

July 2, 2011

We broke up the drive to Monteagle on our first day of vacation by stopping at the Jack Daniels Distillery. There was a two hour wait for the tour, so we had dinner and looked around the visitor center to 'kill the time'. They take you to the end of the complex in a bus and then the guide leads you back stopping at various buildings along the way. We learned about the whole process of making Whiskey. It almost tempts you to start drinking!



Our first stop showed us where they make the charcoal used to filter the White Lightning

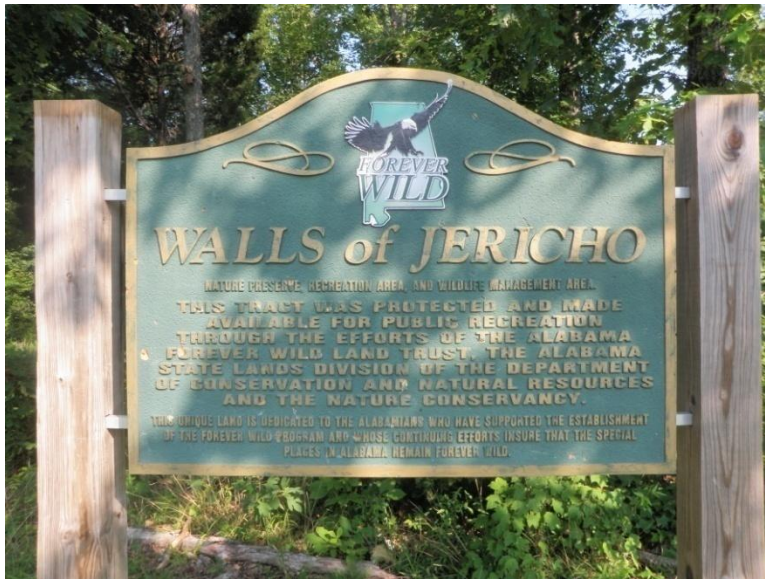


Their fire brigade is trained to put out structural fires as well fires caused by burning alcohol. It is a special skill set and they have provided training to airport fire departments. They have a couple of old fire engines on display. One is an REO Speedwagon. The guide told us how the band got its name.

They showed us the underground river that supplies the water. It doesn't have any iron that will react with alcohol causing bad tasting whiskey. We couldn't take pictures in the buildings, but saw the fermentation tanks, stills, filtering, single barrel processing area and barrel building. They gave us lemonade at the end of the tour. (The distillery is in a 'dry county'.)

July 3, 2011

Our first day of hiking took us to the Walls of Jericho. We started from the Alabama trailhead and hiked to waterfalls that were just past the Walls of Jericho.



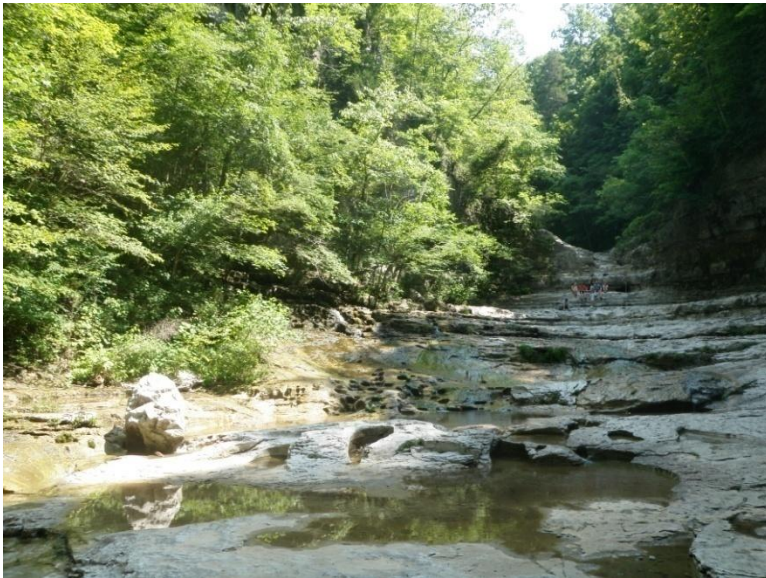
The Tennessee trail only had one car and the Alabama had five cars. We heard that weekends could be crowded, but I don't think this was going to be too bad.



Our first river crossing was easy, since someone had made a bridge out of an old tree. It was flattened on one side and had a hand rail.



We decided this was our first view of the Walls of Jericho. It was hard to see because of all the leaves on the trees.



We stopped briefly at the first falls and then crossed the stream to go up to the amphitheater. We saw some college kids smoking pot and discussing how they were going to pay off their student loans. They gave us good advice on how to climb to the higher level.



Julie after we hiked to the upper level and found that it didn't have any water. However, it was fun to see the steep walled area that holds the 'pool' at the base of that fall when it is flowing. This photo was taken in the amphitheater.



