

Outings and Events Stories

Stories of past ForestWatch Outings and Events

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(Note: we reserve the right to edit stories and photos.)
Thanks for sharing!



Blood Mountain Hike

November 19th, 2011

by: Tom Colkett: Hike Leader



Our little group of 9 people and 3 dogs met at the trailhead parking lot at Winfield Scott State Park starting around 8:30am on a cool, overcast November morning that showed no indication of becoming the sunny day predicted on the weather channel. Thick heavy clouds hung on the tops of the surrounding mountains and sagged into the coves between. After a short period of introductions for both the people and the dogs (some minor growling here to establish the ground rules) we headed out through the lower trail winding through the campsites and cabins, stopping along the way to talk about some wooly adelgid problems with the Hemlocks and to identify the remnants of some Grass of Parnassus growing in the boggy area at the bottom of the Slaughter Creek Trail. Following a short gentle slope on the Jarrard Gap trail we reached the Appalachian Trail (AT) intersection and talked about the various trail connections here leading to Blood Mountain, Woody Gap and Springer Mountain.

From here we turned onto the AT and followed it along a gently climbing 2.5 mile ridge which allowed views to both the north and the south now that the summer leaves were on the ground. Almost everything had stopped blooming during the past two weeks of colder weather.

Even the Asters were gone to seed and the beautiful leaves of Pipsissewa and Rattlesnake Plantain were difficult to find under the new fallen leaves. There was a deep sense of the forests quiet

acquiescence to the coming Winter, the processes of ongoing seeding for the Spring, and a feeling of the rightness of the rain that fell intermittently and lightly, supporting both the living and the newly planted seeds.

On this particular day the members of Georgia Appalachian Trail Club (GATC) were diligently working along these trails, some repairing the trail damage done by the donkeys which had carried the heavy materials for the ongoing repair of the Blood Mountain shelter, others just doing the regular trail maintenance work that GATC does so excellently. We stopped to chat with the maintenance volunteers and to thank them for their hard work.



Where the AT connects with Slaughter Creek trail it turns toward the south and begins to climb a little more steeply up to the summit. We followed a rocky trail through increasingly dense thickets of Mountain Laurel and Catawba Rhododendron, twisting through switchbacks, and stopping to notice and admire the old White Oaks that are stunted and twisted almost like huge Bonsai. The summit was a very different experience from any other time I've ever visited Blood Mountain; there were at least 25 people there, mostly volunteers for GATC maintenance, including many students from Young Harris College. It was good to see young people volunteering in the wilderness. We stood for pictures at the rock outcropping at the summit that normally provides wonderful views sweeping from the south to the northwest, but not today. Today we are in the clouds, no views, and it's cold and windy and so we move on back down the side of the mountain a little to stop and eat lunch on a large rock on the lee side of the mountain.

On the return route we turned right at the

juncture of the two trails and descended on the Slaughter Creek trail. We spent some time identifying some of the oak leaves on the forest floor, talking about the role of controlled fires by the Forest Service, found some beautiful Rattlesnake Plantain hiding under some leaves on an embankment and ended with a little talk about identifying White Pine and how the inner bark can be used as food in an emergency. It was a fun hike, a little over 8 miles round trip, with a great group of friends and dogs, and it didn't even seem to matter that we missed out on the views from the top. Fall/Winter hiking has its own merits and we were fortunate to enjoy many of them.

