



PHOTOGRAPHER: JAY PAUL

Rocks outcropping on the edge of West Virginia's Dolly Sods Wilderness allow a sweeping view from the Allegheny Mountains.

choked by laurel thickets to lower-elevation forests of mixed hardwoods.

Man has not always been kind to Dolly Sods. Tall trees were clear-cut for lumber in the late 1800s, exposing deep humus that dried out and washed or blew away. Logging camps and train engines sparked wildfires that ravaged the land, burning clear down to bare rock. During World War II the U.S. Army used Blackbird Knob and Cabin Mountain as practice targets, dropping ammunition that still occasionally emerges from the thin soil.

Set aside as part of Monongahela National Forest, the land has gradually healed. Some 10,215 acres are protected as wilderness, and 2,000 more acres along an access road are preserved as a scenic area. Now hikers, hunters, berry pickers, and others share a recreational bounty.

A Day in Dolly Sods

A swift breeze shoves thick clots of cool fog over the boulder where I'm perched. Between periods of sublime whiteness I spy the jagged spires of red spruce trees in the distance, limbs long on the lee side but stubby on the windward from harsh winters on these high plains.

I think no one else is here on this summer morning at West Virginia's Dolly Sods Wilderness. But as the fog disperses, unveiling a dramatic Allegheny Plateau landscape, I learn that I am not alone after all.

Slowly crossing an adjacent heath barren is a family of Mennonites. They stoop often to pluck wild blueberries from low bushes in spongy bogs, their laughter drifting my way.

In another direction I spot a father and son headed toward a stone promontory similar to mine. A lone camera buff passes near, bristling with lenses and tripod legs and intent on mosses and ferns that crowd

artfully eroded rocks. Two long-distance hikers bearing giant backpacks pause to eat and gawk at the valley below. A trio of birdwatchers ambles past, chattering about hawks.

Named for the German-immigrant Dalhe family that grazed sheep here in the mid-1800s, Dolly Sods tops 4,000 feet elevation in places. Eons have created a hodgepodge of windswept plains, soggy upland bogs, exposed rock fields, and a climate and plant community resembling a wayward patch of northern Canada.

Meadowlike heath barrens of low-growing azaleas, mountain laurel, and blueberries thrive between groves of red spruce, hemlock, and yellow birch. Trails follow streams



Members of the Miller family gather blueberries for jam and pie.

I've enjoyed the Sods since childhood. I've gathered ripe blueberries and waded streams in summer, watched fall colors cloak the slopes and beavers build stick dams, tracked bear and cross-country skied through winter's snowdrifts, and spotted wildflowers erupting in spring. I know I don't have the rugged beauty all to myself, but sometimes I imagine so. Sitting on a boulder at sunrise, wrapped in swift white fog, I wait to see what marvels Dolly Sods will show me this time. *Joe Rada*

HELLO, DOLLY

Dolly Sods Wilderness and Dolly Sods Scenic Area lie in Monongahela National Forest west of Petersburg, West Virginia. It's not easy to reach, but it's worth the effort. Get information, maps, and di-

rections from the Potomac Ranger District office in Petersburg, (304) 257-4488; Seneca Rocks Visitor Center in Seneca Rocks, (304) 567-2827; or Forest Headquarters in Elkins, (304) 636-1800.

