

## **Spruce Knob, WV, 4,863 ft. – September 3, 2001, HP #2: “Them are Internet Papers!”**

Our group of three had gotten up early Monday, Labor Day 2001, to begin the drive west from Arlington, Virginia to West Virginia's most known natural landmark, Seneca Rocks. Spruce Knob was just a back-up plan in case we had extra time.

Route 66 took us seventy-five miles to where it meets I-81 and US-48, passing by Front Royal along the way. This three-way intersection at Strasburg requires about one-third of the three and a half hour, 180-mile drive. After another sixteen miles on US-48 we entered the state of West Virginia, and thirty miles into West Virginia we turned south onto route 220 following it, and eventually WV-28, to Seneca Rocks. The drive from the Virginia/West Virginia border twisted and turned like a slithering snake. So, upon arrival we were all very eager to get out of the car and begin hiking.

To reach the top of Seneca Rocks we used a less traveled route coming up from the back side of the nearly 900-foot-tall cliffs found on its face. The approach gained a significant amount of elevation over a short distance, often traveling up natural almost stair-like formations. Commenting on the natural steps, Eric mentioned we were climbing a “staircase of steps”, and Jim and I laughed and laughed, pointing out that obviously a staircase consists of steps!



Attaining the razor back ridge, we ventured past the sign warning “here ends the realm of the hiker” and informing us that to proceed we should have rock climbing ability. Approaching the south peak over the sheer drop of its face, we stopped to watch the rock climbers and to take in the impressive views.

To return to our parked car we back tracked. At the parking lot, after looking over some information one of us had printed from a website, we decided to ask some local looking guys about Smoke Hole Canyon to see if they could give us clearer directions. As the locals were approached, one of them in coveralls, nonetheless, noticed the papers in Jim's hand, and before directions could be asked for, the local said “I know what them are, **them are Internet papers!**” As sharp as he was to recognize “Internet papers” he was unable to further enlighten us in our quest for Smoke Hole Canyon. Even to this day, I still get a smile on my face, and a chuckle when I think of “Internet papers” as odd as the name is for a printout from a website.

Striking out on Smoke Hole Canyon, we decided to head south west twenty plus miles to Spruce Knob located in the Monongahela Forest. The state highpoint rises to 4,863 feet and is not only the highest point in West Virginia but also the highest point in the Allegheny Mountains. The

area is known for its strong winds, and the one-sided red spruce trees around the peak bear testimony to that - deformed by constant exposure to strong westerly winds.

Spruce Knob is located along a huge ridge that is part of the Allegheny Front – an escarpment arising in south central Pennsylvania, cutting across western Maryland and into the eastern panhandle of West Virginia dividing it from the rest of that state. The southern end of the front is a series of ridges, one of which contains the Mountain State's highest point. Part of the crest forms the Eastern Continental Divide. We were able to drive up to a sizable parking area at the terminus of route 104.



From the parking lot it is only 900 feet to a stone and steel observation. The observation deck positions visitors above the tree line offering views in all directions, with my favorite being looking toward the east as the crest drops rather sharply at that aspect. None of us packed around cameras (nor phones with cameras) in those days so I do not have any photos from my initial visit. By chance, shy of four years later, I was once again in the Monongahela forest vicinity and I revisited Spruce Knob. This time I was armed with a camera and took a few shots.

