

## Great Smoky Mountains National Park

April 2-9, 1994

### Friday, April 1

Left Cincinnati around 8:30 P.M. following a late dinner at the Blue Gibbon and return visit to Randy's house for some forgotten items. Overnight at EconoLodge in Richmond, KY.

### Saturday, April 2

Breakfast at Waffle House next to motel. On the road again at about 11:30 A.M., arriving at Sugarlands Visitor Center in mid-afternoon. Disappointed to learn that heavy rains and flooding along Little River Road had damaged the roadbed and it was closed as well as Cades Cove. No access from Townsend either. Proceeded to Elkmont but "full" sign was posted. Sites were actually available so we pitched our tent there and then took off on a bike ride through the campground and eventually up to the trailhead for Jake's Gap. Very steep uphill ride for nearly a mile on a road full of potholes -- and we made it! Equally steep downhill loop too -- and we made that! Especially noteworthy since I was using my new Vapor bike seat. Not the discovery of this century, but it definitely helps! Grilled dinner, late night walk through the campground, then off to bed.

### Sunday, April 3

Happy Easter! Drove up to the Jake's Gap trailhead where we had biked on Saturday. Hike took us 3.2 miles up to Jake's Gap and another 0.8 mile up Blanket Mountain for a total climb of 2,350 vertical feet. Started raining lightly as we climbed Blanket Mountain and then sleeted on us at the top in high wind and 38° temperature. Rhododendron was so high along perimeter that we couldn't get a panoramic view -- big disappointment. Returned via same routing and again saw spring beauties, rue anemone, purple and yellow violets, and one lone trout lily. Passed backcountry camp #27 and recrossed two rather challenging streams. Took showers later in Gatlinburg, had dinner and margaritas at a Mexican restaurant, and made an emergency drugstore stop for foot aids (oh, my aching feet!). Still drizzling so we returned to camp and went to bed.

### Monday, April 4

Very overcast, cold and foggy when we started up the Rainbow Falls trail. Saw lots of yellow and purple violets. Sun came out finally just as we were nearing the falls. Big crowd there sharing our lunch spot. Distance up was 2.7 miles climbing 1,750 vertical feet. Returned via same path but this time in full sunshine. Photo stop on return trip at lower falls and near trailhead where violets were profuse. Took Auto Nature Trail at Roaring Fork where we saw our first trillium in bloom. A Kodak moment! Returned to campsite and immediately headed off on our bikes to the Little River Road turnoff and back to the campground office. Rode again to the turnoff and on down blocked Little River Road for about 2 miles to survey the damage before turning around and heading back to camp. Total distance was about 10 miles. We're so good! Cooked dinner and actually ate it in daylight! Took another evening walk and again heard the three owls calling to each other. Had a quick campfire and turned in around 10:30.

### Tuesday, April 5

Weather report predicted a sunny and clear day, so we were on our way to Chimney Tops by 9:30 (a record for us!), arriving at the trailhead by 10:00. Disappointing show of flowers -- only spring beauties, Solomon's Seal in very early stages, and one trillium plant that hadn't even gone to flower yet. (When we last visited in April '92 the flowers were abundant, but it was much later in the month -- around April 22.) I forgot how incredibly steep the 1,350 ft. climb was in 2.1 miles. This time we went all the way to the rocks and actually climbed up into the first level. Steep downhill return was hard on the knees. Stopped for lunch at the first bridge on the way back. Back in the van, it felt great to finally get those new hiking boots off my tired, sore feet! On to Clingman's Dome (it was finally open, and clear days are not to be wasted!). Steep half-mile climb up a 500 ft. elevation through snow to reach the needle and see the very blue surrounding mountains. Sky was growing more overcast by the minute. Sore knees slowed us both up coming down the asphalt path -- me in my old Hi-Tecs and Randy in his beloved Sundowners. Next hiked the Andrew's Bald trail 2.1 miles over very rocky downhill which eventually leveled off in denser forest before climbing gently toward the grassy bald. Took a brief rest stop there until it started to sleet on us. (Do you too get the feeling we get dumped on a lot?) Saw four deer and a blue juno on return trip

through sleet, snow and rain. Got back in record one hour and ten minutes. Only a few cars left in the parking lot at 6:00 P.M. Started raining even harder as we drove down the mountain. Reward for all this bodily abuse -- pizza!