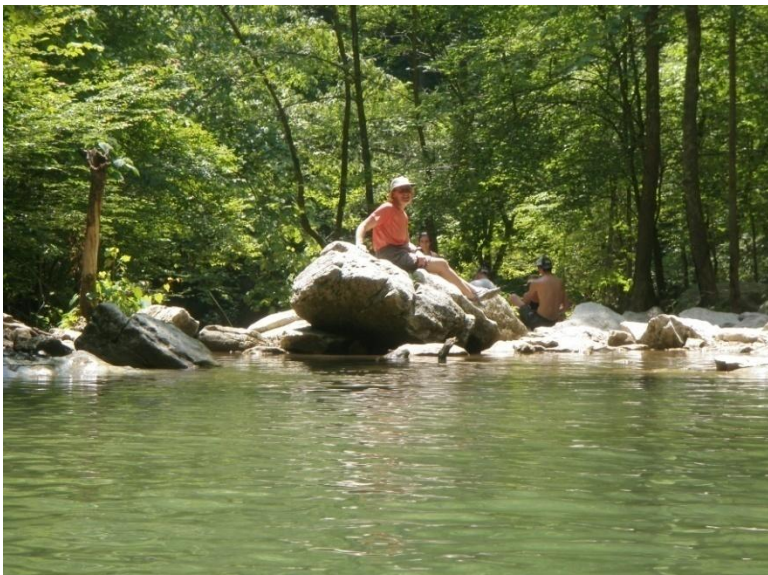
Tom cooling off under the waterfalls. There were a couple of people filling their water bottles from the water running off the rocks. While the water is supposed to be very pure in the watershed, I wouldn't be brave enough to drink it. The water was quite cool.



More waterfalls



Backside of the waterfalls



Julie on the rocks. This was a great lunch place with natural air-conditioning.



Julie crossing the dry river on a little bit wider tree bridge.

We saw an amazing old tree with lots of holes in it yet still had green leaves.

The trail was steep and rocky in places.



On the way home from the park we saw signs to Natural Bridge Park. We didn't know anything about it, but followed the signs. Luckily, we didn't have to follow the signs for very long - it was only a few miles off the main road. It was nice natural bridge and only about a 2 minute walk from the parking lot.



We went to the fireworks display in the evening. It was a great small town display. We sat in a big a grass lot and couldn't figure out why no one else was there. Then we figured it out. First three boys aged 8-10 showed up to play football and four more joined them. The rules became more complicated as more kids showed up. We were almost invisible except we never got stepped on kicked or hit with a football. They were running down both sides of us and tossing the ball overhead. It was like having 50 yard line seats in the middle of the field.

July 4, 2011

On the way to today's hike at the Savage Gulf natural area, we passed through a small town that was preparing for a 4th of July celebration. People were decorating their ATVs with flags and red, white, and blue bunting. Fire trucks were coming to town and there was a balloon archway. We missed all of the celebration to hike the Big Creek Gulf Trail, described as "a demanding trail that will wear you out", and connected to the Big Creek Rim Trail. The complete loop was around 9.5 miles including side trips. We only saw three groups of people and that was in the last half mile. The trail was not as difficult as we were expecting. There was, however, more up and down the entire length of the trail. In the last hour or so we had some rain. It was fun walking through the woods with the rain coming down and the occasional boom of thunder.



The stone door formation is starting point for many of the hikes and is about 1 mile from the parking lot.



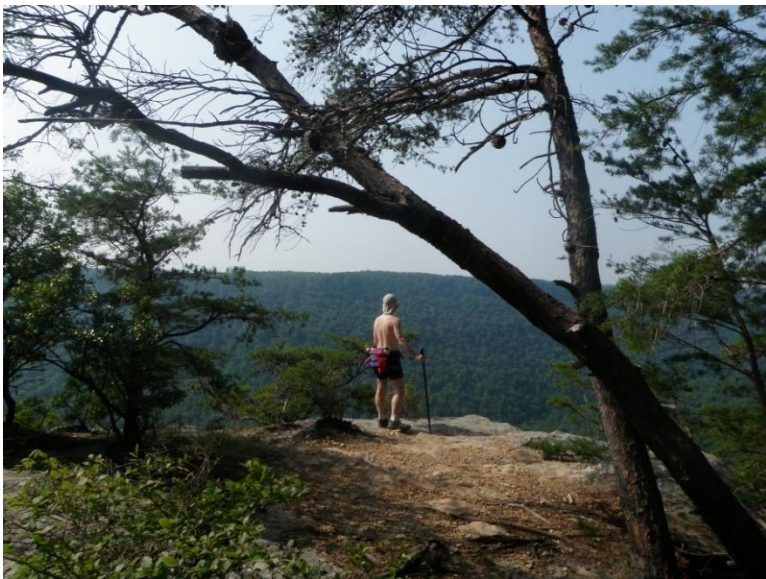
This is our traditional before the hike photo. At this site, hikers were supposed to list the trails they were hiking along with a check in and out times. A few people had already completed the stone door path and no one had done the longer trails.



You know it's going to be a good hike with warnings like this. The pavement was just to put your mind at ease for a short while.



