



May 13, 2013

Back Creek – ‘Round the Bend

By Bill Tanger

Several of us had tried to put a trip together on Back Creek in Roanoke County for a month, but weather and water issues stopped us until Sunday, May 12, 2013. Then the level dropped to 100 cfs, the weather was sunny and 65 degrees and we hit the road. Juanita and Bill Tanger and Tom Christenbury put in at Rt 116 (Jae Valley Road) where it crosses Back Creek.

This is a decent put-in, but needs a parking area and steps to the water. The highway bridge that crosses the creek is about to be rebuilt, and VDOT has the work area surveyed and staked out. So now should be a good the time to look into improved access to the creek at the bridge. The property around the bridge is owned by Roanoke City and is not being used for anything. It was formerly the property for the Sun Valley Swim Club.

We had just enough water so that only Juanita had to get out of her boat, and only once. The creek really moved along quickly with many riffles and the occasional Class II rapid. One dramatic rapid called for ducking under a huge 100 foot tree that was stretched across the river at a rocky curve in the creek. We probably scraped over rocks about a dozen times each, so we all agreed that 100 cfs was probably boating zero on any Randy Carter gauge.



This is a really well-hidden gem, a small tree-canopied creek, right in our back yard. Maybe it should be called Back Yard Creek. All three of us rated this creek section a 9 on a scale of 10. The topo map showed several horseshoe bends, but it turned out to be a very simplified map of the creek, which twisted and turned all day long. It has about a half-dozen horseshoe bends in it!

The creek has dozens of rocky cliffs straight up from the water, with occasional groves of rhodo on the north side and some open farm fields on river left. On the whole trip we saw only three occupied homes, and even those were set back from the creek up on the bank. The scenery was glorious.

Right off the bat we saw a flock of turkey. Then we ran into deer, a hawk, an osprey, mallards, fish, carp, an 18" snapping turtle and more deer. We found a swimming box turtle that must have fallen into the river, so we fished him out and put him on a sandy bank.



One very strange phenomenon was a power line cable that lay along the river from Rt 116 for several miles, often four or five strands at a time. It appeared to be aluminum power line that might even be worth cutting up and hauling out. How it got there is a real mystery!

Towards the end of the trip we found an old falling down two-story, log cabin/cinderblock house that looked like it was built in the 1920's and abandoned around 1930. It even had its own swimming pool and a beautiful sandy beach on the creek.

The section looks to be about 5 miles long. We did the trip in three and a half hours, taking out at Rutrough Point at our new access steps! Our efforts at improving the Rutrough access were very worthwhile. The fishermen on the steps were very accommodating as we hauled our craft up the steps to the roadbed.



This trip should be a club trip for sure each year. It has more bends per mile than any I have seen. You will be amazed at how often you will be going 'round the bend.

The trick is to catch the right water and the right weather. But with some coordination by our trip planner we can make it happen.

And we need to improve the access.