#### Wednesday, April 6

It rained all night long but stopped finally around 6:45 A.M. Ate breakfast and then headed off for Laurel Falls -- 1.3 miles up an asphalt pathway climbing 300 feet. Trail came up along right side of falls so we crossed over rocks and whitewater to reach other side and get a better photo angle. Randy went climbing for that perfect shot of both the upper and lower falls -- and came back alive! We both climbed down to the lower falls just off the trail. Very few wildflowers but I survived round #2 in the new hiking boots. Quick stop at Sugarlands and then on into Gatlinburg for lunch at Taco Bell (we are so good to ourselves!) before our final stop at Grotto Falls. Trail was 1.2 miles up (is there any other way to go in the Smokies?) with a 600 ft. vertical rise. Passed a llama train coming down from Mt. LeConte on its daily run. This was the only falls we've seen that we could walk behind. Difficult getting that perfect shot because so many people were "playing" there. Saw a few trillium in early growth stage and a few spring beauties and violets. Continued on down the Roaring Fork Auto Trail and found our trillium patch from Monday. Yellow trillium specimens were still not fully open but this time we found a jack-in-the-pulpit, Solomon's Seal with its hanging flower buds and white violets. What finds! Further down the road we came across white and yellow trillium and abundant rue anemone -- and sprinkling rain. Headed off for the showers and decided at that point to eat dinner out since it was now drizzling steadily. We may never have to cook again -- it may never stop raining at dinnertime! Tonight's fare was at Bennett's Pit Bar-B-Que. It rained so hard on the drive back that we were sure our tent would be floating. Only a few minor leaks, though.

#### Thursday, April 7

The rain stopped by early morning but it was incredibly cold and damp. After breakfast and an intense discussion, we headed for Cosby on a Ranger's suggestion to hike the Nature Trail at the campground, supposedly a real wildflower heaven. It was a beautiful place full of spring flowers with a path that wrapped around and repeatedly crossed a stream. Saw sharp-lobed hepatica, wood anemone, cut-leaved toothwort, chickweed, trout lilies, dutchman's britches and squirrel corn, miterwort, bloodroot and rue anemone, to name a few. Lots of trillium too. Went on to Sutton Ridge (3 miles round trip) where we found nice vista at the top. Could see snow on the trees at the top of nearby mountains. Identified trailing arbutus near top of the ridge. Took Nature Trail again on way back to car. Grilled shish kebobs by lantern for dinner, took a quick stroll through the campground to get our blood circulating since the temperature was really dropping, and then off to bed.

#### Friday, April 8

Temperature before sunrise dropped below freezing -- thick frost was on tabletop and a layer of ice formed in the water jug. Headed off to Greenbrier to hike the Ramsey Cascades trail billed as strenuous 4 mile uphill climbing 2,375 feet. Last 1.5 miles of roadway was blocked due to storm damage so total distance grew by 3 miles to 11. Oh, our aching feet! Saw loads of yellow trillium and Solomon's Seal, several shades of phlox, and one family of jack-in-the-pulpits. A grueling climb but lots of variety in the trail. Followed alongside "bosky brook" all the way -- some tremendous views. Just when we had all but lost hope of ever reaching the end, we arrived at the Cascades. What a view -- the best falls we'd seen so far. Had the trail all to ourselves on the return leg. Saw shrews and a black snake on the trail and came across a deer, a swooping bat in search of gnats for dinner, and pet wolves on the roadway. Made it finally to the car around 7:00 P.M.. Cooked yet again in the dark, enjoyed our last campfire, and off to bed around 10:30.

#### Saturday, April 9

Today is D-day -- departure day -- and we get to pack up dry equipment! Decided to take one last bike ride and see if we could make it to Laurel Falls -- a 1.5 mile moderately steep uphill from the Little River

Road turnoff. My rear was numb but I made it! Returned to campsite to finish loading up and were on the road to Cumberland Falls in heavy northbound traffic by about noon. Made a Dairy Queen stop at the first available site in Kentucky and then drove on in to the lodge. Checked in mid-afternoon and quickly set out for a hike to Eagle Falls under very cloudy skies. My left Achilles tendon was really sore from the previous day's hike, so the Hi-Tecs (of course) felt like they were gouging my heel. But we went upward, downward and onward anyway. The water level seemed high, but it was very clear that it had been much higher very recently. Returned to the lodge by about 6:15 and had delightful showers -- seemed more like pre-soaking, steam cleaning, and water blasting the grit and grease away! Buffet dinner in the lodge dining room and an early trip to bed -- in a real bed!

Sunday, April 10

Had a quick breakfast in the dining room and then headed north for Cincinnati around 10:30. And no, there is not one Dairy Queen between Lexington and Cincinnati when you really need it.

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