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CONGRESS COMES TO CHARLESTON, PRETENDS TO CONSIDER BUFFER ZONE RULE

By John McFerrin

On September 26, the Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources of the Natural Resources Committee of the United States House of Representatives held a field hearing in Charleston to consider the public reaction to a possible proposal to reinstate the Stream Buffer Zone rule.

History

This rule has been in effect since 1983, when environmental extremist Ronald Reagan was president. It prohibits mining or mine related land disturbance within one hundred feet of a stream. Under the rule, coal mining activities cannot disturb land within one hundred feet of streams areas unless water quality and quantity will not be adversely impacted. Since mining so close to streams will inevitably have an impact upon them, the existing buffer zone rule would, if enforced, prohibit such mining.

Such a change has enormous impact upon mountaintop removal mining. After the mining industry blows the tops off the mountains to get to the coal it can't just make the rock and dirt disappear. Instead, it dumps it in the streams which run down most valleys, creating a valley fill. The current rule would make fills illegal wherever there is a stream.

In the early days of the buffer zone rule, it had less potential impact on the industry. The mines were smaller; there was less rock and dirt to dispose of. Mines which snaked around the side of a mountain could put back most of the rock and dirt after the coal had been removed. The fills were small and it was possible to avoid most streams.



Now that the mines are bigger and there are whole mountaintops to be disposed of, the buffer zone rule has become an enormous inconvenience to the industry. While changing its practices to comply with the law was an option, the industry elected to ignore the rule and continue business as usual.

Leaving the rule in place and ignoring it was the option the Office of Surface Mining and the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection had used in the past. While this has worked for the industry so far, it left open the possibility that somebody might actually succeed in getting the rule enforced. Such a possibility left a cloud over the industry, particularly the mountaintop removal part of it.

The second Bush administration addressed this possibility by

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Putting Genies Back in Bottles

René Dubos, the eminent biologist and Pulitzer-winning author, may be best known now, thirty years after his death, as the man who coined the phrase, “Think globally, act locally.” He once predicted that by 2000 our society would be forced into “a phase of steady state”, by which he meant a stop to new technology, because the planet could not stand the continued reckless exploitation of natural resources. He missed that one—although the jury is still out on how much the planet can stand.

Does anyone believe that we could stop the clock, much less turn it back, on the development of any technology—even the most frivolous or harmful? And that if it were possible to do it, we should? Conventional wisdom holds that we can’t put up selective barriers to “progress.” Narrowly focused programs would only force the technology underground, and anything broader would cause economic stagnation, or so it’s thought.

But there is a historical precedent for rejection of a powerful, popular technology. Noel Perrin told the story in Giving Up the Gun: Japan’s Reversion to the Sword, 1543 – 1879. “Giving Up the Gun” first appeared as an essay in *The New Yorker* in 1965 and as a 150-page book fourteen years later. During that period the United States and Soviet Russia were engaged in a furious nuclear arms race. Our survival rested on a despairing concept, “mutually assured destruction.” None but dreamers thought any member of the “nuclear club” would ever give up the Bomb. Conventional wisdom assumed it could never happen because it had never happened.

All this had been forgotten: In 1543, three Portuguese sailors on a Chinese trading ship landed in far southern Japan. They are thought to be the first Europeans to arrive there. They carried the early guns called arquebuses. The local feudal lord saw one shoot a duck. Through a Chinese interpreter, he arranged to take shooting lessons, and soon bought two of the guns. He ordered his chief swordsmith to make copies.

Training, production, and use spread so rapidly over the Japanese islands that only thirty-two years later guns were decisive in a major battle at Nagashino. By the end of the 16th Century, there were more guns in Japan than in any European country. These were the last years of a period the Japanese call their Age of the Country at War. No feudal lord could afford to lose any advantage.

At the same time, though, firearms were incompatible with the samurai ethos. Peasants could be hired to carry and use them, but a samurai kept his two swords. Honor and bravery were everything to the traditional warrior class. With the advent of guns, bravery became a disadvantage: you couldn’t stand nobly alone, recite your illustrious heritage, and challenge your opponents to personal combat. Even an armor-clad samurai on horseback could have his head shot off by an uneducated mercenary.

English professor Perrin found the same sentiment expressed by a young English lord in Shakespeare’s *Henry IV, Part One*: “But for these vile guns, / He would himself have been a soldier.”

Vile guns to mass armies to military adventurism: Japan’s experience with firearms might have served as a warning, had the islands not been all-but-closed to foreigners (and the West deaf to the East in any case.) The battle at Nagashino in 1575 forecast the

(More (and a bombshell ending) on p. 5)

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CONSIDERATION OF STREAM BUFFER ZONE RULE (Continued from p. 1)

proposing to “clarify” the rule. In December, 2008, the Office of Surface Mining finally adopted a new rule. The 2008 rule allows a surface coal mine operator to place excess material excavated by the operation into streams if the operator can show it is not reasonably possible to avoid doing so. The new rule effectively eliminated the buffer zone rule which had been in effect (if never fully enforced) since 1983.

Litigation followed. During the litigation, the Department of the Interior (of which the Office of Surface Mining is a part) asked that the December, 2008, rule be vacated. Granting such a request would have reinstated the 1983 rule. The court ruled that the Office of Surface Mining could not simply reinstate the 1983 without following standard rulemaking procedures.

The Office of Surface Mining is working on that. It has published an “Advance notice of proposed rulemaking; notice of intent to prepare a supplemental environmental impact statement (SEIS).” In its notice it said, “We have determined that revision of the stream buffer zone (SBZ) rule published on December 12, 2008, is necessary to implement the interagency action plan that the Administration has developed to significantly reduce the harmful environmental consequences of surface coal mining operations in Appalachia, while ensuring that future mining remains consistent with Federal law.”

The Office of Surface Mining is currently working on a draft environmental impact statement and economic analysis for the forthcoming rule. It will likely include additional monitoring requirements, tougher reclamation procedures and better definitions of streams and damage. Nothing has yet been formally proposed.

In a press release announcing that it intended to revise the rule, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Land and Minerals Management Wilma Lewis said, “America’s vast coal resources are a vital component of our energy future and our economy, but we have a responsibility to ensure that development is done in a way that protects public health and safety and the environment. We are moving as quickly as possible under

the law to gather public input for a new rule, based on sound science, that will govern how companies handle fill removed from mountaintop coal seams. Until we put a new rule in place, we will work to provide certainty to coal operations and the communities that depend on coal for their livelihood, strengthen our oversight and inspections, and coordinate with other federal agencies to better protect streams and water quality.”

Although the Office of Surface Mining was supposed to have a proposed rule by early 2011, it has not actually proposed anything yet.

The Pre-emptive Strike

Even though there is no concrete proposal, the coal industry and its minions decided to hold a field hearing on the topic as part of its oversight mission.

The originally invited guests were a who’s who of coal industry supporters: the West Virginia Coal Association, the Ohio Coal Association, CONSOL Energy, Acting Governor Earl Ray Tomblin, etc. They said the usual things about “hard working West Virginians”, “war on coal”, etc. None of them addressed the threats to the environment and local communities which the rules are designed to address.

The hearing didn’t produce any new information. It is unlikely that the subcommittee gained any new insights or did anything other than burnish the Committee members’ credentials as friends of coal.

