

BAY-Hiking 7/24

HEADLINE: Mount Klem: A journey of rain, treasure and getting lost

1533 words

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Well, I am certainly glad to be here writing to you about hiking Mount Klem. It was quite the experience and I learned quite a bit from the trip, but let me start at the beginning. When I decided to do themes for hikes, I knew one of the ones I wanted to do was to participate in geocaching.

If you have never heard of geocaching, it's a modern form of treasure hunting. Regular folks go out and place "caches" out in the world and log the coordinates of the location with a handheld GPS device. The coordinates and clues, such as a poem or picture are then posted for others to see. Participants, called Finders, use their own GPS devices and the clues provided to find the cache. The cache usually consists of an ammo box full of knickknacks, pens, pencils, toy trucks or pins. Those who find the cache are asked to take something and leave a trinket of their own behind. A logbook is included for those who find the cache to sign and date, along with any comments about their trip. Some caches are multiple caches where each find leads you to the next one until you find the items. In certain cases, those who leave the caches will leave a dollar bill or a nicer prize for the first person to find the cache. If you have read my articles before, I have mentioned

Indiana Jones several times, and being the admirer of adventure I am, this activity seemed right up my alley.

My first task was to find a cache that was on one of the mountains I had yet to hike. I found it in the form of a cache entitled "Klem Kadiddlehooper" located near the summit of Mount Klem. The description said it was a traditional cache named after a classic character portrayed by comedian Red Skelton. The notes also said it was an easy find right off the trail. It also included a photo of a place near the cache and a rhyme to help those who needed a little extra help finding the hidden spot. It sounded like just the thing I was looking for!

My next task was to find a handheld GPS system that I could use on my trip. Who would have one that I could use? I certainly didn't want to go out and buy one for just one trip. My mind turned to Dan Tinkham, my geologist expert who hiked Mt. Major with me. I called him up and he was nice enough to loan me his GPS for the weekend.

"Of course I have one," he joked when I called. "Doesn't everyone carry one in their briefcase?"

I e-mailed my hiking guru Don Watson to let him know what I was doing and he suggested not taking the Grant Road route, but the Bickford Road entrance. He offered to show me the route to take, but I looked at the map and I was pretty confident I could find it. The route seemed pretty straightforward. Famous last words, right?

Saturday was the day chosen for my treasure hunting. I armed myself with

maps, cell phone, GPS, instruction booklet for the GPS, description of the cache and something to leave at the cache. I felt I was as ready as I was ever going to be. I found the trailhead easily enough and after parking I pulled out the instruction booklet for the GPS and marked my location and then proceeded to input the coordinates for the cache. The happy little guy with the flag on the display showed me I had done it right. The little machine hung around my neck and let me know I was heading in the right direction and how far I had to go to my goal.

The walk down the fire road at the beginning of the trail was very pleasant and I felt very prepared. I had my borrowed hiking poles, bandannas, plenty of water and I was feeling pretty energetic. Not long down the fire road I saw a red trail that led off to my left. Was that the way I was supposed to go? The GPS said that was the direction of the cache, so I went, big mistake! After following red blazes for a good ways, they seemed to disappear and I couldn't distinguish the trail anymore. The GPS was still pointing me forward and so I figured it shouldn't be long to bushwhack to the trail near Round Pond.

Two hours later - yes you read that right - I emerged from the brush, scratched and muddy, having bushwhacked over rocks, uphill and down, stopping over streams, and hacking through brush as high as my waist. The whole time I kept following the GPS and encouraged myself.

"Would Indiana Jones whine?" I wondered. "Heck

no! He would pull his fedora tighter on his head and press on!”

Needless to say the rocky trail around Round Pond was a lovely sight to behold. That’s when it started to rain. Oh yes, it poured. I was soaked after going no more than a meter and I could barely see the pond as I walked around it towards Mount Klem. Fortunately the downpour let up just as I hit the red trail going up Mount Klem, though it was still raining. This trail was actually very nice and I would have liked to enjoy it when the weather wasn’t miserable. My walk was punctuated by the distant sound of thunder. I made it to the top of Klem, finally, and the GPS told me I was mere feet from my goal. Already muddy and soaked I hopped off the trail and easily found the cache hidden under a rock. Even though I was soaked and uncomfortable I was still pretty excited. I cracked open the green ammo box wrapped with tape proclaiming it an official geocache and found the contents drier than I was in plastic bags. A laminated description of geocaching was included with a picture of Red Skelton as the header. I signed the logbook under cover of a tree and rooted through the selection of items before selecting a smiley face eraser and leaving the pin I had selected as my contribution. There was also a camera included for participants to take a picture with. I decided to take a picture of my poor soaked backpack before I put everything back and hid the cache once again.

I hurried as fast as I could back to the Round Pond trail and was determined to stick to the trail this time. I headed onto the blue trail and tried to follow it as best as I could. I was pulling out the maps and GPS, which I had set to return me to my car, often. I still don’t know how, but I eventually couldn’t find any blue markers anymore and decided that the best thing to do was to press on.

Again I was bushwhacking, this time it was muddier and wetter than before. The woods I was going through were not actually that bad and it would have been a lot better if I hadn’t already been four hours in the woods and miserable. I knew I was going in the right direction because of the GPS and figured I needed to just keep going. I fell and ripped my jeans as well as getting a large scratch on my backside. I nearly lost my boot in the mud. I had to use my hands to dig it out. The trees ripped the T-shirt I was wearing and to top it off I was wearing my prescription sunglasses and it was getting dark. I had no signal on my phone, my only hope to get out was that the GPS was steering me correctly. I figured from the map that I would eventually hit the fire road. I kept pushing on. It seemed like forever, but it was really only an hour and a half, when I emerged onto the fire road. I had been so scared and I had wondered if I was going to make it.

I followed the road back easily and made it back to my car in seemingly no time. Thanks to the maps and GPS I made it out of there. I learned the hard way to

always double-triple check where you are going and if you are at all able to go with someone who knows the trail. Maps, compass, GPS, cell phone, telling someone where you are going and a whistle are absolutely essential for hiking by yourself if you absolutely must.

In the end I ruined a set of good clothes and my maps, not to mention giving myself more than a few gray hairs. I did find what I was after, though, and lived to tell the tale thanks to Don, who gave me sound advice on hiking and Dan’s GPS system. Learn from my scary experience folks! Always be safe! It will save your life or at least prevent an ulcer from being scared out of your mind.

CUTLINE (Hiking1) VIEW OF ROUND POND from the trail, this is very close to the turn to start climbing up Mount Klem. (Danielle DeLisle – Gilford Steamer)

CUTLINE (Hiking2) THE SIGN leading me to the cache, this was a most welcome sight! (Danielle DeLisle – Gilford Steamer)

CUTLINE (Hiking3) The cache itself, near the summit of Mount Klem, can you tell how wet it was outside? (Danielle DeLisle – Gilford Steamer)

CUTLINE (Hiking4) THE BEGINNING of the trail on Bickford Road, I knew I was in the right place when I saw this! (Danielle DeLisle – Gilford Steamer)