

Hiking on Heberly Run, Pennsylvania

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Some fifteen years ago my mother and I took a hike among the famous waterfalls of Ricketts Glen State Park. Afterwards, driving east out of the park, I looked at the long mountain front which the stream tumbles down. I wondered: Many streams come down from this mountain, why does only one have these stunning waterfalls? After reflection, I realized that the question should be turned around: Probably all of these streams have stunning waterfalls, but only the falls of Ricketts Glen are famous. Why not explore the others?

So I purchased topographic maps of the area (that was before you could get them for free from the Internet through topozone.com) and saw that, sure enough, a stream just west of Ricketts Glen, Heberly Run, was marked with two waterfalls, and that Ricketts Glen itself wasn't marked with any! There were no trails along Heberly Run, but I knew that I could hike cross-country or, if necessary, wade up the stream itself. My interest increased when Jeff Mitchell's 2003 book *Hiking the Endless Mountains* called this stream a "waterfall wonderland". I made plans to explore the area, but children and circumstances intervened, and I wasn't able to hike there until Friday, 30 July 2004.

I camped at the Ricketts Glen campground in the back of my station wagon. Too excited to be hungry for breakfast, I drove straight to State Game Lands 13 beyond Jamison City and started hiking before the clock read 8 AM. At first, I walked up the East Branch of Fishing Creek. I had to ford the knee-deep creek twice because the bank I started out on grew too steep upstream. After a short while Heberly Run came in from the west, and I walked up it. There was no trace of a trail. There was no trash and no campfire rings, just a rushing stream and a forest of hemlock and cherry and birch and striped maple, underlain with viburnum and wood sorrel and touch-me-not and miterwort and round-leaved yellow violet and ferns and, unfortunately, stinging nettle. I spent more and more of my time wading in the creek rather than walking along its banks. (I had anticipated this and worn old running shoes ready to be thrown out anyway.)

Soon the banks on either side rose up into rocky cliffs. I had another reason to wade. The canyon air grew cooler, and I glanced up to see two tributary streams tumble over an arcing 50-foot cliff. The falls to the left had a "wedding cake" pattern with many steps of foaming water. The one straight ahead was a plunge over an overhanging ledge, with the water falling ethereally through empty

space. Near the stream bank, bright red bee balm was blooming, and pink Joe-Pye weed was in bud. A few steps beyond, around a bend, the 25-foot waterfall of the main stem of Heberly Run came into view. One rocky amphitheater with three waterfalls flowing together – the only time I had seen such a thing previously was in Disney movies!

I walked back downstream and off to the south to find a way around the falls (there was the trace of a trail here), then continued upstream. Several small tributaries plunged in from the south. In less than half a mile the creek banks rose again, the temperature dropped again, and I reached the lower of the two consecutive falls of Twin Falls. Again I backtracked and looped around to the south. Here there was a more definite trail, and two campfire circles. I cleaned out the unsightly one. (Anticipating no trail, and wanting to travel fast, light, and agile over uncertain terrain, I had worn running clothes and carried no pack – I had memorized the map. I expected no trash and thus had no bag to collect it. But when I did encounter a small amount of trash, I found myself unable to ignore it and I stuffed it into my pockets. Next time I'll bring a trash bag.)

Upstream. In half a mile the rock walls rose up, the air grew cool, and up ahead Lewis Falls leapt into the canyon at a 90 degree angle. The rock opposite the waterfall was constantly moist and sported a nice growth of bee balm. The overhang adjacent the waterfall was impressive. I walked up there, but was uneasy about spending time where I knew that empty air was below my feet.

Just above Lewis Falls the stream splits: Heberly Run continues left, but Shanty Run to the right looked more interesting so I went that way. There are no named waterfalls along Shanty Run. Instead, the whole stream is a series of four- to twelve-foot waterfalls, over lacy cross-bedded sandstone, interspersed with plunge pools and cascades. The most beautiful spot along the whole stream is where Quinn Run enters from the left – half a dozen tumbling waterfalls are visible up either branch. Quinn Run looked so appealing that I waded up that way, walking out of the stream when a waterfall was too steep or a plunge pool too wide to negotiate.

I followed Quinn Run for some distance – about a mile. More than a dozen times I thought I had come out on the top of the plateau, but whenever I did I would spy a waterfall ahead. Finally the stream came out on an acre-large fern meadow, dotted with dewdrop and creeping snowberry, and I decided to turn around.

Walking back I went through uplands rather than along the streams. Sometimes I hiked cross country, other times I followed the traces of old roads. There were some big trees – hemlock and birch and cherry – and some big rocks. Once,

along an old road, I found the remains of a fireplace and chimney slowly decaying into the earth. The last mile and a half was along the Game Commission's gated Grassy Hollow Road. During this easy road-walking I got to thinking about which mountain stream was more beautiful: Ricketts Glen or Heberly Run. It's hard to say - you can't measure beauty in kilograms - but the experience at Heberly Run is more satisfying. Primarily, there's the wildness of Heberly Run. But also, you view the waterfalls in Ricketts Glen at an angle from the trail, whereas you view the waterfalls of Heberly Run straight on because you're wading the stream. It's good to have both experiences available.

Also along the road I realized how hungry I was and picked blackberries. When I got back to the car I found out why: it was almost 5 PM.

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I found an unusual fern near Twin Falls - perhaps Braun's Holly Fern, but I didn't have my fern book there to make a positive identification.

This is a difficult and demanding hike. I wish I had had a companion for safety's sake. Don't even think of trying this hike during high water. And don't attempt it as a backpack - you need the freedom and agility of pack-free travel.

Given the amount of wading involved, this hike should only be done on warm days. I would not do it in the spring or fall.

My running shoes worked all right, but once they got full of water they didn't drain. (As planned, I threw them into the first trash can I reached after the hike.) I would prefer a shoe with the sole of a Teva sandal, the upper of a running shoe, and a few holes punched into the bottom of the upper to drain water. Perhaps the Teva Gamma shoe would do the trick.

I wore cotton socks and wish I had worn wool. The running clothes worked well.

Bring a trash bag. Eat and drink before leaving for the hike.

Don't think I've done it all. There are plenty of other streams to explore in this area. Jeff Mitchell's book recommends the nearby Sullivan Branch. From perusing the topographic maps, I am particularly intrigued by Chimneystack Run. The whole area is a wonderfully harmonious symphony of water, rock, and woods.