The Party Crashers

Although they were not on the original guest list, a great deal of effort and persistence resulted in Bo Webb and Maria Gunnoe being allowed to speak. Because they were so wildly off-script, so uncooperative in advancing the purpose of the hearing, they did not appear in the Subcommittee’s press release describing the event. Even though they did not appear in the press release, they were there and had something to say.

“To date there are 19 peer-reviewed science papers addressing human health in mountaintop removal communities,” said Bo Webb, member of Coal River Mountain Watch. “Not a single one of them have been scientifically refuted. And yet, the chair of this committee has refused to acknowledge this

growing health crisis. Instead, he has chosen to serve the for-profit interests of an industry that is harming us. This committee hearing is an affront to people living — and dying — in mountaintop removal communities.”

“The Obama administration must reinstate and enforce the stream buffer zone rule to protect the very existence and culture of Appalachian people,” said Maria Gunnoe, organizer with the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition and Goldman Prize recipient. “We have witnessed a history of abuses that the coal industry has left in its path — a history that is unimaginable by most people in this country,” said Gunnoe. “Mountaineers will never be free until the madness of blowing up mountains and burying streams ends. The Regan-era stream buffer zone rule must be reinstated and enforced to protect American lives from these unconscionable industry practices.”

Cindy Rank of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy made a statement although she did not appear at the hearing.

To read complete statements of all witnesses, go to <http://naturalresources.house.gov/Calendar/EventSingle.aspx?EventID=260381>.

Speakers Available !!!!!

Does your school, church or civic group need a speaker or program presentation on a variety of environmental issues? Contact Julian Martin at 1525 Hampton Road, Charleston, WV 25314, or Martinjul@aol.com, or 304-342-8989.



FEDERAL COURT OPENS DOOR TO DRILLING IN ALLEGHENY NATIONAL FOREST

By John McFerrin

The United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit has paved the way for gas drilling in the Allegheny National Forest in Pennsylvania without an Environmental Impact study.

Although the surface of the Allegheny National Forest is owned by the United States Forest Service, 93% of the minerals are owned by private companies. Until fairly recently, a mineral owner who wanted to drill for oil or gas had only to provide the Forest Service with notice of plans to drill. The Forest Service and the driller would then negotiate the details of drilling operations, such as the location of wells or access roads, so as to prevent any unnecessary surface use. The process was all informal with no public participation.

Once the Forest Service and the driller done this, The Forest Service would then issue a Notice to Proceed. This acknowledged the receipt of the notice from the company and set out any agreement that the Forest Service and the company had made about how drilling would be done.

The Forest Service had done management plans in 1986 and 2007, complete with Environmental Impact Studies. These were both done while the Notice to Proceed system was in effect. Without explicitly saying so, the Court seemed to consider those Studies as having addressed the environmental impact of the Notice to Proceed system of allowing drilling with no Environmental Assessment.

In early 2009, the Forest Service changed its policy. Instead of allowing drilling based only upon the company giving notice, it halted the issuance of Notices to Proceed until a multi-year, forest-wide Environmental Impact Study (EIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is completed. The change was a result of Forest Service agreement with several environmental groups.

The effect of the change in policy was that there could be no new drilling until environmental assessments, and possibly an entire Environmental Impact Study, had been completed. In response, a gas company and the Pennsylvania Independent Oil and Gas

Association filed suit to overturn the new policy.

The United States District Court issued a preliminary injunction against enforcement of the new policy. The Forest Service as well as the Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics, Allegheny Defense Project, and the Sierra Club appealed this decision to the Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit which upheld the injunction.

The Forest Service defended its policy as part of its duty to protect the surface and its authority to control use of the surface. The National Environmental Policy Act applies (among other situations) where an agency enabled the project by lease, license, permit, or other entitlement for use. If issuing a Notice of Proceed were an actual decision, something akin to issuing a permit, then the Forest Service would be required to, at a minimum, do an Environmental Assessment and probably do an entire Environmental Impact Study.

In this case, the Forest Service assumed that, in allowing drilling to go forward, it really did have a decision to make. The whole point of the National Environmental Policy Act process is to guide decision-making and make sure that environmental effects are considered. If this was a real decision, then NEPA was implicated.

The Court didn't see it that way. The Court treated this as a matter of state law and how it interacted with federal law. Under Pennsylvania law, surface owners (including the Forest Service) had precious few rights. Those rights did not include any right to refuse access to a mineral owner. Neither could the Court find any language in the statutes creating the National Forest system which gave these rights to the Forest Service.

Under the Court's interpretation, absent a right to exclude a mineral owner, the Forest Service had no decision to make. Its issuance of Notices to Proceed were simply a routine act, involving no actual decision. Under such an interpretation, the NEPA process is unnecessary.



Send us a post card, drop us a line, stating point of view

Please email any poems, letters, commentaries to the VOICE editor at johnmcferrin@aol.com or real, honest to goodness, mentioned in the United States Constitution mail to WV Highlands Conservancy, PO Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321.

Leave a Legacy of hope for the future

Remember the Highlands Conservancy in your will. Plan now to provide a wild and wonderful future for your children and future generations. Bequests keep our organization strong and will allow your voice to continue to be heard. Your thoughtful planning now will allow us to continue our work to protect wilderness, wildlife, clean air and water and our way of life.

HUGH FINISHES UP (AND DROPS A BOMBHELL) (Continued from p. 2)

slaughters of our Civil War, as one side lured the other to charge into volleys of bullets. Long standoffs ensued, like the trench warfare of World War I. Then, in 1592, the regent Hideyoshi thought to consolidate his power at home by extending it abroad. His invasion of China by way of Korea (like MacArthur three hundred fifty years later, he got as far as the Yalu) bogged down when China sent troops into Korea, and the Koreans themselves learned to make and use guns. Japan escaped under a treaty of peace. The shogun's attention turned homeward, and the country turned away from guns.

Restrictions were gradually tightened: licenses were required to make, and then to sell, any firearm. Nearly all orders were barred. Gunmakers were forced to live in one city; most were furloughed with meager pensions. The last battle in which guns played a role was a rebellion in 1637 by 20,000 Christian peasants who had hung onto their old weapons. It was suppressed (down to the last man), and guns essentially disappeared from Japan for two and a half centuries.

This history fascinates me, but it doesn't fool me into thinking there's much hope for gun control here. The cultural differences are too great. Beyond the samurai traditions of swordsmanship and bravery, Japan's distinctive aesthetics, class consciousness, and aversion to foreign influence kept it from fully embracing the firearm. Guns were for a time a necessary evil—as they became again in the late 19th Century, after Commodore Perry's forced "opening" of the country.

Perrin pointed out that European rulers beginning with England's Henry VIII had tried gun control. Those edicts were ineffective because too few of their subjects really disliked guns. The same goes for this time and place. I have only to recall my sons' schoolmates who learned that we had none in our house. They were simply incredulous. It was more unbelievable than no TV.

But the Japanese example has a broader application. We don't have to passively accept any new, environmentally destructive technologies. Putting larger and larger wind turbines on every last ridge isn't ingrained in our culture. Ditto horizontal drilling into ever deeper and tighter shales, with all the consequences on the surface. As the shoguns, for their own reasons, eliminated weapons they had once thought essential, so our democratic society can reject technological developments whose costs are judged too great to bear. We have the power to choose.

N.B. I have informed the board that I am resigning midway through my fourth term as President. Our Senior Vice President, Cindy Ellis, who anticipated taking over in 2012, has graciously agreed to begin a year earlier. I look forward to working with her and the rest of the board as Past President. I know Cindy's intelligence, commitment, and energy will be a huge benefit to the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy.

