

I was in Panama when I learned that the virus that epidemiologists had been watching had gotten loose outside of China. It was probably loose long before the loosening was admitted. The general response to this escape, pretty much inevitable for an airborne virus, was to try to stop people, who are only occasionally airborne, from traveling. Or doing much of anything else. Three years on, we now know, again (this isn't new information, but thanks to the great Lysenkoism of 2020, we've had to relearn or deny things that have been well known for a long time), that stopping transmission of an airborne virus can only be accomplished by stopping people from breathing. That was attempted, too, but people have a nasty habit of continuing to breathe in and out, despite the risks that breathing poses to their health. One of the activities that continued to be allowed, probably because it's difficult to close the outdoors, although that was attempted, too, in various places, was hiking alone outdoors. Like I do anyway.

April 3: Loyalsock Creek, near the eastern end of the trail



Thanks to the great Lysenkoism of 2020, all work and no play was the program for those of us who were still allowed or required or forced to work. I had joined the world of the US medical industry (I don't call it health care because it's not about health, and it's not about care, despite there being some caring people involved) less than a year before the virus got loose, so I had a front-row seat for the brouhaha. When I wasn't working, I made it a point, at least once per week, to take a hike. I decided on the Loyalsock Trail, which is a long-distance trail of about 59 miles (about 95 km): an ambitious hike for a long weekend, a comfortable hike for a week, or a way to distract myself for several months in day hikes.

April 7: white hepatica (*hepatica nobilis*): note that there can be different numbers of petals, actually the sepals of the plant



Spring Comes to the Loyalsock Trail, 2020: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

The first day I was out, it snowed. The second day I was out, I went swimming in cold water, of which there is plenty, year-round, along the Loyalsock Trail. The third day I went out, the back roads were being watched by various law-enforcement officials, but not closely enough that they were making themselves useful after a windstorm by clearing the roads. Nope: clearing the roads would have been useful, and there was no such thing as a useful government response during 2020. I stopped several times to clear the roadway on the third day, and when I got to a snag that I didn't feel like clearing, I parked the car and walked. I was out for a walk, anyway.

April 14



Spring Comes to the Loyalsock Trail, 2020: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

I like trilliums. They're sort of like my favorite hikes: my favorite trillium is the one I'm looking at now. They have lots of common names, including birthwort (because of their medicinal use in stimulating or calming uterine contractions), toadshade, wake robin, and wood lily. I can never decide which color variation that is available in the northeastern US is my favorite, so I'll include both. Here is a picture of a red trillium (*Trillium erectum*).



Spring Comes to the Loyalsock Trail, 2020: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

Because the Loyalsock Trail follows the Loyalsock Creek, there are many creek crossings and views of waterfalls of various shapes, heights, and volumes. In Pennsylvania, in general, unnamed washes ('wash' is a geographic term I learned in Arizona, for a channel that only has flowing water occasionally, but I'm pulling it over to Pennsylvania because there are many washes and because there is no locally used word for these features in Pennsylvania) flow into runs, runs flow into creeks, and creeks flow into rivers. There are many exceptions to that overall pattern, but here is a small run with a very small fall.

April 22



Spring Comes to the Loyalsock Trail, 2020: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

Pennsylvania does have its own geographic terms, such as 'knob'. A knob is a place where the tail ends of the glaciers were sliding along on top of the hills instead of gouging and moved around or missed what used to be a higher point on the hill. Here is a picture of Smith Knob, not taken on the Loyalsock Trail. Instead, the Loyalsock Trail goes up and over the knob.



Spring Comes to the Loyalsock Trail, 2020: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

Dutchman's breeches (*Dicentra cucullaria*) are one of the weirder-shaped wildflowers in the northeastern US. The stereotypical flower, the flower every 4-year-old learns to draw, has a central set of pistils and stamens, with a bunch of petals radiating out from the center of the flower, like a daisy. Dutchmen's breeches are shaped like a bifurcated balloon. Try teaching that to the next 4-year-old who wants to draw a flower.



Spring Comes to the Loyalsock Trail, 2020: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

The Loyalsock overlook, in Loyalsock State Park, is one of the more well-known scenic vistas along the trail. Despite going up and down the ridges along the creek, wide views like this are unusual, because of the forest. Hiking this trail convinced me to take Sullivan County seriously when looking for a house, and I now live up that creek and off to the right a few miles, in part because I wanted access to this trail and this creek and this type of forest.

