

BROOKVILLE RESERVOIR BACKPACK TRIP – APRIL 8 & 9, 2000

NOTE: Backcountry camping is no longer allowed on the Adena Trace! Camping is permitted only in the Mounds SRA campground at Brookville Lake.

So it rained 5 inches at Richmond, north of Brookville Reservoir on Friday. So it was below freezing and spitting snow when we woke on Saturday morning. My husband Phil and I, also known as the Geezer and the Geezerette, are intrepid (intrepid in this case meaning slightly crazy) backpackers and we were still good to go. When we got to the tailwaters of Brookville Dam, Gary was waiting for us, although surprised to see that we hadn't wimped out as had two other hikers. We were joined soon by two other hikers.

Leaving two cars at the dam area, we shuttled up to the Fairfield Causeway and found the white blazes across the road that led south on the new trail down the west side of Brookville Reservoir. Members of the Hoosier Hikers Council, with the support of the management of the Brookville Lake Recreation Area, have spent many weekends since February 1998 working to make this trail a reality. While it is still a work in progress, it can be hiked in two days with one overnight, although two overnights would make a less tiring hike, with a little more time to enjoy this unique area.

Because it is a work in progress, parts of this trail are carefully built, with switchbacks up some of the steepest hills; ramps and stonework steps across the worst ravine crossings and benching around some of the worst hillsides. However, much of the trail is marked only by pink ribbons or paint spots on trees leading you on south through the woods. Official white blazes will come when the trail is dedicated, hopefully sometime this summer.

With the temperature hovering slightly above freezing and still spitting snow, we soon came to the first creek crossing – Salt Well Creek. The signs that the water had been waist deep on Friday were evident, but luckily it had gone down overnight. Gone down some, but it was still well over our boottops. Did we turn back, wade in and hike in wet boots the rest of the day, or take off boots and socks and wear the sandals that we had reluctantly added to the weight of our packs? Off with the boots, on with the sandals and into the creek. WHICH WAS ICE COLD! The 39-degree air felt warm when we reached the other side. Back on with the boots, knowing that there would be Wolf Creek and Nameless Creek yet to cross and they wouldn't be any easier. These creeks are usually just step across creeks, or crossed on the many rocks in the creekbed

I must mention the rocks to be found along this trail. Erosion has created ravines, exposing layers of limestone leading down to the lake. Many of these rock-lined ravines are moss covered and become beautiful waterfalls when there has been a lot of rain. These rocks are Ordovician era limestone and are encrusted with fossils of all sorts of shelled sea creatures. When the water is not high, each crossing requires that you take time to study the rocks and look for the individual shells that weather out of the limestone. It's like hunting seashells at the beach. Except that these shells are millions of years old.

The trail sometimes goes high on ridges overlooking the lake; sometimes it dips down close to the lake; sometimes it turns and goes up a ravine until you can cross without needing steps or a bridge. It goes near several old homesites (look for discarded parts of old stoves, etc., which are

artifacts or junk, depending on how old they are). Sometimes it follows some old model T roads, other times it borrows wildlife paths, and the wildlife is quick to follow new paths that the trail workers have cleared. It goes through some magnificent stands of old beech trees high on a ridge overlooking the lake. The lake is always nearby, although in summer you might not see it for a while until the trail takes you up a ridge and you suddenly get a lovely view of this beautiful lake.

Just about the time we stopped to make camp for the night, the sun came out and warmed our spirits somewhat, if not the temperature. We choose a campsite out of the wind, high above the lake. Backcountry camping is allowed, observing all the Leave No Trace guidelines, especially not camping close to the lake or creeks. Water is plentiful in the creeks and can always be obtained from the lake. Filtering is always essential. In a very dry season, like last fall, Salt Well Creek might be dry, but Wolf Creek and Nameless Creek should have water.

On Sunday morning the wind had died down, the sky was beautiful and we were sorry for the folks who had wimped out and missed this glorious morning. Two flights of cormorants wheeled over the lake and a pair of ducks paddled across the lake way below our campsite. As we hiked out, we were seeing wildflowers, which seemed to have been called out to greet the sunshine. Bloodroot, anemones, a tiny yellow flower which we had to look up (I carried a wildflower book despite the weight) that was identified as corydalis, purple henbit (the same plant which turns fields purple in spring), yellow and purple violets, dutchman's breeches, trout lilies, hepatica and bluebells. In some places the bluebells were so thick that they covered the hillsides above and below the trail. Forward progress had to stop when morel mushrooms were spotted growing right in and beside the trail.

The water had gone down even more during the night and there were no more large creeks to cross, just some large ravines that still had water flowing, but could be crossed on the rocks, which meant that we didn't have to take our boots off again. With rest stops because this trail is surprisingly up and down, and a lunch stop to fix soup and hot chocolate, we reached the dam by four. When the dam is in sight, you must go through a gate and up a service road to reach the dam parking lot. If your car is parked at the lot below the dam, a long steep walk down the grass-covered face of the dam completes your hike. The exact length of this trail won't be known until it is surveyed after completion, but our tired feet and the hours spent hiking convinced each of us that it must be around 17 miles.

If you would like to be a part of completing this trail, the Hoosier Hikers Council has work days planned for April 29 and April 30. We will be building more rock steps across some of the steepest ravines, revising some of the trail that we realized was just too steep for backpackers, and doing more of the all-important benching to improve the footing around the side of hills. This is labor intensive work and many volunteers are needed. We have some tools, but garden rakes, hoes and shovels are useful, and if you know how to use a Pulaski you will be especially welcomed. You might even help choose a name for this new trail. We will meet at the Mounds Office on the east side of Brookville Lake at 9:00 on Saturday morning and again on Sunday. Bring work gloves and a trail lunch.