Shadow

Dusk on the Greenbrier
Pulls winged hunters out of hiding
Dozens of bats
Darting over the water, nearly grazing the flow
Bridge's black shadow
A reminder of illness sweeping from the north;
Fly fast my friends
Before your noses frost white.

Come April, tornadoes swarmed
Like hornets from Hell
Past the Alleghenies.

A hunter told me turkeys could only watch from branches
As their hatchlings drowned
In onrush of Mississippi bloated like road-killed possum.

Souris, Passaic, Susquehanna.

A beautiful beetle is killing ash trees by the millions
Hemlocks and chestnuts and elms already missing,

While men with maps and Garmins and laptops
Plan the best way
To blast another mountain to smithereens.

Mamma toad, feel the sun on your back and
Lay your eggs in the deepest puddle.

The planet shudders with fever;
What's this white spot on my nose?

Carpenter, build us a table round
Where we can set our maps and laptops and coffee cups
And yell to exhaustion 'til we have a plan
To set the world right

Can we shake on it and get started?

Bat, make haste--
It's getting dark
And mayflies rising from the river;
There's not one of us
Has time to waste.

E.R.

Seeing Marcellus Drilling First-Hand**POCAHONTAS COUNTY COMMISSION GOES ON A FIELD TRIP**

Pocahontas County Commissioners recently traveled to Wetzel County to see firsthand the impacts of Marcellus Shale gas drilling. Commissioners David Fleming, Jamie Walker and Martin Saffer spent more than five hours speaking with landowners, visiting well sites, compressor stations and driving on the county's back roads on a trip arranged by Stamping Creek resident Brynn Kusic.

The tour of the Chesapeake Energy gas fields of Wetzel County was lead by Wetzel County Action Group members Rose Baker and Bill Hughes. The watchdog group has been documenting the activities of Chesapeake and its subcontractors in Wetzel County since 2007.

The stated mission of the group is to "support economic development for the county and state; and work to ensure that economic development does not negatively impact the safety, economic interests, and quality of life of the Citizens of Wetzel County."

In the past four years, the group has documented on its website, wcag-wv.org dozens of tractor trailer accidents and dangerous driving conditions on Wetzel County roads, as well as spills and leaks on and around well pads.

During Thursday's tour, commissioners visited a half dozen of the more than 20 active well pads in eastern Wetzel County and southern Marshall County.

One of these well pads sits on the property of Dewey Teal. While he owns the surface rights on his 19 acres, the owner of the mineral rights lives in Charleston, Teal explained. Teal told commissioners he came home one day to find five acres of his land cleared and excavated, without any prior word from Chesapeake or its subcontractors. Those five acres, said Teal, included his family's garden and access to his woodlot.

What commissioners saw Thursday on the site across the road from Teal's house was a five-acre, graveled well pad with two wellheads, four storage tanks and two large evaporators. Drilling of the two wells was completed about a year and a half ago, said Teal. The process took six months of round-the-clock work. During that period, Teal said, the lights and sound of diesel engines and pumps resulted in a lot of sleepless nights for him and his family.

"They said once they were through

here I'd have homesites and all that, once they were done," Teal told the commissioners. "They said all I would see are these two wellheads. Well, you can see how much stuff you can see here now."

"They also told me I could have free gas," he added, "but that went out the door when they were done drilling. They said no, you have to have a \$30,000 regulator."

While drilling is finished for now, there is still gas company activity on Teal's land. The well pad's tanks are emptied three times each week by a pair of 3,000-gallon tanker trucks. The separators and compressors connected to the wells are in continuous operation. When the gate to the property is unlocked or left open, Teal says the site is used as a truck-turnaround by drivers working on neighboring well pads.



While Teal is unable to use the five acres where the well pad sits, he told commissioners he still has to pay property taxes on it.

But what seems to bother Teal even more than this is what happened to his water.

"They polluted my water and everything else," he said. "My pony won't even drink water out of the well any more. I have to haul water from town. And we just buy our drinking water and haul water from town to wash."

"I drank the water out of that well for 35 years," said Teal.

In addition to surface owners like Teal, Pocahontas County commissioners saw the wide rights-of-way being cleared and excavated for the pipelines that are collecting gas from Wetzel County well sites and taking it to the three compressor stations

in the county. In one location commissioners visited, the right-of way is as wide as a two-lane road, passing within 100 feet of the front porch of a house. Hughes said work on the new pipelines began about two years ago.

While drilling has been completed on the well pads visited by commissioners, they saw several convoys of oversized trucks plying Wetzel County's back roads. In most cases, the convoys are lead by a pilot vehicle warning oncoming traffic of the oversized vehicles behind. The pilot vehicle is then followed by three 18-wheelers-typically tankers. Bringing up the rear is usually a smaller tanker, pump, or roll-back truck.

In several instances during the commission's tour, there was little room for the vehicles of Baker and Hughes to get past the convoys on the narrow roads. A sign at one 18-percent grade warned motorists to "yield to heavy downhill traffic."

The roads themselves often showed signs of damage from the heavy truck traffic-crumbling shoulders, large potholes and washboarding pavement. While Chesapeake and its subcontractors recently finished summer maintenance on the roads they are using-as part of the company's bond agreement with the state-Hughes said the combination of truck traffic with wet weather and winter snow can turn the roads into a rutted mess. In some instances, Hughes said he has watched subcontractors use heavy equipment such as graders or dozers on county roads to tow trucks through the snow to well pads.

While local job creation is often touted as one of the benefits of drilling, most of the trucks bore emblems of companies based in Pennsylvania or counties outside of Wetzel. Unemployment data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics shows little difference between Wetzel County and the rest of the state. In 2006-the year before drilling activity began-Wetzel County's unemployment rate hovered around seven percent. From 2007 until now, the county's unemployment rate has followed a similar curve to that of the rest of West Virginia, with spikes well above that of the state average. As of July 2011, the last month for which data is available, Wetzel County's unemployment rate was 10.9 percent, while the state average was 7.3 percent. Pocahontas County's rate at that time was nine percent.

(More on the next page)

MORE ON THE FIELD TRIP (Continued from p. 4)

Commissioners said they were also surprised to see how much excavation each well pad required. Nearly all of the sites are on ridges. The sites are leveled, and the land is terraced where the ridge slopes away from the well pad. Commissioners saw several instances where the earth on these reworked ridges had slipped and failed, sending tons of earth downhill.

On the car ride back from Wetzel County, the commissioners shared their thoughts about what they saw that day.



“Drilling for gas is definitely an industrial activity,” said commissioner Martin Saffer. “There’s just no other way to paint it. It’s a big-scale, industrial enterprise, which looks to me to be growing in scale and intensity and seriousness.”

“The decision the county has to make is that-is this the kind of life we want to have, or do we want to live in the environment that we presently have and that we all enjoy?” Saffer continued. “Or do we want to become an industrialized community. That’s a choice of lifestyle and a choice of values that we as a community are going to have to make.”

Commissioner Jamie Walker said he was surprised by the problems he saw with the excavation at several well pads.

“The main concern I see with it was the devastation of the stability of the ground once they leveled it off,” Walker said. “I think that’s something that should be worked on.”

“It’s definitely going to change the whole view and outlook when it’s done,” Walker added, “but I think it’s up to the responsibility of the landowner to determine whether he thinks its a good idea or whether he would benefit by it.”

Commission President David Fleming

said he was struck by the noise and scale of what he saw in Wetzel County.