April 28



Spring Comes to the Loyalsock Trail, 2020: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

Another waterfall, more rocks. I tried to take a picture of a wildflower and a waterfall on each day, and I succeeded, but after a while, the pictures all run together, and I cut many of them. This one made the cut, probably because of the shapes of the whitewater, particularly where it spreads out near the bottom of the picture.



Spring Comes to the Loyalsock Trail, 2020: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

Yellow trout lilies (*Erythronium americanum*) grow from bulbs and mostly spread by extending root runners under the ground. If left to themselves long enough, they can form enormous colonies that cover large areas of ground. They don't make flowers until they're about seven years old, so a bunch of mottled leaves without a bunch of flowers, indicates a relatively young colony (or an early or late phase of the colony's blooming season). They rely on ants to spread their seeds.



I hiked most of the trail twice because I was providing my own car support. I'd drive to a trailhead, hike about half as far as I wanted to hike, then walk back to the car. But my mother came a couple of days to provide car support, especially across places where there was more than ten miles between roads, which doesn't often happen in the eastern US or along the Loyalsock Trail, but it can. On the first day of the hike with mom's car support, I met John, who was carrying twenty-six pounds (11.79 kg) in his day pack and planning a loop hike of twenty-five miles (40.23 km), because his mother wasn't providing car support, and because he didn't want to go out and back. I think in general the pack should weigh less in the Avoirdupois system than the distance of the hike in the imperial system, but maybe he was going with less weight in the metric system. He had gotten stuck with a pile of paid vacation that was scheduled to expire, and he wasn't allowed to go anywhere to use it. So he went outside.

May 5



Spring Comes to the Loyalsock Trail, 2020: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

Long-spurred violets (*Viola rostrata*) are common along the trail, along with several other species of violets. These have a lavender edge and a darker center, unlike the bog violets or blue violets that are also common in the area. I think that all of the violets, including the yellow ones and the white ones, are beautiful flowers, but while I was looking up information about these plants, I found a site letting us know how to kill them all and prevent them from coming back. What is wrong with people? Here we have beautiful, edible plants, and we're going to apply herbicide liberally and repeatedly because... something about having a lawn with just grass? I don't know. I don't even want to meet those people. More good reasons to hike alone.



Spring Comes to the Loyalsock Trail, 2020: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

I hiked the Loyalsock Trail in a series of doable day-hikes, but that shouldn't be taken to mean that the trail is trivial when divided up into small sections. In short sections, I routinely hiked over a thousand vertical feet (.3 km) on most of the day hikes, up and down and up and down and up and down, etc., on steep trails, with rocky and uneven terrain. During rain, snow, and frost, rocks and leaves are slippery. This is a picture of typical trail. It is covered in potentially slippery rocks and leaves, with nearly a cliff next to the trail. While many other people were gaining virus weight, from being indoors and not doing anything, I was in terrific shape.



Spring Comes to the Loyalsock Trail, 2020: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

The white flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*) was in bloom by the middle of May. I would like one of these for my yard. I have a different variety, a green variety of Kousa dogwood (*Cornus kousa*), which is very nice, but I'd like one of the native plants. I'll have to look for one or just stop mowing the lawn to let the local plants grow.

May 13



Spring Comes to the Loyalsock Trail, 2020: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

A crown of black snakeroot/black cohosh/black bugbane (*Cimicifuga racemosa*): bugs dislike the smell, supposedly, although it depends for pollination on several small insects, and deer dislike the taste. Maybe that's what it was growing with several other plants, which could benefit from an odoriferous neighbor.



Pennsylvania used to be famous for its coal mines. In some places, near what used to be coal mines, there is coal left on the ground along the trail. Now Pennsylvania is famous for its natural gas drilling. On one of my hikes, I came across a surprisingly well maintained, unmapped road out in the middle of the forest. I followed that road to see what was what, and eventually, I reached an enormous gas pad with pipes that extended in many directions. In theory, the tax money from the natural gas extraction was supposed to be used for road maintenance in the state, because the trucks required as part of the operations for the natural gas extraction damage the roads, but a multi-billion-dollar industry is not covering its costs. The best roads are the unmapped roads that the gas companies maintain for themselves. Everyone else's roads get maintenance when the federal government passes an infrastructure bill. Meanwhile, state officials and gas company executives are wallowing in cash. No one ever considered returning some of the proceeds of the operations to the residents of the state, like they do in Alaska. Nope—it's luxurious vacation homes for the people at the top of the socioeconomic pyramid scheme, while I spend \$650 dollars getting a wheel bearing replaced after hitting a convincing pothole in one of the state's roads. Follow the money or follow the roads: they both lead to the same conclusion.



