon found ourselves walking along the ridge with the mountain falling away quickly on either side of us. We got some window sized views of the creek valley to our left and of Raystown Lake to our right. The views are probably much better in the winter when the leaves are off. We made one more short ascent to reach the high point of the hike at about 1600 feet. This is obviously a big deal to many of the park visitors since it is marked with a large carin. The south section of the trail was nothing at all like the east section. We walked on gently descending, well blazed haul roads with, for the most part, a healthy hardwood forest with a fern understory all around us. Near the bottom there were some Striped Maple thickets but these were quite tall and provided a dense canopy to walk under. After crossing Old Forge Road we hooked up with the Raven Rocks trail and soon found ourselves at the Balanced Rock. It looks like with one good shove it would fall to the creek below and shatter into little pieces but it's been perched there for millions of years. We descended to the Rainbow Falls and then the Suspension Bridge, both of which we visited yesterday, before joining the aptly named Rhododendron Trail. This short trail had two surprises in store for us. First we found a nice deep refreshing pool for Precious to cool off in and then secondly we came face to face with a thirty foot high cliff. The

trail went right up the side of it. Hoping this was going to be the last of anything approaching difficult. I grabbed a hold of any root, branch or rock that I could reach and pulled myself to the top. Even Precious was having traction issues but her sharp claws finally dug in and she made it. Needless to say this last little ordeal required a brief break as we looked 50 feet down into the creek. From there it was an easy walk out to Copperas Rock. We hiked down the road to pick up a short section of the Laurel Run trail that we had hiked earlier and retraced our initial steps back to camp. With the exception of the east section of the Brumbaugh Trail this was a very enjoyable hike, one that I wouldn't mind doing again. I should also note that, except for around the Balanced Rock and Suspension bridge I only saw three serious hikers and they were in one group.

That night and the following day was very hot and humid. My next hike was supposed to be a mostly easy 6 mile hike mostly on the Terrace Mountain Trail. We found the trailhead the previous day (It's about 10 minutes from camp), we slept in even later than yesterday, ate breakfast and hung around camp for a while before heading out. Janet dropped me off at the Tatman Run Access Trailhead around 11:00. The initial hike was a pleasant descent through a hardwood forest on a blue blazed footpath to a pipeline with a nice view of the lake. A post here indicated that I should turn left but all I could see was the beach and playground area. A well worn path went to the right on the pipeline as it steeply climbed up and over Terrace Mt. I pulled out the Army Corps of Engineers trail notes to find them absolutely worthless in resolving this issue. It seems the writer was more interested in describing the history, geology and flora and fauna of the area then providing accurate directions. Well, we turned right and followed the trail about 25% of the way on the steep part of the pipeline. If this is the right way it definitely wasn't my idea of having a good time. The trail was too steep for me to hike on. As it was descending from here was going to be tricky. Reluctantly I turned around and coaxed Precious back down to the blazed post. We followed its direction looking carefully for anything that looked like a trail. At the edge of the beach area I spotted a well worn trail but without blazes. It appeared to be a fisherman's trail that ended abruptly at the Lake's shore. By this point I was soaked in my own sweat and Precious was panting like I've never seen her pant before. We sat down under a shady maple tree and rehydrated as I mulled the situation. I had given up on trying to find the continuation of the trail. Could we road walk the five miles back to camp on a hard surfaced road in the blazing sun and high humidity? I didn't bring my cell phone since I never get a signal out here so I couldn't call Janet. Her phone was probably off any way. Just then a young gentleman came along and offered us a ride in the back of his pickup after his kids were finished playing in the playground. I graciously accepted and in 20 minutes found ourselves back at camp drinking water and iced tea. With nothing left in the hopper of information that I had brought with me to keep me occupied and the anticipation of yet another hot and humid night in the tent we decided to break camp early and spend the rest of our vacation in the coolness of our air conditioning drinking Janet's homemade sweet tea.

Although we had to shorten the trip I consider it to have been a good one even though I failed to accomplish all of my goals. I will be back to hike the Terrace Mountain Trail once I find out where my error was. Can anyone help in that matter?