“The compressor stations were significantly larger than I thought they would be, and they’re constantly noisy,” he said. “The truck traffic, while down today, was still pretty substantial, noisy and tricky to get by on these narrow roads. The visual presence of the drilling pads was more than I thought it would be. There are visible structures on each pad. In addition to the wellhead, there’s a separator machinery, there’s a diesel engine running on every one, so there’s constant noise there.”

Fleming said he was also disturbed by what he saw on Dewey Teal’s land.

“They bulldozed his garden,” Fleming said. “He seems to have no rights as to what is done on his land. The gas company told him when they’re done, they’d reclaim it, but he has no idea when ‘done’ is going to happen. While drilling is over, they continue to use his site as

a truck turn around spot.”

“It’s not fair that he has to pay property taxes on land that he basically has no control over,” Fleming added.

Fleming said the commission would have a lot to think about as it continues to wrestle with the issue and balance concerns over safety, property rights and quality of life in Pocahontas County.

Note: These pictures are not any of the specific scenes that the County Commissioners saw. They are two of many that appear on the web site of the Wetzel County Action Group (www.wcag-wv.org). For a better understanding of the tribulations of living around gas drilling, visit that web site.

This story originally appeared in *The Pocahontas Times*.

AND WHAT THEY DID WHEN THEY GOT HOME:

When the Pocahontas County Commission got home from its field trip to Wetzel County, it wrote the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection to express its views. Here is some of what it said:

“The Pocahontas County Commission is gravely concerned about the impacts to our pristine environmental and rural culture from the impending possibility of hydrofracture drilling in the Marcellus Shale underlying our borders.”

“As a governing body, we do not want our local rights on this very local issue usurped or diminished by state government. The commission views the present proposed rules as grossly inadequate and failing to speak to our county’s unique needs.”

Martin V. Saffer, a lawyer and member of the Pocahontas County Commission, said the county’s unique environment “is a benefit for people who live here and people throughout the rest of West Virginia.

“We have pure water, opportunities for recreation. We have a wonderful, flourishing tourism industry. We have farming communities and timber resources.

“All of these resources will support an economy that will sustain itself for many, many future generations,” Saffer said.

“From my perspective, I believe the citizens of Pocahontas County should have full rights of self determination about how to protect their community and their heritage,” Saffer said.

Pocahontas residents Cyla Allison and Beth Little have helped organize a grass-roots group called the Eight Rivers Council.

A CHOICE, NOT AN ECHO

By the time *The Highlands Voice* goes to print and you read this, we will have had the special election and either Mr. Tomblin or Mr. Maloney will have been elected Governor. Millions of dollars will have been spent so they could call each other crooked, carpetbagger, two-faced, etc. (paraphrase, not direct quotes).

While it would have been difficult to know of it from most news coverage, there was another candidate—West Virginia Highlands Conservancy board member Bob Henry Baber.

While Mr. Baber was only visible in most stories in the last paragraph, under “other candidates”, Jeff Biggers did an extensive interview with Mr. Baber. He also included some observations about Mr. Baber and his campaign. While it is too long to reprint here, you can read the whole thing at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jeff-biggers/taking-on-big-coal-govern_b_973797.html.



HATS FOR SALE

We have West Virginia Highlands Conservancy baseball style caps for sale as well as I ♥ Mountains caps.

The WVHC cap is beige with green woven into the twill and the pre-curved visor is light green. The front of the cap has West Virginia Highlands Conservancy logo and the words West Virginia Highlands Conservancy on the front and I ♥ Mountains on the back. It is soft twill, unstructured, low profile, sewn eyelets, cloth strap with tri-glide buckle closure.

The I ♥ Mountains The colors are stone, black and red.. The front of the cap has I ♥ MOUNTAINS. The heart is red. The red and black hats are soft twill, unstructured, low profile, sewn eyelets, cloth strap with tri-glide buckle closure. The stone has a stiff front crown with a velcro strap on the back. All hats have West Virginia Highlands Conservancy printed on the back. Cost is \$15 by mail. West Virginia residents add 6% tax. Make check payable to West Virginia Highlands Conservancy and send to James Solley, P.O. Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321-0306



T- SHIRTS

White, heavy cotton T-shirts with the I ♥ Mountains slogan on the front. The lettering is blue and the heart is red. “West Virginia Highlands Conservancy” in smaller blue letters is included below the slogan. Short sleeve in sizes: S, M, L, XL, and XXL. Long sleeve in sizes S, M, L, and XL. **Short sleeve** model is \$12 total by mail; **long sleeve** is \$15. West Virginia residents add 6% sales tax. Send sizes wanted and check payable to West Virginia Highlands Conservancy ATTEN: James Solley, WVHC, P.O. Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321-0306.



Voice Available Electronically

The Highlands Voice is now available for electronic delivery. You may, of course, continue to receive the paper copy. Unless you request otherwise, you will continue to receive it in paper form. If, however, you would prefer to receive it electronically instead of the paper copy please contact Beth Little at blittle@citynet.net. Electronic copies arrive as e-mail attachments a few days before the paper copy would have arrived

BUMPER STICKERS

To get free I ♥ Mountains bumper sticker(s), send a SASE to Julian Martin, 1525 Hampton Road, Charleston, WV 25314. Slip a dollar donation (or more) in with the SASE and get 2 bumper stickers. Businesses or organizations wishing to provide bumper stickers to their customers/members may have them free. (Of course if they can afford a donation that will be gratefully accepted.)



Also available are the new green-on-white oval *Friends of the Mountains* stickers.

Let Julian know which (or both) you want.



STUFF YOU CAN DO TO IMPROVE THINGS IN MARCELLUS SHALE DRILLING

Sometimes it must seem as if the problems with drilling in the Marcellus shale just keep on coming with no relief in sight. In this issue of *The Highlands Voice* alone we have one story about the Pocahontas County Commission visiting Wetzel County to see the practice first hand and finding a colossal mess. We have another story about a court decision giving the Forest Service fewer tools to control Marcellus drilling in the Allegheny National Forest. The world can seem uphill in all directions.

That is not to say that there is nothing we can do. Here are two suggestions:

1. New Environmental Protection Agency Rule on Air pollution.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) wants to reduce harmful air pollution from the oil and gas industry. It recently proposed new rules to reduce air pollution from hydraulically fractured gas wells. EPA estimates that if these rules are adopted air pollution from drilling will be reduced by more than 25%. It also estimates that under these rules industry will save about \$30 million annually by using technology already used in some states.

New rules do not just happen. When, as here, there will be industry opposition, EPA needs encouragement. It will be accepting written comments on the proposed rules through OCTOBER 24. If you want to support the rules They need some help. Please speak out and show your support for their efforts. EPA is seeking public input on their proposal and **they're accepting written comments on the proposed rules through October 24.**

How to send comments:

Submit your comments, identified by Docket ID Number EPA-HQ-OAR-2010-0505, by one of the following methods:

E-mail: a-and-r-docket@epa.gov. Include Docket ID Number EPA-HQ-OAR-2010-0505 in the subject line of the message.

FAX: (202) 566-9744.

Mail: Attention Docket ID Number EPA-HQ-OAR-2010-0505, 1200 Pennsylvania Ave., NW., Washington, DC 20460. Please include a total of two copies. In addition, please mail a copy of your comments on the information collection provisions to:

Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs

Office of Management and Budget (OMB)

Attn: Desk Officer for the EPA,

725 17th Street, NW.

