

## Steve Temple

### Trip Report April 16<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015

About 5 years ago I made a photo book, through one of those Amazon Local offers, of some photos I had taken of several of my favorite NC waterfalls. I shared this book with one of our daughters and she showed it to some of her friends. She and her husband have a small group of very close friends and they were very impressed with the photos (actually the waterfalls) they saw and wondered aloud to my daughter if she thought her dad might be willing to guide them to see some of these falls. My daughter approached me with this request and after twisting my arm way behind my back, finally convinced me that I should do this for her. Now if you think she had to twist my arm, you don't know me very well. To make a long story short, we had our 4<sup>th</sup> annual trip the weekend of April 16-19, 2015 and aside from the poison ivy that some of the group apparently got into, it was a wonderful weekend.

We stayed at a cabin named Serenity at Cedar Cliff which is on the north shore of Cedar Cliff Lake about 2 miles south of where the East Fork joins with the West Fork to form the Tuckasegee River. Although we didn't have time over our 4 days to take full advantage, the cabin had a nice variety of human powered water craft available for those wanting to enjoy the lake. It was a beautiful location and there seemed to be a consensus that we might want to return there next year.



View from the lower level deck of our cabin on Friday morning.

Our number 1 goal for the weekend was to see the water from the dam release at Lake Glenville begin to flow over High Falls on the West Fork. That had been our plan the previous year and we made it to the falls at the right time, but some genius (me) had gotten a draft release schedule from American Whitewater in November of 2013 that listed the weekend we ending up going, but had failed to confirm with the finalized schedule that nothing had changed. Turned out we were one week too early, but fortunately for me they had a great time at the falls and once it became clear that there was no release, they had a big time playing around on the rocks below the falls. I was careful this year to make sure that there was no repeat of my previous year's gaffe. I even called Duke Power the day before we left to confirm. There were releases scheduled for both Saturday and Sunday, and Sunday was to be our backup day just in case Saturday didn't work out.

This year's group was to included 14 people (7 couples) and the trek west on Thursday involved 3 different groups leaving at different times, and in one instance coming from a different direction. Our first rendezvous point was to be a late lunch at Tupelo Honey on Hendersonville Rd. just south of Asheville. Our youngest daughter and her husband were down from NYC for a couple of weeks and we were tickled that they were able to join us. My son-in-law had a work event at the Marriot in downtown Raleigh the first part of the week and I picked him up at 7:00 on Thursday morning. Although expecting a bit of rain, we weren't sure what the weather would be like by the time we reached the Blue Ridge and I hadn't made any specific plans for our free time before lunch. We would adjust on the fly.

By the time we got to Marion, the rain had stopped for the most part so I suggested that we check out Toms Creek Falls. Sean had never been there, so he was all for it. FYI, he was still on the clock and did a good bit of work over the phone (some while we were on the trail) and with his computer on Thursday and Friday. The falls were pretty as ever, but there had been a significant number of trees around the falls cut down by the Forest Service. It opened up the view of the falls a bit, but otherwise made a mess.



Toms Creek Falls

Sean later posted a photo of Toms Creek Falls on KA's Facebook page and come to find out Kevin had showed up there a couple of hours later. I hate that we missed him.

When you are trying to pinpoint a time for everyone to meet when leaving at different times and from different places, it is likely that timing adjustments will need to be made. When we left Toms Creek Falls, I knew that we still had time to spare and so we got off I-40 at Old Fort and went to check out the new parking area for Catawba Falls. We started at the new trailhead and took the short hike to where the trail crosses the river. I didn't think we had time to hike all the way up to the falls, so we looked around a bit, saw some pretty wild flowers, and headed back to the RAV4. About time we got back, Sean got a text that lunch had been pushed back 45 minutes. I still didn't feel we had time to go to the falls, but there was still some additional free time.

We decided to check out the Mountain Gateway Museum in Old Fort and talked with the lady inside while we looked around. For some reason I thought of the old geyser (Andrews Geyser –but I couldn't remember the name) that I had read about and seen photos of and I asked the lady about it and pointed us in the right direction. A very pretty drive along Mill Creek eventually brought us to the site of this manmade geyser which was originally built back in 1885 and restored and rededicated in 1976. Although manmade, I thought it was pretty cool.





Andrews Geyser near Old Fort

After a tasty lunch at Tupelo Honey, the group was ready to see some waterfalls. There many options available, but our ultimate goal was to see a waterfall or two and get to the cabin at a “reasonable” hour. We could have gone down through Brevard and taken NC281 up to the cabin. There would have been plenty of waterfalls along that route, but the ride up 281 would been a little tough for many who had already been on the road a good portion of the day. The quickest route probably was to get back on I-40, get off on US74 and take that southwest to Sylva where we could join NC107 south down to 281. The waterfall choices on the route were very limited, so I opted to get on the BR Parkway and head toward Graveyard Fields. Although we had driven by there several times on previous trips, due to weather and time constraints, we had not been to Second Falls. This would be our first destination. My plan was that from there we would continue down the Parkway to NC215 and head south to Charles Creek Road which would take us over to 281 just a few miles south of our cabin.



