

M. R. Hyker's Latest Adventure



11-20-2010, French Creek SP-West Loop: I was joined by Bubbles, The Coca-Cola Kid, Indiana Moser and the Mad Hatter. It was cloudier and chillier than expected but still a good day for a hike. We set out from the Hopewell Lake parking area around 10:00, following some obvious but un-official trails to the Boone Trailhead. The climb to our maximum elevation on Williams Hill was only of moderate difficulty. We were a bit worried when two large pods of mountain bikers passed us. I thought we were going to have to put up with our wheeled friends for the entire day but fortunately that was the last of them. As a matter of fact we only saw three pairs of hikers for the rest of the day. We connected with the Horse-Shoe Trail and enjoyed a pretty easy circumnavigation of the hill. We left the Horse-Shoe Trail on the northern side used the continuation of the Boone Trail to skirt the western shore of the smaller Scotts Run Lake, reconnecting with the Horse-Shoe Trail as we began the circumnavigation of Brush Hill. The Six Penny Trail is the primary loop trail in this area. Before we started our climb up the northern flank of the hill we passed the ruins of the old park day use/bath house area which was constructed in the 30s and used until the new swimming pool was built. It was then destroyed. This climb was probably the hardest part of the hike but was greatly aided by cool temps, cloudy skies and, much to our surprise, meaningful switchbacks (a not too common occurrence in PA). We used a connector trail to skirt the family campground and reconnect with the Boone Trail which in turn took us back to the Horse-Shoe Trail and Hopewell Lake. For a while the trail followed an old gravel road but then veered off back into the woods away from the lake as it passed through a rather tame area with a lawn and Cedar trees (perhaps an old picnic area). We stayed on the gravel road and picked up an old footpath that had very faint yellow blazes (perhaps an old route of the Horse-Shoe Trail). After negotiating a swampy area created by our paddle-tailed friends we crossed a stream on a bridge directly in front of a very impressive beaver dam, especially when considering the closeness to civilization. From there it was a brief walk back to our vehicles.

I had heard some negative things about French Creek SP but, given its proximity to civilization (Less than an hour from Philadelphia), I considerate it a welcome retreat from the hustle and bustle of city life especially during the winter when the days are short and the weather unpredictable. The trails are well cared for, blazed and signed. There are some rocky sections but these are short and confined to very limited areas. It is nothing at all like some sections of the Mid-State or Standing Stone Trails that we've hiked. We will be returning next weekend to hike the eastern side of the park including the Hopewell Furnace Historical Site.