Washington, DC 20503

2. Public hearing on proposed Horizontal Well Development Rule 35CSR8

The West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection will hold a public hearing on Tuesday, Oct. 11, at 6 p.m. in the Coopers Rock Conference Room at the WVDEP Headquarters located at 601 57th Street, SE, Charleston, WV. The purpose of the hearing is to receive comments on proposed Horizontal Well Development Rule 35CSR8.

Any person wishing to comment on the proposed rule is invited to be present or represented at the hearing. In addition to oral comments provided at the hearing, the agency **will accept written comments at any time up to the conclusion of the public hearing.** Written comments may be submitted to the following address:

Public Information Office

WV Department of Environmental Protection

601 57th Street SE

Charleston, WV 25304

Comments may also be e-mailed to dep.comments@wv.gov

For a copy of the proposed rule:

<http://www.dep.wv.gov/oil-and-gas/Pages/default.aspx>

Thanks to the Sierra Club for alerting us to these ways we could help.



Join Now !!!

Name _____

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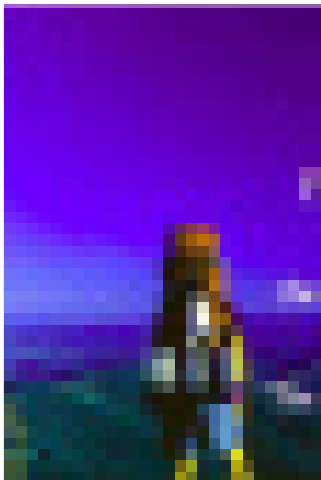
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Membership categories (circle one)

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Senior	\$ 15		
Student	\$ 15		
Introductory			
Other	\$ 15		
Regular	\$ 25	\$ 35	\$ 50
Associate	\$ 50	\$ 75	\$ 100
Sustaining	\$100	\$ 150	\$ 200
Patron	\$ 250	\$ 500	\$ 500
Mountaineer	\$500	\$ 750	\$ 1000

Mail to West Virginia Highlands Conservancy PO Box 306 Charleston, WV 25321

West Virginia Highlands Conservancy
Working to Keep West Virginia Wild and Wonderful!



GREAT HISTORY BOOK NOW AVAILABLE

For the first time, a comprehensive history of West Virginia's most influential activist environmental organization. Author Dave Elkinton, the Conservancy's third president, and a twenty-year board member, not only traces the major issues that have occupied the Conservancy's energy, but profiles more than twenty of its volunteer leaders.

Learn about how the Conservancy stopped road building in Otter Creek, how a Corps of Engineers wetland permit denial

saved Canaan Valley, and why Judge Haden restricted mountaintop removal mining. Also read Sayre Rodman's account of the first running of the Gauley, how college students helped save the Cranberry Wilderness, and why the highlands are under threat as never before.

With a foreword by former congressman Ken Hechler, the book's chapters follow the battle for wilderness preservation, efforts to stop many proposed dams and protect free-flowing rivers, the 25-year struggle to save the Canaan Valley, how the Corridor H highway was successfully re-routed around key environmental landmarks, and concluding with the current controversy over wind farm development. One-third of the text tells the story of the Conservancy's never-ending fight to control the abuses of coal mining, especially mountaintop removal mining. The final chapter examines what makes this small, volunteer-driven organization so successful.

From the cover by photographer Jonathan Jessup to the 48-page index, this book will appeal both to Conservancy members and friends and to anyone interested in the story of how West Virginia's mountains have been protected against the forces of over-development, mismanagement by government, and even greed.

518 pages, 6x9, color cover, published by Pocahontas Press
 To order your copy for \$14.95, plus \$3.00 shipping, visit the Conservancy's website, wvhighlands.org, where payment is accepted by credit card and PayPal. Or write: WVHC, PO Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321. Proceeds support the Conservancy's ongoing environmental projects.

SUCH A DEAL!

Book Premium With Membership

Although *Fighting to Protect the Highlands, the First 40 Years of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy* normally sells for \$14.95 plus \$3.00 postage. We are offering it as a premium to new members. New members receive it free with membership.

Existing members may have one for \$10.00. Anyone who adds \$10 to the membership dues listed on the How to Join membership or on the renewal form will receive the history book. Just note on the membership form that you wish to take advantage of this offer.

LISTEN UP!

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy will hold its annual meeting on Sunday, October 30, 2011, at Hawk's Nest State Park, Fayette County, West Virginia at approximately 9:30 a.m.

The board meeting will include the election of at large Board members as well as any other business that may come before the meeting.

Immediately following the annual meeting will be quarterly Board meeting. All members are welcome at the Board meeting and are free to take part in the discussion although only Board members may make motions and vote.

The Annual Meeting and Board Meeting are part of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy Fall Review. Saturday and Sunday, October 29 and 30. Hawk's Nest State Park. Fayette County, West Virginia. Hawks circling right outside your window (avian cooperation not guaranteed), close to Mystery Hole, New River Gorge, etc. etc. etc. Watch for program details on our website.

West Virginia Mountain Odyssey



Outings, Education and Beyond 🇺🇸

Saturday & Sunday, October 15 & 16: 10 am each day, Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center. Red Spruce Ecosystem Restoration. Join us for a day, or 2 days, of volunteer work to help restore the red spruce ecosystem. We'll be collecting red spruce cones in mature spruce forests. Searching for and collecting spruce cones from the needle and moss covered forest floor is not a bad way to spend a day in the mountains. Dress for the weather, wear sturdy shoes or boots, and bring a lunch and water bottle. For more information, visit www.restoredspruce.org or call Dave Saville at 304 692-8118.

Saturday, October 22: 10 am, Cranberry Mountain Visitor Center. Red Spruce Ecosystem Restoration. Join us for a day, or 2 days, of volunteer work to help restore the red spruce ecosystem. We'll be collecting red spruce cones in mature spruce forests. Searching for and collecting spruce cones from the needle and moss covered forest floor is not a bad way to spend a day in the mountains. Dress for the weather, wear sturdy shoes or boots, and bring a lunch and water bottle. For more information, visit www.restoredspruce.org or call Dave Saville at 304 692-8118.

October 29-November 1, 2011, Coopers Rock State Forest Car Camp, WV: Two hikes: Scotts Run Loop and a hike through a virgin Hemlock Forest, both about 8 miles. Campsite reservation and pre-registration required. Contact Mike Juskelis @ 410-439-4964 or mjuskelis@cablespeed.com.

Open Dates: Visit Kayford Mountain south of Charleston to see mountain top removal (MTR) up close and hear Larry Gibson's story about how he saved his mountain, now almost totally surrounded by MTR. Bring lunch for a picnic on Larry's mountain. Call in advance to schedule. Julian Martin (304) 342-8989; martinjul@aol.com or Daniel Chiotos, (304)886-3389 – cell, (304)205-0920 – office.