Spring Comes to the Loyalsock Trail, 2020: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

Another version of a trillium , the painted trillium (*Trillium undulatum*). While I was looking up the scientific name, I found that I can buy trillium plants for my garden. That would be fun.

May 19



Spring Comes to the Loyalsock Trail, 2020: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

Another waterfall.



Spring Comes to the Loyalsock Trail, 2020: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

A gigantic boulder that could break off and crash down the hillside. Or just continue to sit there.



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Another waterfall. Truly, the Loyalsock Trail is not a boring trail. But it is relatively predictable. On the hillsides: plants and rocks, with often evident microclimates and microzones of soils. Between the hillsides, creeks with waterfalls. On the tops of the hills, occasional views, and sun-loving trees and plants, and a short break before a steep descent among rocks and microclimates to the next creek.

May 26



Spring Comes to the Loyalsock Trail, 2020: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

This American toad (*Anaxyrus americanus americanus*), American because of the common name, not because he holds a US passport, not that holding such a passport would have done him any good in the summer of 2020 when no one was allowed to use their passports for anything other than tucking under the short leg of a chair to keep the chair from tipping, is a reddish color, appropriate to the red shale in the area. Despite the commonness of red shale, red toads are less common. This was the only such reddish toad I found. Maybe he has a skin condition. He should talk to his doctor about the latest treatment for moderate-to-severe plaque psoriasis, a treatment that will visibly reduce reddish patches of skin in 90% of users, if they're willing put up with such side effects as exploding kidneys, sudden blindness, an overnight sensation of having peanut butter stuck to the roofs of their mouths, lymphoma, and possible allergic reactions. Wish him luck.



Spring Comes to the Loyalsock Trail, 2020: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

Unlike most of the waterfalls along the trail, this one can be enjoyed from the car. It's a short jaunt off route 87 on Little Bear Creek Road to the trailhead, and off to the right, shortly before one reaches a small pull-off where hikers can ditch the car for the day, this waterfall does what waterfalls do, which is to prevent waterfall withdrawal. I was not aware of this condition until my friend Julie mentioned it and took me to Ricketts Glen State Park where we dealt with her waterfall withdrawal. There must be an FDA-approved medication for this condition, or at least one in the works, but going outside and seeing, hearing, smelling, and skinny-dipping in the pools below waterfalls is more effective and with fewer side-effects.



Spring Comes to the Loyalsock Trail, 2020: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

On June 2, International Sex Workers Day, my mother came to provide car support. It was a good day to have car support. I lost the trail, found a large waterfall, and spent about eight miles (12.9 km) bushwhacking in the general direction I needed to go, not necessarily in that order. My mother did what she could do to facilitate finding the hiker, which was to drive back and forth on the road until the hiker appeared, because neither the hiker nor the driver had cellular service at any point during the hike. Providing car support for a hiker requires a particular set of skills, and over the years, my mother has developed most of them.



Spring Comes to the Loyalsock Trail, 2020: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

This brown fungus that looks like a shallow cup is called a brown cup fungus (*Peziza phyllogena*). I'll bet you didn't see that one coming. Wikipedia says edibility is unknown, but, and I quote, "Roger Phillips considers it edible." Huh. And what does Alice Mayberry think? Or maybe Gertrude Watson would like to weigh in on this? Ferris Bueller? Anyone? Anyone?



Here is one of my favorite pictures: there are five timber rattlesnakes/banded rattlesnake/canebrake/American viper/black rattlesnake/eastern rattlesnake/timber rattler (*Crotalus horridus*) in this picture: two larger ones tangled on the right, and three smaller ones piled up in a small corner near the left of the boulder. There had been more, but at least two of them slithered into cracks in the rocks as I approached. I almost missed them. They were on a short spur trail to an overgrown overlook, and knowing that the overlook was overgrown, I decided to overlook the overlook. But then I heard a tremendous squawking, and about a dozen enormous turkey buzzards/vultures/John crow/carrion crow (*Cathartes aura*) took off from the trees near the overlook. I had to see what was going on with loud, large birds, so I walked over there. By the time I got to the edge, the birds were riding updrafts along the steep side of the ridge, and I almost stepped on a snake. The rattle warned me back.



