

TROOP 8

SOUTH TACONIC RANGE BACKPACKING TRIP

July 2008

(Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York)

1. Trip Summary:

This backpacking trip is a short but challenging loop hike covering approximately 21 miles completed over five days and four nights camping. This trip can be varied by a day, shorter or longer, if you wish. The trail is steep and rocky in many places, but it rewards the intrepid hiker with many beautiful mountain vistas, abundant streams and waterfalls, camping along vertical escarpments, and swimming opportunities at Sage's Ravine and Guilder Pond. This route has been used by new Venture Crew members on at least two occasions, but some scouts may find it physically strenuous. Leaders are urged to stress good physical conditioning and be proactive about the group's level of physical preparedness.

This is an excellent training hike for Philmont, as it is guaranteed to raise the skill and confidence levels of all participants. Memorable views, rewarding climbs, and beautiful natural features engender enthusiasm (once the fatigue wears off). All in all, one of my favorite short loop hikes.

2. Participants:

ASM's Jim Wyse, Eduard Mostert, Bob Weber, Curt Villars

Scouts 8 Scouts aged 13 -16 years old

3. Itinerary: (Assumes a start at the Forest Headquarters.)

We have used two different options for the first portion of the hike. The first option starts at the Mount Washington State Forest Headquarters at the junction of East Street, West Street and Garrett Farms Road. The second option starts at Bash Bish Falls State Park in Massachusetts (just east of the town of Copake Falls, New York). The two start options converge at Alander Mountain. The Bash Bish Falls start involves a very steep climb out of the ravine at the very outset of the hike; the Forest Headquarters start is a more gradual climb. Distance-wise, they are pretty close. I prefer to start at the Forest Headquarters because it's easier to close the loop at the end of the hike without having to use a shuttle car. Although you miss some of the ridgeline along the northern part of the South Taconic Trail, the best views don't start until you reach Alander Mountain anyway.

After Alander Mountain the route follows the South Taconic Trail southerly to Brace Mountain and the junction with the Mount Frissell Trail, where the states of New York, Massachusetts and Connecticut

come together. It then traverses east over Mount Frissell (2,380 feet), the highest point in Connecticut, then joins the Appalachian Trail for the northward leg. The AT passes through Sage's Ravine, a hemlock gorge with many rocky pools and waterfalls, and the wilderness camp at Bear Rock Falls, with stunning views to the east and a stream shooting out from a vertical escarpment. The trail then crosses over Mount Race, with 360° views, and Mount Everett (2,602 feet, the highest peak in the Taconic Range) before ending at the shelters close to Guilder Pond. The return to Park Headquarters is a relatively short walk along back roads. Returning to Bash Bish Falls is more complicated; you may want to send drivers ahead to hitchhike, or leave a shuttle car at the parking area at Guilder Pond.

Day 1 Trailhead to Alander Mountain (2.8 miles). Depart early so as to leave plenty of time to hike after you get there. The Forest Headquarters is on a narrow country road. You can leave cars at the parking area. Follow the Alander Mountain Trail west toward Lee Pond Brook. Be sure to bring plenty of water, or be prepared to stop for water before you leave the stream. Several trails branch off to the left at various points; don't get sidetracked. On the map you will see that there is a dispersed camping area along a small trail that joins from the left a little more than half way to Alander Mtn. You can use this option if running late, or if the weather is dicey. We continued on past the Alander Mtn. cabin and camped in the open at the top of Alander Mountain, which was beautiful. Needless to say, don't expect to find water there, and it is obviously a heightened leave no trace situation. I don't know if camping here is sanctioned; just be careful about it if you choose to do so, and don't even think about it if a storm is threatened.

Day 2 Alander Mountain to Sage's Ravine (7.7 miles w/o side hike). This is a rugged day of hiking, which will require most of the day. Follow the South Taconic Trail southward, first descending to Alander Brook, deep in a ravine. Stop here for water. Continue on the South Taconic Trail through Gentz's Corner, and along the undulating ridgeline toward Brace Mountain. The trail will pass over a number of small brooks en route. At 3.7 miles, you will reach the junction with the Mount Frissell Trail at an open crest where you can leave your packs and take a side hike to the summit of Brace Mountain (0.8 mi round trip). The summit is used as a jumping off point for hang gliding. Excellent views all around. Following the Mount Frissell Trail will soon bring you to the small obelisk that marks the corner of the states of New York, Connecticut, and Massachusetts. From here it continues east to the summit of Mount Frissell, again with excellent views, especially to the north, and good blueberry picking in season. The trail drops into a saddle before climbing again to the top of Round Mountain, then descends very steeply to the valley, where it connects with Mount Washington Road (2.2 mi. from trail junction). From here, follow the road south a short distance to a woods road that departs eastward to join the Appalachian Trail. Following the AT northward will bring you to Sage's Ravine, where there is an established backcountry camping area (1.6 miles from the road). The ravine is a great place to explore; incredibly picturesque and lots of swimming holes. If you wish, you can continue further, ascending the ridgeline to camp at Bear Rock Falls.