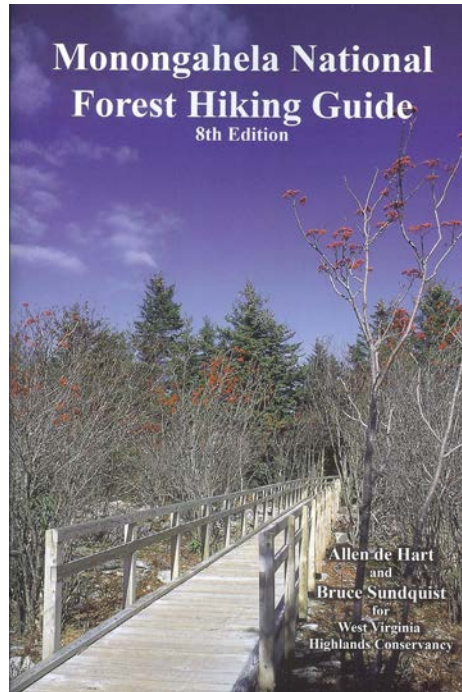
The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy is a non-profit corporation which has been recognized as a tax exempt organization by the Internal Revenue Service. Its bylaws describe its purpose:

The purposes of the Conservancy shall be to promote, encourage, and work for the conservation—including both preservation and wise use—and appreciation of the natural resources of West Virginia and the Nation, and especially of the Highlands Region of West Virginia, for the cultural, social, educational, physical, health, spiritual, and economic benefit of present and future generations of West Virginians and Americans.

The Highlands Voice is published monthly by the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, P. O. Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321. Articles, letters to the editor, graphics, photos, poetry, or other information for publication should be sent to the editor via the internet or by the U.S. Mail by the last Friday of each month. You may submit material for publication either to the address listed above or to the address listed for Highlands Voice Editor on the previous page. Submissions by internet or on a floppy disk are preferred.

The Highlands Voice is always printed on recycled paper. Our printer uses 100% post consumer recycled paper when available.

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy web page is www.wvhighlands.org.



The Monongahela National Forest Hiking Guide

By Allen de Hart and Bruce Sundquist

Describes 180 U.S. Forest Service trails (847 miles total) in one of the best (and most popular) areas for hiking, back-packing and ski-touring in this part of the country (1436 sq. miles of national forest in West Virginia=s highlands). 6x9" soft cover, 368 pages, 86 pages of maps, 57 photos, full-color cover, Ed.8 (2006)

Send \$14.95 plus \$3.00 shipping to:
West Virginia Highlands Conservancy
 P.O. Box 306
 Charleston, WV 25321
 OR
 Order from our website at
www.wvhighlands.org

New 8TH Edition Now Available on CD

WV Highlands Conservancy proudly offers an Electronic (CD) version of its famous Monongahela National Forest Hiking Guide (8th Edition), with many added features.

This new CD edition includes the text pages as they appear in the printed version by Allen deHart and Bruce Sundquist in an interactive pdf format. It also includes the following mapping features, developed by WVHC volunteer Jim Solley, and not available anywhere else:

- All pages and maps in the new Interactive CD version of the Mon hiking guide can easily be printed and carried along with you on your hike
- All new, full color topographic maps have been created and are included on this CD. They include all points referenced in the text.
- Special Features not found in the printed version of the Hiking Guide: Interactive pdf format allows you to click on a map reference in the text, and that map centered on that reference comes up.
- Trail mileages between waypoints have been added to the maps.
- ALL NEW Printable, full color, 24K scale topographic maps of many of the popular hiking areas, including Cranberry, Dolly Sods, Otter Creek and many more

Price: \$20.00 from the same address.

Outing Report

BANDING BIRDS ON THE ALLEGHENY FRONT

Orion wasn't visible until the full moon set. Not long after moonset, some of us at Red Creek Campground headed to the banding hut---the Allegheny Front Migration Observatory.

At 6:30 a.m. on the second Sunday in September, the nets were unfurled for another morning in hopes of briefly sidelining migrating songbirds. The sun slowly rose behind a cloudbank and a Winter Wren sang. Phalanxes of Cedar Waxwings wheeled in circles and stripped the berries from Mountain Ash trees. Two Ovenbirds and an American Robin were the first birds gently fingered out of the nets and another day of counting began.

Soon, "the nets look like Christmas trees" one observer said, and net tenders hurried to retrieve the birds and get them quickly to the three banders for quick data gathering and release. A party of folks from the D.C. area leaned in close as their tour leader Mark Garland gave a mini-lesson on many of the warmly hued little birds; most were Warblers.

A few of us were there on a West Virginia Highlands Conservancy outing and we listened too. By 8:15 a.m. the busiest part of the rush of birds was over, although a few more of the day's 358 fliers could be seen still coming from the steep valley below or resting briefly on a nearby rock-edged Spruce. And, as Hugh Rogers said in his Voice column of October 2009, after his visit to AFMO, "It was a gift to meet them..."

We who enjoy that spot are ever grateful to all those who have worked and continue to work to protect that part of Dolly Sods. Without those efforts we...and the birds...would have had to go elsewhere. And "elsewhere" is getting harder to find.



WVHC member John Rundle at the bird banding.

Cerulean Blues: A Personal Search for a Vanishing Songbird by Katie Fallon (Ruka Press, Washington, DC.)

Reviewed by Cindy Ellis

Daddy grew up on 100 acres adjoining what is now Kanawha State Forest. So that place is familiar and special to me. But this book review is not about threats to one forest. Not exactly.

Teaching was my job for 34 years. I know how it feels to enjoy a special rapport with many students and to have a heightened regard for their welfare. But this book review is not about teachers and students. Not exactly.

The study of wild birds has been a deep interest---okay, a passion---of mine since the early 1980's. And, luckily for me, the years since then have included experiences with tiny birds called Cerulean Warblers. Mostly this book review is about those birds. Teachers, students, and Kanawha State Forest fit in too. So does mountaintop removal mining.

"Cerulean Blues: A Personal Search for a Vanishing Songbird" by Katie Fallon tells of a young instructor's research into the life and travels of a small blue bird. It also tells of the year in her life and of her travels and of her reactions to a deep tragedy in which some of her students died.

Fallon is an instructor at West Virginia University and is also the Education Director for the West Virginia Raptor Rehabilitation Center in Fairmont. She was sparked toward a special interest in Ceruleans by attending an Audubon presentation. Dr. Petra Wood explained the decline of these warblers and noted factors that are threats, including, but not singling out, mountaintop removal. In the introduction though, the author writes of the bird as "...a sentinel singing a warning..." Fallon was intrigued by Wood's remarks and longed to find out more.

Anyone interested in birds and conservation will soon find that one-third of the breeding territory of Cerulean Warblers lies within the mountains of West Virginia. Photographs capture some of their stunning, "four-and-a-half inch, nine-gram" beauty.

Their importance is that they are within that whole array of forest creatures and plants for which the loss of any diminishes the whole; they are an indicator species. I thought I was original in naming the game, "Jenga" when describing dangers to biodiversity---how many wooden game tiles can be removed before the entire structure collapses?! But Fallon at one point uses that too, so there must be a group of people across a span of ages who remember that game and think of it when stressing how every piece fits in a

healthy ecosystem.

While busy life carried her away from the notion of studying Cerulean Warblers, Fallon did not entirely forget. In the time after hearing Dr. Wood speak, Katie happened to be teaching at Virginia Tech at Blacksburg. She had decided to pursue her idea of finding out all she could about Ceruleans and had begun making travel and research plans. But April 17, 2007, found her scrunched down in her office, with her back to the wall, waiting for an all-clear signal. Students had been shot, some of whom she saw routinely in her classes.



Katie Fallon with Cerulean Warbler

Poignantly, school counselors gave advice that, in dealings with surviving students, instructors who had concerns about touching them could, "err on the side of the hug." Katie Fallon used the poem "The Peace of Wild Things" by Wendell Berry in her first class after the shooting. Her book is dedicated to one of her students.

