

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



06/11 to 14/2011, Car Camping and Day Hiking in the Ohiopyle Area: Janet, the dogs and I arrived at the campground around 1:00. The campground is huge and near capacity. We were a bit disappointed in our site (It had about a twenty degree pitch to it.) but made do with what we had. We got set up and then drove down to the visitor center in hopes of hiking the Ferncliff Natural Area. The views were great but the trail was too wet and rocky for a fast sneaker walk. Janet and Joey (who was hobbled by a torn claw anyway) turned around when we hit the first rocky section. Precious and I made it to the first waterfall but turned around as we were getting soaked by a sudden thunderstorm. By the time we got back to the visitor center the sun had returned so on our way back to camp and dry clothes we made a quick foray to Cucumber Falls. Since I was already soaked I hiked down below the falls and walked up the creek in my wet tennis shoes to get an unobstructed view.

The Mad Hatter had arrived at camp before us as had Ted E. and Momma Bear. (They would be doing their own thing throughout the trip.) John H. joined us in the middle of the night. We met Alan at the Bear Run Preserve parking lot around 9:15 the next morning. Doc was also supposed to meet us but we had a miscommunication on the time. She had arrived an hour early and did a hike without us. The plan was to do an 11.5 mile circumnavigation of the preserve. We started on Tissue Lane, a double track road. This section was pretty pedestrian

but we were rewarded with views of fields of wildflowers with a backdrop of the Laurel Highlands. We stayed on the double track too long, unknowingly turning away from the desired route and climbing to the top of the meadow to a nice home nestled in the woods. I'm glad we made this accidental detour because as we turned around to correct our now obvious error we were treated to yet another great view. We retreated until the point where the road had made the 90 degree turn and noticed that there was a wide mowed swath that continued straight ahead. We followed it for a few yards and soon turned left onto the Peninsula Trail, a footpath at this point. The forest was luxurious as the trees, ferns and understory exhibited several hues of green. The initial section of trail was pretty easy, well maintained and with no rocks. I began to wonder if we were really in Pennsylvania. A brief side bar took us to the Paradise Vista. We barely caught a glimpse of the river as the forest blocked most of our view but we did get to observe two young Copperheads basking on the rocks. As we hiked what I consider to be "the front" of the peninsula the trail became rockier and sidehilled up and down for a while. We stopped for a break where the trail would soon start changing directions. That's when the Mad Hatter pointed out a problem with one of my light hikers (Landau Renegades). At first I thought just the toe guard was separating but within another 500 yards of hiking I found myself humming a Jimmy Buffet song: " I blew out my flip-flop, stepped on a pop top ....." The sole had separated all the way to the instep. I borrowed Alan's duct tape and wrapped it up the best I could. By this point we had joined a pleasant old woods road or railroad grade. It also started to rain. It felt good because until then the morning had been pretty muggy. The boot repair didn't last long but I continued to flip-flop along the grade which by now had become the Laurel Run Trail. There were side trails down to the run but we bypassed them as the rain continued to fall. We crossed Rt381 (?) which bisects the preserve and took a brief lunch. I tried the duct tape repair once again but this one also soon fell off. I could see that this was going to require an amputation so I borrowed John's pocket knife and removed the damaged rubber. The flip-flopping was now gone but I was left (literally) with the sensation that I was walking with a slipper on my left foot, feeling every stone and twig I stepped on. We truncated the hike by turning onto the mostly grassy Snow Bunny Trail. We passed a couple of nice backcountry campsites along the way, both close to a stream. (This might be a good venue for a beginners' overnight trip.) By the time we got back to our vehicles we had hiked a bit over 8 miles. While we didn't get to do our entire route it was still quite enjoyable.

By the time we got back to camp a cold front, which had apparently

stalled to the west, finally rolled through and substantially cooled things down to the point that I had to slip on a long sleeve shirt and trousers. The firewood had gotten wet so we ate and called it an early night. The next day John, the Mad Hatter and I set up a shuttle, Leaving Mad's car at a lot near the Yough and then driving the truck to Maple Summit Road. We hiked the southernmost 11.2 miles of the Laurel Highlands Trail. If yesterday's hike was nice than this one was grand. Initially we found ourselves hiking through mature hardwood forest and then younger Hemlocks. We passed through several rock cities, the boulders covered with emerald moss and ferns. We stopped and chatted with a backpacking church group who were taking a break at a pleasant stream. We continued on, passing through more rock cities and a nice westerly view before a long and steep 1200 foot descent. Window views of the Yough and the surrounding mountains were had as the descent joined an old road of sorts. These are probably more numerous during leaf off. We took lunch at the Ohiopyle shelters before crossing a stream and beginning a 700 foot climb. The gradient of the trail was such that little effort was required except near the top. From there it was down again, cross a couple more trails and climb again. This time the E.G. was only around 450 feet but was much steeper. After crossing a forest road, the trail zig-zagged up a set of very short "teaser" switchbacks. I'm not sure if they were really physically helpful but psychologically it made a difference. As before the trail joined another road which led us to two views of a bend in the river with Sugarloaf Mountain immediately to the right. We spent a few moments here before making the final descent to the valley below. The final leg consisted of hiking 2 miles on nearly flat haul roads. Mad was way ahead of John and I so drove his car across the road to meet us.

We had a nice fire that evening but I was nearly falling out of my chair after two nice hikes so we wrapped things up around 9:00. The next day, after breaking camp, Janet and I returned to town for a quick breakfast at the Falls Restaurant and Market and then made one more visit to the falls before pointing the truck eastward and heading home. It was a very good trip. I will be returning to hike the rest of Bear Run and the trails in the park itself.