Day 3 Sage's Ravine to Bear Rock Falls (1.4 miles). After a tiring Day 2, you get a respite with a short hike to the top of the ridge leading to the camp at Bear Rock Falls, one of my favorites.

Or, as noted above, you could go to Bear Rock Falls for night 2 and just stay put. It's not hard to hike back to Sage's Ravine for a day of swimming, or you can play around at Bear Rock Falls. The site has a sheer escarpment, which overlooks the Sheffield valley to the east. We once sat there and watched the Fourth of July fireworks across the valley. If you prefer, you can continue to Race Brook Falls campsite, but then you'd miss the fun in Sage's Ravine.

Day 4 Bear Rock Falls to Glen Brook Shelter (5 miles). Day 4, although not long mileage, brings another bit of exercise as the AT proceeds north along the escarpment, with its wonderful views and windswept vegetation, crossing over Mount Race before descending to a trail junction in a pretty little hollow, where a side trail leaves to the right toward the Race Brook Falls campsite. That site would be another option for your overnight stay if you wished. From here the AT ascends fairly steeply to the summit of Mount Everitt, where there is an abandoned fire tower. This is another challenging piece of trail, with some rock scrambling in places. But, you will feel a sense of reward at the end, knowing that the rest of the trip is pretty much downhill. The trail now heads down toward Guilder Pond, where there is a small dirt parking area. The Pond makes for nice swimming if the weather permits. To camp, continue north a short distance where there are two nice shelters: the Hemlock Shelter and the Glen Brook Shelter. The AMC trail wardens don't like to have groups stay at these shelters, which are primarily for thru-hikers. So, don't be surprised if you are politely asked to move to the group camp area near Glen Brook Shelter, which is actually a very attractive spot. I would observe trail etiquette and go straight there, as tempting as it might be to occupy Hemlock Shelter. Your call.

Day 5 Return to trailhead (3.4 miles). Backtracking to Guilder Pond, follow dirt road downhill to East Street. Turn left onto East Street and proceed to its intersection with West Street, where you will see the entrance to the Mount Washington State Forest Headquarters. You should have no problem making it back in time for an early start home.

4. Administration:

- As of this writing, a zoomable online map can be found at:
http://www.bnrc.net/zoom_map/southtaconic.htm
- Maps & Guides: The New York-New Jersey Trail Conference publishes a map set of the South Taconic Trails, and the area is described in the New York Walk Book. Highly recommended.
<http://www.nynjtc.org/>
- Call the Forest office for updated permit requirements. Mount Washington State Forest, East Street, Mount Washington, Massachusetts 01258; Telephone: (413) 528-0330.
- Much of this route is exposed peak and ridgeline. Be prepared for sudden storms.
- As noted, I can't guarantee that camping on Mount Alander is permitted. If you want to be careful, use the camping area to the left of the trail before you reach the Alander Mtn. cabin.
- Save some time the first morning by bringing breakfast to eat in the car on the way up. There are some good diners in the small towns on the way back.

- This trip is certainly do-able for new Venture Crew members, but they need to be physically prepared. It is not a cake walk.
- *Route Options:* If your crew is up to it, you could lengthen the route by detouring southeast along the Bog Trail/AT to Brassie Brook Campsite at the end of Day 2. Then on Day 3, head north on the AT to climb Bear Mountain before descending into Sage's Ravine. Or, if they are super fit (and gluttons for punishment), climb Bear Mtn. via the Bee Line Trail on Day 2 before continuing on to the Ravine. *But be warned:* the Bee Line and the AT north of Bear Mtn. are very steep.

Access: New York State Thruway I-87 to Saw Mill Parkway north to I-684 north, which becomes NY Rte. 22 north. Follow NY Rte. 22 north to Copake, NY. From NY Rte. 22 in Copake Falls, take NY Rte. 344 east into Massachusetts (becomes Falls Rd.) for 3.3 miles. Turn right onto West Street and continue for 2 miles to intersection with East Street. Or, I-87 to I-84 to Taconic State Pkwy; then CR-2 and CR-7.