Spring Comes to the Loyalsock Trail, 2020: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

The Loyalsock Trail is still, in some places, marked with original-style trail markers: painted lids from tin/ aluminum cans. More modern trail markers are plastic discs with trail information printed on them.

June 11



Spring Comes to the Loyalsock Trail, 2020: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

Here is one of the more modern trailmarkers, printed on a plastic circle. Also, here's a picture of a walking stick, probably a northern walking stick (*Diaphoromera femorata*) because there aren't enough pictures of arthropods in this set of postcards, and not because I wasn't getting all bitten up, because I was.



Spring Comes to the Loyalsock Trail, 2020: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

What is this thing? If anyone knows, please let me know. I went looking, but although there are numerous sources for identifying fish it might be fun to torture and kill (i.e., game fish), the rest of the water animals receive no such attention.



Spring Comes to the Loyalsock Trail, 2020: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

The mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*) started to blossom in June. Since 1933, it's been the state flower of Pennsylvania. As government interventions go, that one seems relatively harmless.



Spring Comes to the Loyalsock Trail, 2020: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

I took notes to help me remember where I'd left off and therefore where I needed to start again. Those notes now resemble a surrealist found poem:

Brush Creek

Hi

Rock Run Road by the bridge, "Bridge on Rock Run"

Loyalsock west into the hemlocks

High Rock Spur near the gate

Northeast from the state park, if can

Mineral spring uphill to southeast

World's End west at 3mph sign

Parking across from coal mine

Intersection with Ketchum Run

A mile from High Knob

Sign

High Knob intersection hikers only

High Knob Road

North of Ogdonia/Brunnerdale

Is Brunnerdale a road?

Between rock and cut fallen tree

Is McCarty a road?

If reach mile marker 25, go back south

Whistle Pig Fishing Club, 1910



Spring Comes to the Loyalsock Trail, 2020: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

By the last week of June, the mountain laurel was in bloom. Sometimes, I wished I'd brought along a machete.

June 23



I had a hard time identifying this flower. Would it be in the white-flower section of the field guide, or in the green-flower section? Eventually, I found it. It's fly poison (*Amianthium muscitoxicum*), also known as crow poison. It's estimated that about 95% of all plants on the planet are edible. Of those many edible plants, if we count all of the spices and plants used in all of the cuisines in all of the world, people use less than 5%. A lot of people try to learn about which plants are edible. Given the statistics on edibility, it would be easier to learn about which plants are not edible. Fly poison is not among the edibles or the actually eaten. All of the parts of this plant are toxic thanks to alkaloid compounds. Other notable alkaloids include morphine and quinine. But don't eat this one to avoid pain or malaria.

And for those of us who hate this kind of suspense, it was in the white-flower section.



On this particular day, I saw a lot of millipedes (*Narceus americanus*), sometimes in groups. Millipedes are not known for their social behavior. Being seen together is not the same as socializing. This particular millipede did not object to being handled and crawled right onto my hand when offered. Maybe we should reconsider whether millipedes are social.

Millipedes cause no problems. They aren't parasitic. They don't spread diseases. They don't chew through houses. They don't consume agricultural products. They don't make obnoxious sounds or smells. But most of the sites offering any sort of information about millipedes are from exterminators. Apparently, some people will pay good money to kill completely unproblematic creatures. Somehow, this makes me feel better about not being popular—unpopularity might not be because I'm causing a problem but because other people make problems where there are none. And yet another good reason to hike alone.

June 26



Spring Comes to the Loyalsock Trail, 2020: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

After having so much fun with rattlesnakes on a previous sunny overlook, I never overlooked another overlook, in case there might be rattlesnakes. No rattlesnakes at this overlook.



Spring Comes to the Loyalsock Trail, 2020: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

The End

(the other end, the one off route 87, not the other other end, where I started, off route 220, where I'd started 59 miles (95 km) northeast of the end where this sign appears)

