

BAY-Hiking 6/5

HEADLINE: Mount Anna:
Lady of the Flies

1171 words

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I have now experienced the fifth season in New Hampshire: black fly season. I really had no idea what I was getting into when I decided to hike Mount Anna, but on the advice of co-workers and my go-to guy Don Watson, I bought some heavy duty bug spray and headed out to conquer my third mountain in the Belknap Range.

This time I was joined by Judith Silverberg, the head of wildlife education for the New Hampshire Department of Fish and Game; Don and trail-dog Denny also joined us as guides. We met up at the town hall in Gilford and followed Don in Judy's vehicle past Gunstock Ski Area, onto Glidden Road, and all the way to the end, where we reach Stonybrook Farm. Parking and donning our hiking boots, Don pulls out his map and explains to us the route we are going to take through the woods.

"We are going to take this old logging road up to the saddle between Rand and Quarry," Don said as he pointed to it on the map. "Anna is straight ahead, we go down a little bit then bushwhack down and hit the Anna/Mack trail. It's really easier than it sounds."

Right. Easy. We start down the logging road and almost immediately come upon our first signs of wild life. A toad is making his way across the trail and I stop to take a

couple pictures of the amphibian before we move on. Not much farther down the trail Judy points out moose and coyote signs as well as some wood violets and hobblebush. We hear an enormous number of birds on the trail and Judy recognizes most of them as species of warblers. We even catch sight of one very close on a log and take turns admiring him through binoculars.

"This is what we call 'first succession forest,'" Judy says. "It's the stuff that grows up soon after an area has been logged. This is just the type of area these birds need and this is the perfect time of year to really hear them."

It becomes more obvious why warblers abound as I swipe the black flies from my face. Warblers are insect eating birds, and these black flies are breakfast, lunch and dinner for them. It would be like humans living in the middle of a buffet 24 hours a day, seven days a week for two weeks. The area we are walking through has some open areas that Judy guesses were logged three or four years ago. Don comments that he always hates to see logged areas, and in my heart I really agree with him.

Judy says it's really not as bad as most people think; in fact, every forest needs to have different tree levels in order for it to be healthy.

We continue down a little ways from the saddle until Don tells us it's time to turn off the trail and bushwhack down to another trail.

I start humming the "Indiana Jones" theme as we make our way down, and we stop to look at a plant where all the ends have been nipped off by a moose. It's called

browsing and all moose do it in the winter, which is their weight-losing time of year.

"I am always amazed such large animals can live off of that," Don says, chuckling.

"Oh, moose will eat about 34 pounds of browse a day," Judy responds.

Thirty-four pounds! That must be the only thing the moose does all day, browsing for small plants in the snow. We also see where a moose has stripped bark off a tree to eat with his teeth by scraping them up the trunk to take off the bark.

The bushwhacking is actually not all that difficult, and soon we are on the second trail. Continuing my trail training Don tells me to remember three distinct things about this spot so that I will remember where we came through. Why do I get the feeling he is going to make me lead on the way back?

This new trail has red wooden diamonds as markers. With fallen trees forcing us to crawl and several streams to cross, I really do feel like Indiana Jones. The three of us look more like something out of a horror movie than an action/adventure, however – Don broke out some bug netting gear when the black flies became too much. I put on a mesh coat that has a piece of mesh as a hood that you pull over your head and tuck into the top so no bugs can get at your face. It is pretty hot and gave me a very interesting view of the world through the netting. Judy reminds me black fly season lasts only for a couple weeks.

The hike to the top of Mount Anna is not very steep at all and when we get there I

realize Don was right to warn me that there wasn't much of a view. Still we made it to the top and stop to take a break near a cairn. I take the opportunity to ask Judy about animals in the area and what people should look for.

"There is really nothing plant or animal wise that will harm you as long as you use common sense," Judy says. "The goal of wild life watching is to watch the animal doing what it would normally do. If I saw a rabbit in front of us I would stop and enjoy it from a distance."

She says larger animals will leave you alone unless they feel threatened, so when you see one you should move slowly and get out of the area. She says most of these animals, like bears, will be long gone before you get near enough to see them anyway.

Her key advice is to use common sense and give animals plenty of distance and not eat any plant life you can't identify. While the plants will not kill you they can make you very, very sick.

The way back seemed very quick and even the black flies diminished as we neared the vehicles. Denny certainly enjoyed himself if the dirt, leaves and wet fur he was covered in were an indication.

Mount Anna was a little hard to get to the way we went, but there are several ways a hiker can attack this trail if they are working for their patch. It doesn't have fantastic top-of-the-mountain views, but for viewing plants, trees and signs of wildlife, Anna is a great hike. It's not too steep, but do expect to climb over roots, trees and streams along the way. The total trip for us took about

four hours and was about four miles round trip.

Danielle will continue to chronicle her 12-mountain goal throughout the spring and summer. To get your own check-off list, maps, and other info about the Belknap Mountain Range, visit www.belknapsportsmensclub.com or email dwatsonmusic@hotmail.com.

CUTLINE: NO, THAT is not the Creature from the Black Lagoon, that's just me showing off my lovely hiking outfit to ward off the black flies that turned out to join our party. You can't find ensembles like this on Rodeo Drive. (Courtesy)