Fallon struggled with summoning enthusiasm for research on a threatened bird species when recalling young human life ending too soon. But she began.

She interviewed Petra Wood, whose published work includes, "Cerulean Warbler (*Dendroica cerulea*) Microhabitat and Landscape-level Habitat Characteristics in Southern West Virginia in Relation to Mountaintop Mining/Valley Fills." She became acquainted with Appalachian reforestation efforts and shares the skepticism of some West Virginia Highlands Conservancy board members on the ultimate efficacy of such

work. She traveled to Cooper's Rock State Forest, Lewis Wetzel Wildlife Management Area, and Kanawha State Forest, flatly declaring, "West Virginia is hands down the most beautiful place on earth."

It was in Kanawha State Forest that she sought and found the nest of her target bird. Along the way toward KSF, Fallon traveled in the state's southern counties and visited an MTR site, something she had already seen by air. She also already knew something of mining's legacy; she is the granddaughter of a child laborer---a "breaker"--- a boy who toiled at sorting coal.

Then she turned to seeking birds, under armed guards, in Columbia, South America, where Ceruleans spend the winter. There she saw colorful parades with school children in bird costumes and she learned more about efforts to save bird habitat with "shade grown" coffee plantations. The production of coffee in full sun damages trees and land in South America. It is not an exaggeration to link the choice of drink to survival of birds in Appalachian forests.

Memories of her slain students often surfaced and affected her view of the trials of the birds too. One night, after a rain soaked trip, she wrote, "As I crawled into my warm bed and inhaled the familiar smell of my pillow, I wondered: could this---comfort, relief, exhaustion---be what Cerulean Warblers feel when they arrive back in Appalachia after months in the tropics? Or is the reverse true---that the Andes feel more like home than the breeding grounds? Could it be both?"

Katie Fallon's year of search, for birds and heart's ease, ends. Her words make it easy to travel with her, through West Virginia, through the Andes, and through the year. She points us toward usefulness with a list of eight ways to help birds. You are probably already doing some of those things. West Virginia Highlands Conservancy itself was one of the signers of a petition to try to designate Cerulean Warblers as an endangered species. And our organization is listed as a resource under item #4, "Speak out..."

"Cerulean Blues" has a publication date of October 18, 2011; the publisher is Ruka Press, Washington, DC.

Finally, here is her benediction, to her diminutive subject: "May your trees be old, your mountains high, and your coffee plantations shaded."

WATOGA STATE PARK ADVENTURE HIKE

By Michael Juskelis

At over 10,000 acres, Watoga is the largest state park in West Virginia. It offers everything: a swimming pool, lake, two modern campgrounds and one primitive one, standard and modern cabins, a restaurant (in season) and over 33 miles of maintained trails including 5.5 miles of the long distance Allegheny Trail. The real draw for this hiker, though, was the recently (2009) designated Spice Run Wilderness (SRW) which is approximately 1.5 miles south of the southern park boundary on State Road 21.

We set up camp in Riverside Campground. The next morning I packed extra water, snacks, fleece and head lamp just in case I would get stuck in the woods after dark. P-Hyker and I began our trek at the far end of the Laurel Run primitive campground and were immediately plunged into the darkness of a Hemlock grove and two easy fords of the run. The road then passed through a large meadow with a wonderful view of Pyle Mountain. It then re-entered the woods, fording the run one last time. Initially the road made for a nice hike through Calvin Price State Forest with a few ruts and mud puddles to negotiate.

The last 0.3 miles were quite the opposite. It appeared that local ATVers had brought in a piece of heavy equipment and created huge "tank traps" - giant, scooped out mud puddles, reinforced with clay and log dams on the downhill sides to prevent drainage. It seemed more like an obstacle course like you would see on TV than a State Road.

I was OK with all of this destruction because in mere minutes I would be back in my element ... the wilderness, or at least so I thought. We arrived at a clearing with a giant pine tree in the middle and a sign post (with the map removed) next to what was once upon a time an old jeep road used by hunters that traversed Spice Ridge. It was my plan to use this old road to deposit us at the confluence of Greenbrier River and Spice Run.

From there we would hike up the run returning to SR 21. Keep in mind that this road has existed for something like 30 to 50 years, serving as the boundary between the

Monongahela National Forest and Calvin Price State Forest. Although it might be considered a scar in a wilderness area, it had ample time to heal and was at least partially naturalized with an assortment of several species of wildflowers, ferns, mosses, lichens and herbaceous shrubs reclaiming their spot in the forest.

Words cannot express my dismay to find that the Forest Service had bulldozed all six miles of it as part of a mandate for "Wilderness Reclamation", roughly grading it to match the contour of the ridge it followed. We hiked up it for about 0.5 miles, hoping



Meadow with Pyle Mountain as the backdrop

that it was merely a brief effort to keep mechanized vehicles out of the wilderness but, indeed, the devastation was complete. This short part of the hike was like walking uphill, on a beach with combat boots on, in the middle of a heavily shelled war zone. It was difficult and plain ol' UGLY. It would take another 30-50 years for this new scar to heal and it will probably not return to the hardwood forest it was once before but will most likely be replaced with unwanted species such as Striped Maple and Sassafras, both miniature trees that grow in dense thickets preventing desirable species from ever taking hold.

We began a hasty retreat to the truck. I tried to purge my mind of what we had just experienced but it was very difficult. I probably won't get another chance to visit Spice Run again and I still needed a wilderness fix.

As we approached the large meadow we had walked through earlier I remembered

an old boundary road on the U.S.G.S. maps in my software that roughly followed Laurel Run as it separated Calvin Price State Forest and Watoga State Park. We found it after we forded the run. I didn't have that particular map with me but "What the heck!"

We followed it downstream past a majestic old maple tree. The meadow constricted here but soon opened up again and then "Bingo!" we were standing on a wide rocky road. We followed the road through more meadows, beautiful stands of Pine and Hemlock and a couple of stream crossings and scenic streamside views for about 1.5 miles.

I suddenly realized that I was breaking one of the tenets of safe hiking: "Tell a loved one where you will be hiking and do not deviate from your plans in case rescue is needed." So here I was, 1.5 miles off of my designated route and on a trail that nobody working in any of the involved government agencies knows about. I had been recording the route on my trusty GPS so ended this little side bar adventure and returned to camp confident that come tomorrow I would experience my wilderness fix after all, leaving thoughts of the more civilized Watoga hike on maintained trails for another time.

The next day we drove to the Ann Bailey Trailhead (Ann was a British born lady who became a scout during the Indian wars after her husband was killed.) and proceeded down the double track woods road. The road climbed gently for 1.25 miles as it passed through mature hardwood forest to the junction with the Burnside Ridge trail (also an old road) which we followed for another mile.

Here we turned left onto the South Burnside Ridge Trail until we reached the crest of the ridge. The adventure began as we left the road to the right, descending into an un-named drainage. We stayed a bit up on the hillside for a while, avoiding several serious blowdowns.

As the valley opened up we began to follow the dry stream bed, at times walking in it and at other times walking on narrow deltas

(More on p. 15)

MORE WAGOTA ADVENTURE (Continued from p. 14)

created by past flooding. Following the topography was pretty easy albeit different from much of what I had hiked in the past. I felt sort of like Ed and Jeff. ... hiking where no man has hiked before.

