

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



04/10 to 12/10, Tracy's Ridge Backpack and Day Hike: I was joined by Sparky, Ted E. Bear and Single Malt. After a 5.5 hour drive we arrived at the trailhead where [the North Country Trail Crosses Rt 346](#). It took a few minutes to find the continuation of the trail as it crossed Willow Run but we soon found our way and began a long gradual climb along and through some [beautiful Hemlock Glens](#) (as Jeff Mitchell would call them) and moss covered rocks. We crossed several tributaries of Willow Run before gradually turning 180 degrees and heading south along Allegheny Reservoir. It was well below us and out of sight for quite a while but about three miles in we got a few glimpses. At four miles in we dropped down to visit [a cove](#) fed by [Tracy's Run](#). There is some great camping here though someone did their best to trash a campsite. (Sparky and Single Malt hauled out a bunch of trash on our way out.) The trail is a bit hard to follow immediately after leaving Tracy's Run but once you get to junction 12 (That's the way they do the signage there.) the way becomes more apparent. From there it is a flat to slightly downhill two mile walk to [Johnny Cake Run](#) and its [own cove](#). This is where we set up our base camp.

The next day we set off for what was supposed to be a 12 mile day hike. The North Country Trail with its blue blazes was still easy to follow. In about a mile we joined an old haul road. Sparky and I went down to check out the [Handsome Lake Campground](#) (a fee area only accessible by hiking or boating.) and its [view of the lake](#). It seemed to be well maintained but then camping season has yet to really get going. From there we continued south on the haul road. We stopped at a naked sign post and pondered our next move. Sparky saw a blue blaze on a footpath so we headed up the shallow yet narrow ridge. A mile up we came to the 6 junction. We were supposed to leave the blue trail at the last junction and follow the white blazes to the 9 junction. If we continued on we thought we would miss some very nice hiking and arrive back at camp way too early. We retraced our steps, adding 2 extra miles to the 12 mile hike, and corrected our mistake soon arriving at [Hopewell Campground](#), a miniature version of Handsome Lake. We took a break here before continuing to our lunch spot on Polly's Branch. It was during this part and for a lot of the remainder of the hike that things got tricky. The blazes changed from white to gray plastic diamonds and were nailed to the thinnest of gray trees. These were all that marked the path which was impossible to see in places due to lack of use and maintenance. It was obvious

that the Tracy Ridge Recreation Area hasn't seen a chain saw in quite some time. Single Malt aptly called it the closest thing to hiking in a wilderness but with blazes. [Polly's Run](#) was nice but the trail veered away from it as soon as we crossed it, climbing steeply to a haul road. The trail made use of it for most of the way back to junction 6 where we had turned around earlier. A couple of times it left the road, I think to dodge some wet spots, but in both cases it returned to it. These "High Water Trails" were just a bunch of blazes that went over and around a series of blowdowns. I recommend to anyone else that hikes here to put up with some mud and stay on the road. Once we were back up on the ridge the hiking got easier and as we got closer to Tracy Ridge Campground the trails became easier to follow. At junction 2 we turned left and descended back to camp, passing through yet another beautiful Hemlock Glen.

The next day we awoke to a light frost. While others made hot meals I just made some coffee and ate a Power Bar. We broke camp around 8:30 and retraced Saturday's steps back through the Hemlock Glens, cleaning up the Tracy Run campsite along the way. We were out of the woods by 12:30 and soon looking for a place to get some good food. We found it at Tanks Bar and Inn on U.S. 219.