

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



08/20-21/2011, John P. Saylor Backpack, Gallitzin S.F., PA: I lead a day hike on the primary 12.3 mile loop last September while camping at Blue Knob State Park. There are no great views or waterfalls on this hike but something impressed me enough to make me want to come back and hike the whole nine yards so at 1:00 O'clock I found myself at the Lost Turkey Trailhead strapping on a pretty light pack with Tater Tot, Ted E. Bear and Dimitri. We crossed Route 56 and walked through the Babcock Picnic Area to the trailhead. The canopy was thick and a light cool breeze was blowing.... an exceptional day for a hike. Things were pretty much as I remembered them except we seemed to get to Wolf Rocks a lot faster than what I remembered. Dimitri explored the rocks a lot more thoroughly than the rest of us who were more than content to sit on the first huge boulder we could climb up on. Shortly after most of the rocks disappeared from the trail and easy hiking became the theme for the remainder of the day as the trail weaved through mostly mature hardwood forest with an understory of ferns with frequent dense Hemlock glens too thick for the sun light to penetrate. We crossed a forest road and soon found ourselves hiking up an old railroad grade. We probably gained 200-300 feet in elevation over a mile but it was so gradual we couldn't feel it. The climb continued as we crossed another road and skirted the edge of a bog with fields of blooming Snow Grass. We were all impressed but were to realize tomorrow that this was nothing compared to what we would see then. As we crested the hill we found ourselves on an old railroad grade following the bank of Clear Shade Creek and totally immersed in another Hemlock grove. We took time to study the extensive cribbing used to hold the grade up. There was a lot

of labor involved in that. We took a break at the swinging bridge before crossing and following two other grades to our campsite for the night. In my pre-hike research I found that most people refer to the structure as a shelter but I think it might pre-date the trail and could have been intended for livestock. The surrounding area seems to have been a pasture at one time. Regardless, we set up camp, collected water and ate our dinners at the picnic table. Personally I retired early and slept like a rock. It was truly one of the best night's sleep I've had in a while.

We arose to a slight chill but things were warming up by the time we were ready to roll. The hike started with more gradual climbing through hardwoods with a dark green understory of ferns and then a brief break in another Hemlock grove. There was another gradual climb before a rapid descent to yet another large bog. Besides the seemingly ever present Snow Grass large thickets of Pearly Everlasting abounded. We eventually turned onto a railroad grade and soon found ourselves back at the swinging bridge. We took an early lunch break and then continued on making quick work of the last gradual climb back to the main plateau. Here we made a change from last year's hike and took the Bog Trail and then the Boulder Trail back to Wolf Rocks. Now this, my friends, is the mother of all PA bogs (with the Bear Meadows bog in Rothrock State Forest being the father). We took the left fork in the trail hoping to find a viewing deck and we did. From this vantage point we got a good view of it but it seemed "far away" still. At this point we experienced about a twenty minute shower but it was nothing to be concerned with. We continued on, crossing the bog on boardwalks and squishy grass. Here I think we got the best view of the bog as we, more or less, were looking down its throat. Awesome is a pretty over-used words these days but it's the only one I can come up with to describe the view. The hike along the Boulder Trail was another adventure in itself as it traversed several rock fields, some dry and exposed to the sun while others were moss covered and protected from the sun by Hemlocks. The trail was aptly named. This trail and the short sections on either side of Wolf Rocks were the only "rugged" parts of the trip. Speaking of which, we took a ten minute break there before putting the finishing touches to the trek with an easy 1.3 mile hike back to the truck.

We all had a great time but I am thoroughly disappointed in an establishment called the Apple Bin on Rt 56. It looks like a very nice place to eat at after an adventure but last year, after our car camping trip, we found out the hard way that they are closed on Tuesdays. This time we were all primed for an "all you can eat Sunday Buffet" only to find out they close at 3:00. We arrived at 3:10. Major bummbage!!! I honestly think they saw us coming and realized they were going to lose money on us and slammed the shutters shut just as we got there. They're permanently off of my list of Trail's End Restaurants. We had to settle for eating at Hoss's Family Steakhouse in Bedford (I think that's the name of the town). It was OK but not notable. The drive home was yet another adventure!