

# Bombs removed from Dolly Sods Wilderness

By **DAVID SHARP**  
The Associated Press

MORGANTOWN, W.Va. — People trekking through the rugged Dolly Sods Wilderness in the Monongahela National Forest have a few less things to worry about.

Fourteen, actually.

Workers unearthed 14 live mortar rounds this summer that had lingered from the days when the barren high country was used for Army training during World War II, said Steve Wright, spokesman for the Army Corps of Engineers.

One of the projectiles was actually exposed, its tail jutting from a laurel bush, he said. All were detonated.

The Army Corps undertook the project after years of reports of hikers finding projectiles in the 10,000-acre Dolly Sods Wilderness, where warnings are posted at all of the trail entrances.

Dave Wolfarth, who oversaw the project, said the area is now safe for hikers and others, as long as they stay on designated trails where workers used magnetometers to look for bombs.

"I hope we've done some good for the hikers in the area. Hopefully we'll have no more projectiles turned into the forest service office," Wolfarth said. "Hopefully it's all clear."

The search-and-destroy mission began last spring with contractors heading into primitive plateau in the Allegheny Mountains with magnetometers to search for metal-clad projectiles under the ground.

Rangers said the concern was not so much someone stepping on a bomb but that someone might build a campfire or drive a stake into the ground where an unexploded projectile lurks near the surface.

All of the 81mm and 60mm mortars that were discovered were within one to two feet of the surface, Wright said.

Eight were discovered on the Fisher Spring Run Trail, two were found on the Red Creek Trail and four were found on the Rocky Point Trail, Wright said. One inert round was discovered as well.

For workers, it was akin to looking for a needle in a haystack, Wolfarth said.

The contractors made 32,594 excavations and had only 14 mortars to show for it, Wolfarth said. Most of what they found were old tools, horseshoes or railroad spikes, he said.

Altogether, the project covered 21 miles of trails and 8.5 acres of unofficial camp sites where backpackers often pitch their tents in the wilderness in eastern West Virginia.

After finishing last month, workers moved to the adjacent 6,000-acre Dolly Sods North area, where they will work until Nov. 20, Wolfarth said. Work will be completed there next summer.

Altogether, the two areas, which are about 100 miles southeast of Pittsburgh, attract tens of thousands of backpackers, hunters and others each year.

They are among 2,136 places from Maine to California where people may be exposed to the explosive remnants of military training, said Kim Speer of the U.S. Army Engineering and Support Center in Huntsville, Ala.

The Army Corps set aside \$1.2 million for the Dolly Sods Wilderness and it came in \$300,000 under budget, she said. In all, there is funding to remove ordnance or to evaluate about 60 sites, she said.

The Army saw no problem with hurling projectiles into Dolly Sods as soldiers trained in World War II. The barren area where annual snowfall exceeds 100 inches seemed well suited to the job.

But the area became popular after backpackers and hikers discovered the peaceful ranges and panoramic vistas in the harsh climate where spruce are one-sided because of the strong westerly winds.

Workers got a taste of the nasty weather a week ago when the temperature dipped to 18 degrees with a wind chill of minus-30.

They were required to pack in their equipment, water, meals and extra clothing because motorized vehicles are not allowed in the wilderness. It often took 11/2 hours to reach the sites.

"At first, I thought we were wasting our time. Then we got to Rocky Point and Fisher Spring Run, and we basically hit a gold mine," Wolfarth said. "I'm glad we found some stuff."

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