

Trail Notes for the Hemlock Natural Area – Bowman Hollow Loop

Description: The Tuscarora State Forest is probably one of the least popular hiking venues in the Keystone state yet it contains over 70 miles of good hiking trails. The degree of difficulty ranges from easy to strenuous. Described here is a 12.6 mile moderate loop that starts at the Hemlock Natural Area. This was once touted as being a stand of Virgin Hemlock and was dedicated as a Natural Area by the state in 1973. Many of the largest trees have fallen victim to the Woolly Anelegid. But there are still some good ones remaining. Younger trees are fighting to hold on. In the spring and summer an extra sense of coolness is added to the presence of Patterson Run, which you seldom lose visual or audio contact with, by a thick carpet of Hay Scented Fern. This place must smell wonderful in the fall. The route continues on the Tuscarora trail as it descends partway down the rocky eastern flank of Rising Mountain toward Fowler Hollow. It never quite makes it there as it follows the Perry Lumber Company trail and then the Twig trail back up and over Rising Mountain once again. On the west side of the mountain it descends into a labyrinth of red blazed trails. This route takes you along the Shearer Dug Road (Use this road all the way to the Iron Horse trail if you want to make a 10 mile loop but you'll miss out on some pleasant streamside hiking.), Bowman Hollow, Bowman and Iron Horse trails to almost complete the loop. Near the junction of Bowman Hollow and Bowman trails is an old homestead complete with ruins. This would make an ideal camping spot should you decide to do this as a short overnight backpack. You'll be left with a 1.2 mile open woods bushwhack. You mainly have to follow the right side of pretty Hemlock Run until you find your cars. At the end of May we found little in the way of briars or heavy brush that had to be negotiated. There were some blowdowns to step over or go around. Normally I don't suggest bushwhacking unless you have a GPS unit but in this case it's pretty tough to get lost. Hemlock Run is to your left and Hemlock Road is to your right.

Trail Notes: All trails are signed and blazed. The trails in the Hemlock Natural Area use multiple colors. The system of trails in the Fowler Hollow area uses both assorted colors and shapes. The blazes for the rest of the hike are all red rectangles regardless of trail.

The orange blazed Patterson Run trail begins on the right side of the lower parking area. Descend slightly and cross the run on a footbridge. The trail will climb slightly up the hill on the east side of the run. In 0.59 miles the Patterson Run trail will turn sharply left, uphill, and will be blazed red. Don't turn here but continue straight on the yellow blazed Rim trail. At 0.45 miles turn right, descend to the run and cross it on a footbridge. The trail to the right goes back out to Hemlock road. Turn left onto the red blazed Hemlock trail. You won't see any blazes for the first few yards.

In another 0.45 miles pass yet another spur trail out to the road on your right. Shortly cross the stream again and come to another bridge and the junction of the yellow blazed Rim trail. Crossing the bridge and following the remainder of the red Hemlock trail will take you out to the upper parking area. Instead, continue upstream on the yellow blazed Rim trail. In 0.24 miles arrive at Hemlock road. Turn left onto it. The blue blazed

Tuscarora trail is across the road just as it makes a hard left. Get on the Tuscarora trail and turn left.

The trail will soon climb up and over the ridge of Rising Mountain and descend steeply along a very rock section of trail. In 1.67 miles from Hemlock road turn left onto an old woods road. Soon arrive at the junction of the Perry Lumber Company trail blazed with orange diamonds straight ahead. If you turn right on the Tuscarora and follow it for 0.13 miles you'll soon arrive at a shelter. This is a nice break spot. A latrine is a little further along the Tuscarora trail on Perry Lumber Company Road (not trail).

Return to the Perry Lumber Company trail and turn right onto it. In 0.61 miles turn left onto the Twig trail blazed with blue diamonds. Climb steadily up for 0.95 miles. There is a view of Amberson Ridge about halfway up. At the top turn right onto Hemlock road and in another 0.26 miles turn left onto Shearer Dug road (a trail at first). Note: all of the trails from here are red blazed.

Cross Rising Mountain trail. Shearer Dug road now becomes a grassy/gravel road. In 0.66 miles reach an open turn around area in the road. To the right is a stake marking the Bowman Hollow trail. Turn here and follow this trail for 1.15 miles. The upper part is wide, smooth and dry. Some of the lower section may be wet in places. Near its end come to a grassy clearing with tall evergreen trees and the ruins of a house and spring house. This is a great break/camping spot. There is no fire ring. Please do not make one!

The trail turns left, crosses a small stream and joins the Bowman trail which comes down off of the hill to the right. Continue straight on the Bowman trail. In 0.32 miles come to an old rickety bridge on the left and more unmarked trails that seem to climb up the mountain. Ignore these and continue down the right bank of Bowman Run. In 0.19 miles cross the run on another footbridge. Soon arrive at a hunter's cabin. Turn left at the first corner onto a footpath that follows the private property lines. The Bowman trail ends and the Robinson trail begins.

Soon come to a large tree with a double red arrow seemingly in the middle of the trail. The continuation of the Robinson trail is more or less straight ahead. You can use this but I suggest you turn right and in a few yards find yourself on the Iron Horse trail. (It closely follows Sherman Creek and is a bit more picturesque than the Robinson trail.) Turn left onto it. You'll cross the creek a couple of times on footbridges. In 0.77 miles cross Shearer Dug road (now a maintained gravel road) and pass another hunter's cabin on the right. Stay on the trail. Since you joined the Iron Horse trail you've been on an old logging railroad grade. Along this next stretch the grade continues but goes through private property. Watch for a small log across the grade. Turn left here following a footpath to a bridge over a stream 1.03 miles from crossing Shearer Dug road. This is Hemlock Run and the beginning of the bushwhack.

Immediately after crossing the bridge turn left off of the trail. Follow the right side of the stream. You'll cross a couple of small streams along the way. In one or 2 spots it might be wise to climb to the right a bit to avoid some steep banks but kept the stream in sight. In about 1.12 miles from

the bridge look uphill to your right. You should be able to pick out what appears to be a level, grassy area near the top. This is an old woods road. Climb up to it and turn left. Hemlock road is just a few yards away. Turn left onto Hemlock road and in a few yards find yourself back at the car. Should you miss the grassy woods road on the hill you'll eventually come to a fork in the stream. The left fork is Patterson Run (Sound familiar?) and the right fork is Harts Run. Follow the right side of Harts Run up to Hemlock road near a culvert. Turn left onto the road and arrive back at your car.