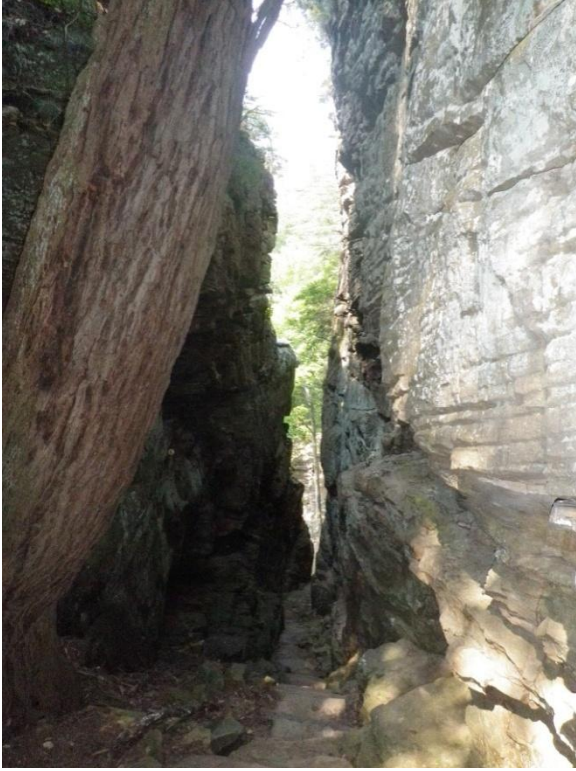
At the first overlook you could see the area where the rock climbers play.



The trail was wooded with great overlooks of the valley and where we were ultimately going.



One of many great views we had. It brought back fond memories of rock climbing class.



This is the famous stone door formation. I didn't understand the symbolism. It was nice and cool to walk through and was the start of the more difficult trail.





Typical trail

Ranger Falls was well worth the side trip. It was quite refreshing,

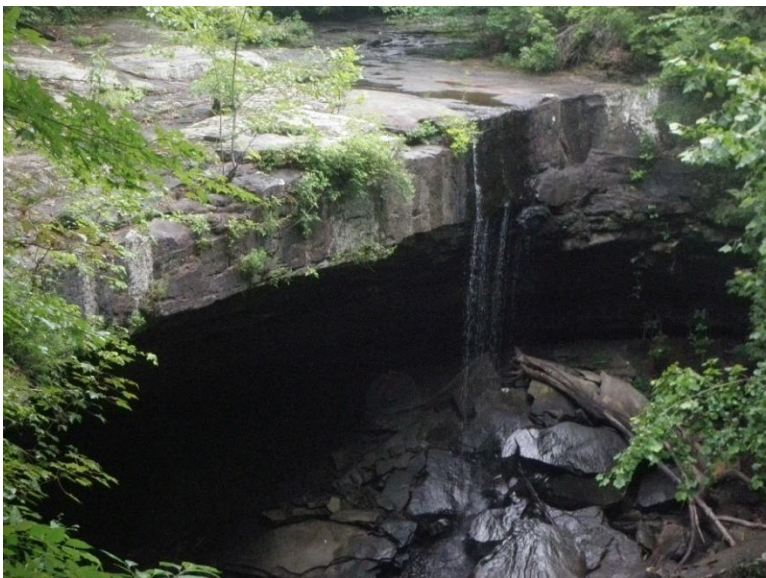




Lunch spot



Julie taking a short break - we are almost done and the rain had just started.

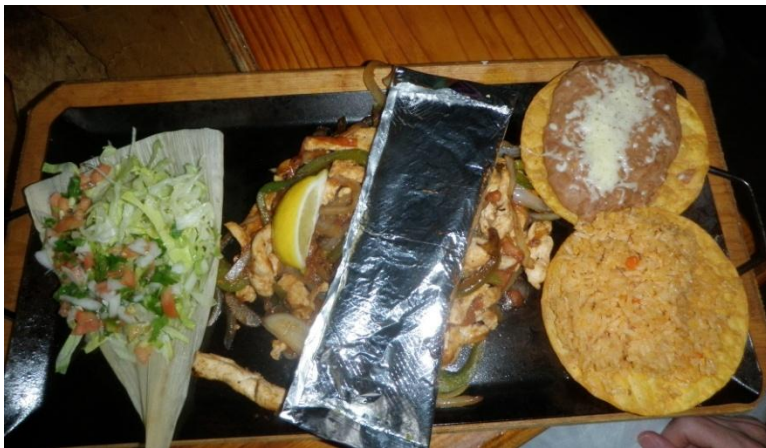


After we finished the main trails, we took the short 300 yard side trip from the ranger station to Laurel Falls. There wasn't much water there.



There were, however, many steps leading back to the ranger station. We had a great day of hiking.

When we got back to town, we went to the outfitters store that was having a big sale. Julie shopped and shopped. We were there long enough that we were present for the drawing for the doorprizes. Julie won a very nice Kelty backpack. I got to wear it while she finished shopping.



We worked up a big appetite and went to a great Mexican restaurant. The salsa was very good and I had a faitia that was excellent.