

EXCERPT FROM AUGUST 2019 WHOOP-N-HOLLER
The Beauty and the Beast: The Challenging Lower Glady Fork

By Doug Wood

As the title implies, the ALT along lower Glady Fork exhibits two main suites of characteristics, those that evoke joy in the hiker who takes the challenge and those that test the hiker's endurance. The river corridor nestled between steep mountains is ipso facto a wilderness area. No, it does not have federal wilderness status, but since the time it was logged heavily in the 1920s and 1930s, it has been pretty much left alone to grow into a wild place. There were a few scattered farms wherever significant level or rolling terrain allowed them to exist, but mostly the land just reverted back to forest and healed many of the scars of the logging boom. Today, the most prominent reminder of the logging days is the RR grade that criss-crosses the river (minus the bridges). And it is that feature that lends heavily to both the beauty aspect of the trail and the beastly aspect.

The Beauty

There are only a handful of places in WV where hikers can have a wildland experience of so many miles (~26) along a beautiful fish-filled mountain river. The ALT stretch along Glady is one of those rarities. The lower Glady portion of the ALT (~5.4 mi.) features monstrous old trees, excellent smallmouth bass fishing, trout fishing in spots where springs join the river, frequent wildlife encounters, awesome spring and summer wildflower displays, and abundant scenic views of the river.

The Beast

Frequent flooding, two dangerous trail washouts, flash floods, abundant precipitation, sustained high water in winter and spring, fallen monstrous old trees, flood debris on the trail in many spots, some steep rock scree slopes, and did I mention frequent flooding? Oh yes, I did. After all, it is the frequent flooding that caused the two washouts and necessitated elevating the trail out of the bottoms in a few areas, thus encountering rock scree. The first and downstream-most washout occurred during the 1985 flood and is located 1.2 mi. upstream of the Gladwin low-water bridge. The second happened much later, likely in the early 2000s near and downstream of Two Spring Run. The flood-caused washouts have necessitated the designation of high-water routes around the lower Glady Fork segment of the ALT. The new fourth edition trail guide describes those hiking alternatives.

Warning about the following rules-of-thumb: Riparian zones are dynamic. Shorelines and substrates frequently change shape during floods. The following rules-of-thumb that applied in July 2019, may no longer apply after future flooding.

Backpackers approaching the lower segment from downstream at Gladwin, have a rule-of-thumb to help them determine whether or not they will likely be able to wade past the washouts. If the water level at the upstream side of the low water bridge over Glady Fork is at the half full level in most of the culverts, then hikers will likely have no difficulty wading around the washouts. As the water level fills increasingly more of each culvert opening, the ability to wade around the washouts becomes increasingly less likely. If the water level is at the top of most of the culvert openings, then it is likely impossible to safely wade around the washouts. The downstream washout necessitates wading during most of the year. The upstream washout is at a slightly higher elevation relative to the stream's surface than the downstream washout, and therefore requires wading less often.

North-bound backpackers at the southern junction with the high-water routes (the bridge over Glady Fork near the Glady dispersed camping area along the road between Alpena and Sully) also have a rule-of-thumb for helping them determine whether to continue on the ALT or take the high-water routes. While standing at the east end of the bridge on the upstream side, look across to the opposite cliff-lined shore. During lower flow regimes, the shore nearest the bridge has a rock shelf extending further towards midstream than the rest of the short cliff above (see accompanying photos). If that

