

Great Smoky Mountain National Park LSAM Spring Excursion March – April 2007

Day 3

Matt arrived in the night. He and Desmerelda (although apparently everyone calls her Daniela) drove up from Baton Rouge the day after we left. She hails from Baja, a dry treeless place and wanted to know what streams and forests looked like.

Today is our longest hike of the trip. We're headed up to Albright Grove, the most picturesque of the old growth sites that I collect at. Our mission was to collect litter and CWD class 5 samples for my work and to set up two hanging canopy traps. During the hike up we travel over three types of trails, each about a mile long. The lower "trail" is really a maintained road that is gated. At the top of this trail some large boulders bar trucks, but this middle trail is wide and flat enough for 4 wheelers, although I don't they are used on a regular basis. Thankfully Adriean got us past the gate, so we got to drive the first mile of our hike.

The wild flowers were out in full force. We attained the top and collected my samples. Scouting for a place to set the canopy traps takes some finesse. You have to find a sufficient limb, the proper height, a clean path for the projectile, and finally, hopefully, it's clear underneath for trap maneuvering, etc.

We found a wonderful limb, dead, but apparently sturdy about 50 feet up the side of an ancient hemlock. We had some misfires but finally a shot carried the line over the limb and the trap was set in no time. It's very impressive to have an 8 foot tall trap hanging 50 feet off the ground in the branches of a 400 year old tree. We put up a second trap lower, to see what faunistic differences may be found.

These are the first canopy traps used to collect beetles and other general insects in the Smokys. They are also in an old growth forest (a very rare habitat), and amongst hemlocks which are disappearing as fast as the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid can eat them. The eating is surprisingly fast, in case you were wondering. So these are pretty great traps and have the potential to yield some very important and perhaps surprising results.

We have the whole day up there. So we hiked the loop and collected bugs. I found a big Zopherid, a beautiful beetle indicative of old growth forests. We happened upon a newish dead old pine that had been stripped bare of bark by the woodpeckers.

We made the hike back to the suburban, and were homeward bound. I made crawfish bisk (I smuggled some tails from Baton Rouge in with the drinks in the ice chest).



Quitting the Vehicle



Trudging the trail



Trout Lilly



Salamander



Yellow Violet



Quiet Moth



Zopherid – Little Known Fact: Naturally Blurry



Nitidulid on a sappy stump



Fungal Forest



Lunch Break



Desmerelda (AKA Daniela)



Tall Traps



Pine Cone



Trillium



Naked Tree



Long awaited meal