Second Falls on Yellowstone Prong of East Fork Pigeon River

The trip down to the falls was enjoyed by all, although the climb back up began to take its toll on a few of the group as we approached the last set of steps leading up to the parking area. Everything was good and we headed on down the Parkway and even slowed down to see a roadside view of Upper Falls off in the distance. Rounding a bend just before reaching Black Balsam Road, we found that the Parkway was closed beyond BB Road. I guess I should have checked the Parkway's phone line for closures, but the thought never crossed my mind. Oh well, you live and you learn – hopefully.

Well we backtracked to US276 and headed for Waynesville and on to the cabin. After a stop for groceries in Sylva, we finally made it to the cabin shortly after nightfall. We'd have to wait for morning to see the view from the two huge decks overlooking the lake.

Aside from High Falls, my daughter had determined that she wanted her friends to see Twin Falls on the Thompson River and so we decided that would be the starting point for our day on Friday. There were still some heavy clouds hanging around early, but by the time we headed out they were beginning to break up and we actually enjoyed a beautiful midday until rain returned late that afternoon. We made pretty good time over to Upper Whitewater Road and down to the falls. I considered stopping at the trailhead for Rockhouse Falls on Burlingame Creek before it flows into the Horsepasture, but there were some time constraints that had to be taken into consideration. Our new tradition now *requires* that at some point or other during our trip, we must eat a meal at two specific places: Pisgah Inn and Cornucopia Restaurant in Cashiers. Today it would be Pisgah Inn so we had a pretty good drive ahead of us in order to get there for a late lunch.

We managed to get the whole group down to Twin Falls except for Sean who had a call in meeting which required him to ride back up the road a piece in order to get a good enough signal for his call in. After



getting back to the 15 passenger (Sean had driven my vehicle up the road and we were hoping he'd be back soon) we all got in headed down to Slippery Witch Falls on Mill Creek and scrambled down to view this pretty waterfall. Back up at the road, there was still no sign of Sean so we headed back in direction we came assuming that we would find him parked along the road working. Such was the case and after the call in meeting was finished, we headed for Pisgah Inn.



Twin Falls on Thompson River





Slippery Witch Falls on Mill Creek

The clouds had begun to build back up by the time we arrived at Pisgah Inn, but the ceiling was high even at the 5000' elevation of the Inn and we were able to enjoying stunning views of the mountains below and in the distance as the clouds shifted and changed in dramatic ways. Lunch was enjoyed by all and most choose to finish it off with various tempting deserts. The waitress serving our table would stop and look out the window occasionally and finally mentioned to us how she never tired of the view and how sometimes she would come out of the kitchen only to be stopped in her tracks and overwhelmed by the beauty of the mountains spreading out before her. I thought it was pretty cool that someone could see this view day after day while working and still be sensitive enough to the beauty that it could bring tears to her eyes.

The group wanted to see another waterfall after lunch prior to heading back to the cabin to enjoy the lake, but their guide had an infection on his left ring finger that according to the two nurses in our group, and more importantly my wife, needed to be looked at by a doctor. There wasn't much time to get back to Brevard before the Sisters of Mercy Urgent Care Center closed, and we parted ways for a time while I went and had my finger lanced.

Post surgery, my wife and I hooked up with my youngest daughter in downtown Brevard and decided to ride around the area and check out a few local falls while I waited for my antibiotic prescription to be filled at the CVS. First we rode over to Key Falls just east of town and then a little further east we stopped at Seven Falls along Pleasant Grove Church Rd. Yes we trespassed again as Sean and I jogged



up the little road across a wooden bridge over Lake Willow Creek and up to this beautiful waterfall. My camera was in the van from earlier in the day, and the photo below is from a previous trip. Anyone interested in the controversy surrounding the Seven Falls development may want to check out this link: <http://archive.citizen-times.com/article/20120930/NEWS/309300070/Seven-Falls-promised-much-delivered-little>



Seven Falls in March 2012

After picking up my meds and enjoying a nice little supper at Mayberry's in Brevard, the four of us headed back to Cedar Lake.

Everyone had committed to be ready to go at 8:45 Saturday morning so that we could get to the High Falls trailhead off NC107 by 9:00. This would give us plenty of time to get to the falls well before the release flow reached the falls. Amazingly the group was ready around 8:30. On our way to the trailhead, we also got a nice view of Grassy Creek Falls along 107. The trail we took to High Falls approaches the falls along the east side of the river and along the way affords a beautiful view of Rough Run Falls (a.k.a. Thurston Hatcher Falls) where Rough Run flows into the West Fork. In my mind, it would be worth the hike just to see this beautiful waterfall – especially on a day with a nice strong flow as we had on this day.





Rough Run Falls ~0.25 mile downstream from High Falls

Anyone who has never seen High Falls at full flow and who had never heard about the recreational release program would surely see this falls as a grand sight even as it was when we arrived that morning. The geologic setting is spectacular and the falls itself was pretty impressive as seen below.