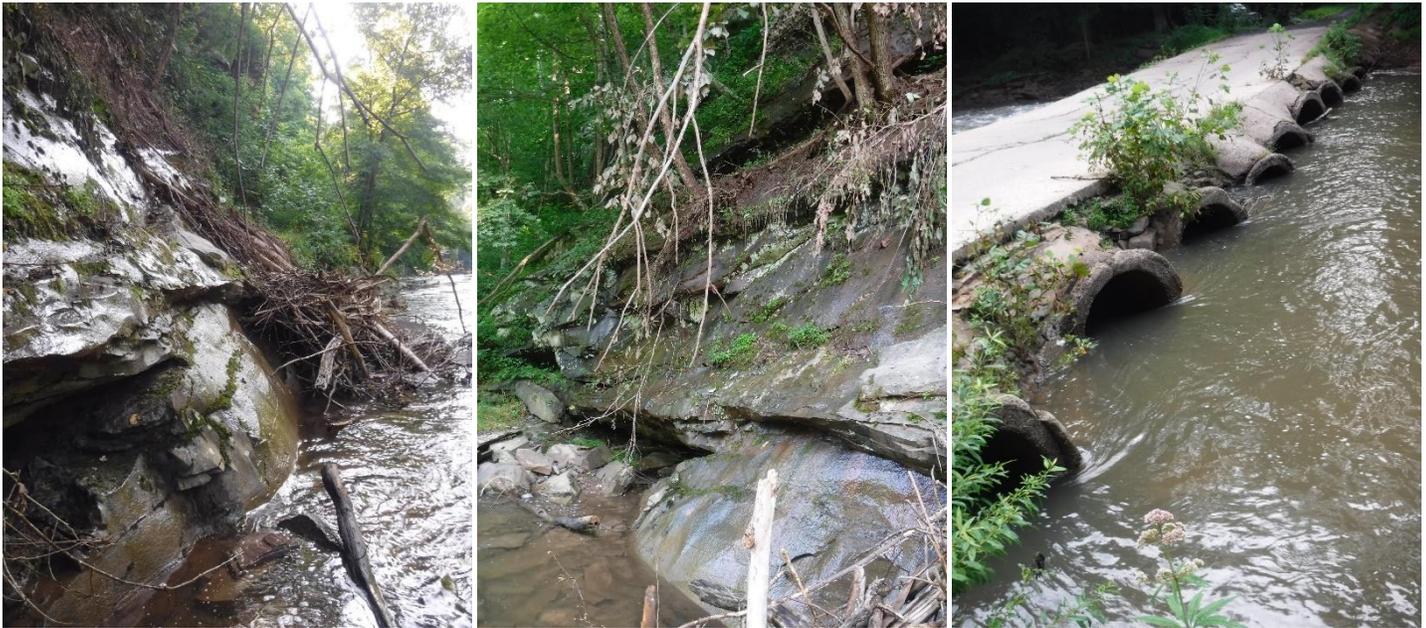
shelf is covered with water, then hikers can be sure they won't be able to wade around the washouts. If only a very little bit of the shelf is exposed, hikers may still be in danger at the downstream washout. Hikers may cover the 6.2 mi. between the bridge and the upstream washout or the 7.8 mi. between the bridge and the downstream washout, only to find out they must backtrack to the high-water route. If they make it to the upstream washout and find they must get their feet wet skirting around it, they can be assured that the downstream washout will be impassible. Because of the frequent flooding and sustained high water levels in winter/spring, a backpacker traveling S-N in late fall, winter, spring, and early summer, should probably plan to use the high-water routes, unless they are certain that the climatic conditions have been extremely droughty in the previous two weeks before they reach the Sully bridge. Only the period August-mid October offers any normality of a large number of days of access around the washouts. Be safe and use your head. Don't take unnecessary chances with your life. I have seen ropes rigged by hikers, attached to trees with shallow surface roots, to allow rappelling over the washout rock face to a very small ledge of rock. I would not trust my life to such rigging. If you missed an opportunity to hike the lower Glady Fork segment of the ALT due to high water, plan another trip in late summer or early fall. The fishing is usually good in September and the river with its October leaf colors reflected in its clear pools is a real beauty.



L-R: A cliff along Glady Fork and the gravestone of an early valley farmer, Andrew G. Shirk; b. May 19, 1864, d. Nov. 15, 1896. Shirk was born approximately one year after WV's statehood began and is buried near the cliff edge. The beauty of Glady Fork, an excellent Smallmouth Bass stream. The bass shown had a 5-inch chub in his/her gullet.



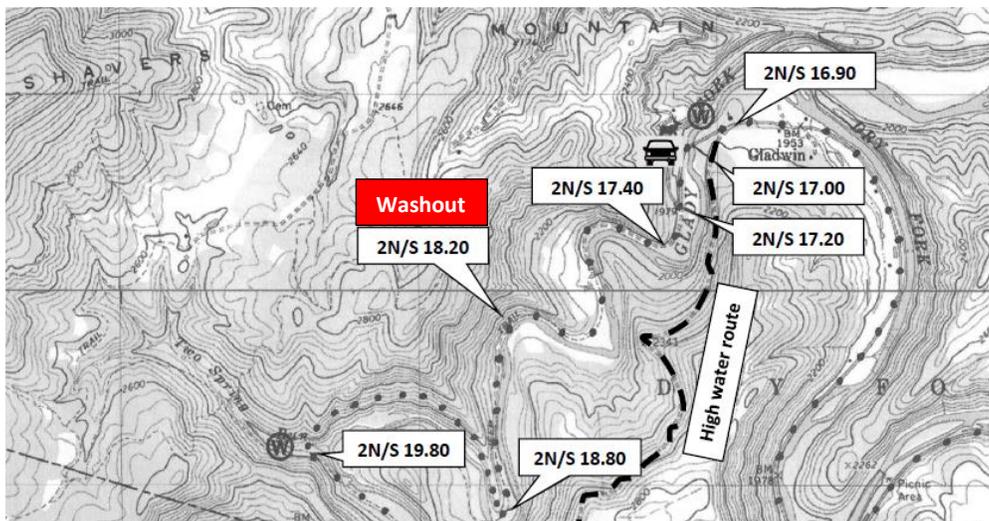
Left: A view from the Shirk clifftop overlooking the beautiful Glady Fork valley. Right: A wildlife encounter on the moist talus slope above the downstream washout. *Anaxyrus americanus* (American Toad).



Left: The downstream washout nearest Gladwin, when wadeable (S-N view). Middle: Same spot (N-S view). Right: The “rule-of-thumb” marker for N-S hikers. Most Gladwin bridge culverts are half full or less, indicating less dangerous wading conditions at the washout.



Left: The short cliff on the W shore of Glady Fork as viewed from the E end of the bridge on the upstream side. Note the exposed rock shelf on the right, the “rule-of-thumb” marker for S-N hikers. Right: Close-up of the “rule-of-thumb” marker for S-N hikers. At the level of jutting rock shelf exposure shown, the downstream washout was passable with ease on July 14, 2019.



Map of ALT between Two Spring Run and Gladwin, excerpted from the new 4th edition Hiking Guide to the Allegheny Trail.