In 1.1 miles the stream bed steepened as it deposited us, as if on a sliding board, into the middle of mostly dry Laurel Run. "On yeah, this is just the ticket!" I gleefully thought. As we looked upstream we had our left feet in the park and our right feet in Calvin Price S.F. Also to our right was a flood plain. I thought perhaps we would find an old grade there to hike on but the entire thing was covered in impenetrable Rhododendron thickets.

We returned to the stream and proceeded to follow it toward the GPS track we had created yesterday. We were only about 0.5 miles away. During the spring this portion of the hike would probably be what I call a "Waterwhack" but the gentle grade of the stream and the flatness of the rocks would make it an easy one. (BTW, we saw several such rocks turned on their sides ... an obvious result of bear looking for their favorite crustacean ... crawfish.) We explored a few more deltas but the time and energy spent was not worth the effort.

I committed myself to the stream which actually proved to be an excellent decision as we passed bouquets of violet

Asters, vivid specimens of intense scarlet Cardinal Flower, assorted goldenrod species, Sneezeweed and Wingstem.

With the next two miles being a "No Brainer" and yesterday's trek through the tall goldenrod still evident, I could spend more time focusing on our surroundings. The "Leader of the Pack" in the open meadows was obviously the Sharp-leaved Goldenrod, chest high most of the time, but the towering Giant Ironweed and the much more diminutive Monkshood proved to be rewarding accents. Once we spotted that old magnificent Maple from yesterday we made a bee line to the primitive campground and temporarily borrowed a picnic table for some nourishment and rehydration.

The Kennison Run Trail, the final leg of our adventure, is described as an old railroad grade that crosses the run many times. Although blazed with faded yellow circles it was difficult to follow. It obviously gets much less use than the other park trails and that is

exactly what I was hoping for. Initially we had to work around some huge fallen trees and then mistakenly turned right up a steep, rocky dead end ravine at a double blaze.

It seems that in the park, a double blaze might not necessarily signify a turn but in this case was meant merely to point out a stream crossing. Only after crawling under a large trail obstruction did I finally realize my error. Precious gave me that look of "non-confidence" that only a canine can give as we crawled back under it. We corrected our mistake but still had trouble staying on trail.

As we continued to crisscross the trail while trying to follow the stream my hiker instincts started to kick in. Railroad grades in stream valleys are all pretty much the same wherever you go. While a waterway is able to follow the path of least resistance on its serpentine track down the valley, a railroad grade generally has to follow the more gentle contours of the valley. By nature it cannot make the sharp turns that the stream makes.

Once we spotted the next yellow blaze I began to follow my nose, the occasional blaze and some very old log cuts from long ago trail maintenance. While I was figuring all of this out, we were walking through a near

continuous stand of pine and Hemlocks. The trail was still overgrown in places but eventually gave way to an understory of low growing ferns or plain leaf mulch where Rhododendron tunnels precluded any form of vegetative growth.

At 3 miles the trail made an abrupt left hand turn and climbed more steeply to the T.M. Cheek or South Entrance Road. Here we turned left onto it and in another 150 yards turned left again onto the Ann Bailey Trailhead Road. We were back at the truck by 3:30 full with that sense of accomplishment one gets after a true wilderness exploration.

We returned to camp for one last sumptuous meal and an early bedtime. A light rain fell throughout the night, ending the orchestral cadences of Katydid and crickets while punctuating the end of another great adventure.



Laurel Run

REACHING THE SUMMIT OF REDDISH KNOB IN VIRGINIA

By Michael Juskelis

At 4397 feet, Reddish Knob (Yes Bobby, you can drive to it!) is the highest point in Northern Virginia. There are no taller peaks between it and the Adirondacks to the north save Spruce Knob (4863 feet) and Mount Porte Crayon (4770 feet) to its west in West Virginia.

Gadget Gyrl, Speedy, Bubbles, Keith, Andy, Paul and I set out from Hearthstone Lake around 11:00. The first 2 mile segment of the Buck Mountain Trail was relatively flat as it wound its way through a narrow valley with the Little River (parts of it reminded me of Ramsey's Draft) to the south and the base of Hearthstone Ridge to the north.

There were some overgrown, brushy areas early on including some dense patches of stinging nettles but these disappeared as soon as we crossed the now bone dry river and began a steep climb. From here on out the trails were in pretty good shape.

We climbed almost 2400 feet in 6.3 miles with about 2200 feet of it compressed into 3 miles of hiking. Although the climb was tough I still had enough interest to notice a nice patch of Pine Sap (a parasitic plant w/o chlorophyll related to Indian Pipe) and two carefully stacked piles of rock.

We had been hearing thunder coming our way during the entire climb. It culminated in a brief refreshing shower. The rest of the walk on Buck Mountain was quite gradual with a soft tread of leaf mulch to comfort our tired feet. It seemed as if Buck Mountain was saying "Thank you. Come again soon!"

We were all ready to call it a day but the first clearing we came to had an awfully bad list to it. A brief walk on a dirt road lead us to a perfectly flat area with a magnificent old White Oak whose limbs were just right

for hanging a bear bag line on. We went to bed as the Katydid's began their noisy lullaby. They usually keep me awake but nothing was going to stop this hiker from sleeping tonight.

We got started around 8:30 the next day. The plan was to hike an easy 4 miles on mostly dirt roads to the summit while gaining about 800 feet in elevation. We took a break at the intersection with FR 85 before proceeding to the summit.

Despite the graffiti on the parking lot and guard rails the views were astounding ... not quite 360 degrees ... maybe 330. There is a sliver of forest preventing a full panorama. We made this an early lunch and spent time taking several shots of the mountains, snacking, rehydrating and talking to Mountain Bikers who were curious as to how we got there. One pointed out Hearthstone Lake to me. It gave me a sense of gratification to see what the group had accomplished up to this point. We retreated down the road to the Timber Ridge Trailhead.

You probably haven't realized that I haven't mentioned anything about water sources up to this point. That is because there were none. The area had been in a severe drought until recently and all of the springs and streams were drier than a wrung out sponge. We knew this going in so I had driven out there on Thursday and cached 24 quarts of water about 10 yards down the trail, enough to get us through the night and the next morning. After filling our containers with fresh, cool water and taking great enjoyment from crushing and packing the plastic bottles we proceeded down the ridge.

We soon traversed a talus slope that allowed us to look back at a pretty knob, not

Reddish but a slightly lower one that sits at the end of the same ridge. From there the hiking was mostly downhill on a trail that is obviously used more often by mountain bikers than the Buck Mountain Trail. For the most part the trail was wide, soft and well groomed with only a few overhanging branches. Although the elevation trend was generally downhill there were a couple of sneaky climbs that ascended a couple of knobs, adding a few more 100 feet of E.G. to the hike. The last of us rolled into the prescribed campsite at 2:00 o'clock.

I was OK at this point except that I was feeling pretty tired. After a 15 minute break we made the decision to push on and finish the trip today. I knew that I would be totally wiped out by the end but the thought of a hot shower, drinking wine with Janet and sleeping in my own soft bed was too compelling.

We finished the descent of Hearthstone Ridge by about 4:30. By the time I had reached the trailhead, Bubbles and Andy had already taken off without their packs to recover a vehicle to shuttle the remaining drivers back to the Lake.

I appreciate their decision because I don't think I had one more step left in me. It would have taken me forever to complete that uphill 1.3 mile road walk. What was supposed to be an 8 mile hike ended up being 12 miles! We said our good-byes and parted ways.

The drive home was long but the wine, hot shower and talking to Janet was well worth the extra efforts of the day. I'd gladly do it again.