There was quite a crowd there when our group arrived and more showed prior to the big show. A good number of viewers had apparently used the new trail which comes down on the west side of the river from the dam area above the falls. This trail was constructed primarily for use by kayakers who intend to run the river during these release periods. Certainly the trail is open to hikers as well, but hikers must climb ~600-700' back up the steep trail while the kayakers are carried down the river ~5.5 miles to the takeout area across from the Thorpe Powerhouse on NC107. When the initial surge of water began to plunge over the falls, the attention of everyone turned that way. After a few seconds the spray began to envelope all who were within a hundred yards or so of the falls and there were a few screams and much shifting of position in order to find a spot where photos could be taken without getting drenched. This being the first release of the year, the river channel was effectively flushed of all debris and the initial flow had a distinctly muddy appearance along with a somewhat unpleasant aroma. After a few minutes however, the water began to clear so that a brilliant white wall of water coursed over the falls.



High Falls – shortly after the release flow arrived at the falls

We hung around for a good while, but saw no kayakers coming down the trail until just before we headed back to our vehicles. Later in the day as we headed back up 107 toward the cabin, we could see an occasional kayaker paddling downstream and there were a good number of paddlers packing up their vehicles at the takeout area.





High Falls at full flow

That was quite an experience for everyone and our overall timing was just right so that when we got back to the trailhead we were right on time to get to Cornucopia Restaurant early enough to beat the lunch crowd. Considering that much of our crowd loves to taste and sample each other's meals (as opposed to the standard cheeseburger and fries of yours truly), an occasion like this is quite a communal event as multiple menu items can be tested at one sitting.

This was perhaps going to be the afternoon on the lake for some, but they wanted to see one more "easy" waterfall before returning to the cabin. I had something different in mind and suggested that we check out Judaculla Rock. Everyone bought into that since it was a short trail and definitely something different. The group found this historic Cherokee artifact interesting and then most headed back to the cabin while my little group cruised on up to the Engels on the south side of Sylva to purchase steaks, a couple of pieces of chicken and a birthday cake for a surprise birthday party planned for the evening meal.

The groceries were dropped off at the cabin ~4:00. Some were on the lake, others napping or resting and it was a good time for the guide to get away for a while. I grabbed my Bernie maps and directions and headed down 281 to the area around where the West Fork French Broad River flows under 281. Bernie

(otherwise known as Sasquatch) had given me directions to a series of three waterfalls on McCall Branch that flows into the West Fork and another couple of drops on the West Fork just downstream from the 281 bridge. I had never seen these falls, so was very anxious to check them out. His directions were true and I managed to get to them easily, although the trail up beside the falls on McCall Branch was a bit steep and then I had to wade the West Fork in order to get a decent view of the second drop – certainly no big deal. I then drove down Silverstein Road a piece and got a couple of shots of a nice cascade on Parker Creek just before it crosses under the road. I had been told that supper was targeted for 7:00 so it was time to head back up the road, especially since I had one more stop I wanted to make.



Lower drop on McCall Branch

As I began to climb in elevation, I looked back across to the ridge on the south side of the West Fork and was somewhat surprised to see what looked to be a tall waterfall way off in the distance. The more I looked, the more certain I was that it was definitely a waterfall. As I pondered the situation, it seemed that the most likely scenario was that this was Dismal Falls on Dismal Creek as it tumbled toward the West Fork. Once back to the cabin, I checked out my topo map and was certain of my original diagnosis. Just to be sure, I emailed Bernie and he confirmed that Dismal could indeed be seen along that stretch of 281 during winter and early spring before the trees leafed out. I guess I can now mark off Dismal Falls from my “to do” list, without having to go through hell to see it (KA gives it a 9 beauty rating, but 10 for difficulty).

As I headed back to the cabin, I turned off onto Tanasee Gap Rd. and took the short hike down to the lower falls on Cold Creek. I had been there several years ago and it was a quick and easy hike to a very pretty waterfall. I made it back to the cabin by 6:55 well before the food began coming off the grill. Supper was delicious and it was time to start planning for our departure the following morning. The rain began falling as twilight enveloped us and it continued pretty much unabated until we reached the Triangle area Sunday evening.





Lower Waterfall on Cold Creek

We loaded up in the rain on Sunday morning and headed north to Sylva. I decided to drive the caravan through downtown Sylva so that everyone could see the beautiful old Jackson County Courthouse up on the hill at the end of mainstream. About that time, my daughter realized that we had forgotten to close the gate at the cabin on our way out. We had reservations at the same Tupelo Honey we ate at on the way up, but we were ahead of schedule. I told the rest of them to head on to Asheville and we would go back and shut the gate, assuming that we could do that and get to lunch by the appointed time. Even with the rain and clouds, it was still a beautiful drive. The rain only enhanced the many different shades of green produced by the newly budding trees all along the surrounding slopes. Our timing worked out pretty well as the majority of the group was already seated and ordered. Our attentive waitresses jumped right on our orders so that we all received our food together. We enjoyed this one last meal together and then headed on our ways. A wonderful group of people and a wonderful long weekend!