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Plan B Trip Review

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I forgot to follow up on this. Many of you know I was planning a trip to the Smokies in October, but the trip got axed due to the gov'ment shutdown. So my dad, brother, and I headed north to where it all started for us. Here's a little write up and pics I did for the trip on my blog.

This is long overdue, but sometimes I just need some time to digest things. Plus, my school work load is doubled up now, so posting time is limited. Still, here is what I can remember from our trip north.

We were, no doubt, disappointed that the national park was closed. It would have been my first trip to the Smokies, and I planned this trip for quite a long time. Still, going north into the Pennsylvania wilds was like a trip down memory lane for us. Camping at Ole Bull State Park, stopping in at Kettle Creek Tackle Shop, even a trip to the old "honey hole" on Kettle Creek, it was like the "old days" for my dad, brother, and me. This is where it all began for us. We learned how to fly fish here. So by the time we arrived at Ole Bull, we weren't even thinking about the Smoky Mountains.

The trip started beautifully. A bald eagle was spotted on the way up, and I was glad to buy a camera with a 10x zoom! Day one started on Hammersley Fork. This was less about the fishing and more about seeing a patch of virgin hemlock trees that survived the logging boom of the mid 1800s. We arrived on the Hammersley around 9:30am Thursday, Oct. 10th. The spawn wasn't under way yet, and the water was holding around 50 degrees, despite night time temps into the 40s. The brookies were off at first, but as the sun came out, so did the fish. My dad and brother fish small streams less than I do, so it took them a while to get their chops, but it was a beautifully wild stream. After about a mile or so of fishing upstream, we reached the Forrest Dutlinger Natural Area trail head. A hike up the side of the mountain would land us right in the middle of virgin timbers. The hike up was brutal. I believe it was a climb of about 700ft in altitude in less than a mile. It took some time for us to get up there as we were in our waders (not the best hiking gear!) and were toting our vests, chest packs, and fly rods. About half way up we dumped all our fishing gear. We figured no one as coming up to take it! When we reached the top, we realized how worth it the hike was. The trees were absolutely stunning. It was a sense of the forest as it once was. My dad said that he heard about these timbers for almost 30 years, but never took the time to find them. He was glad to finally see these trees.

We arrived at Ole Bull around 4:00pm, after a hearty lunch at Debs/Cross Fork Inn, set up camp, then headed to the old 'honey hole' on Kettle Creek. Kettle was just stocked, but oddly enough, the only trout that I caught was a 4" wild brownie.

The next day we decided to hit up Cross Fork. This is a stream I've fished in passing, but never spent the time I felt the stream deserved. The stream would become our main focus for the rest of the trip. We fished three sections of the creek. Friday we fished a middle portion of the stream that was just littered with wild brownies. Some of them were quite significant in size. There was so much good water, every run and pool looked trouty,

that fishing was slow because you didn't want to overlook one inch of this stream. Saturday we went to the more popular stretch of Cross Fork. As we were entering the stream at the bridge, some bait chuckers tried to hole jump us and get upstream of us. That didn't work out for them, as we fished a lot faster than they did (and with every cast the one guy was caught in trees), and we soon got up stream of them. It didn't matter anyway. This stretch obviously sees more pressure than other stretches, and didn't fish very well. I knew of another stretch that I fished during the Spring, so we got in the truck and drove upstream several miles, well upstream of the two prior sections we fished. Here, it was all native brookies. The stream goes into a series of splits, and the water can get pretty skinny. It's littered with brookies though, and we all ended up having a double digit day on this stretch.

The weather was great, the scenery was stunning, the fishing was great, and it was a trip that I think the three of us will remember for quite some time. I forgot how much I love this area of my home state. It was, in a way, like going home for us.