

**<http://theworldupclose.blogspot.com/2009/07/planting-of-trees.html>**

Tuesday, July 14, 2009

## **Planting of Trees**

In March we headed to East Tennessee to plant some trees with the Nature Conservancy and other partners. We met, in the foggy and chill early morning hours at a coal plant. Black grime covered the parking lot and trucks carrying loads of freshly mined coal rumbled in and out. After meeting with representative of the conservancy, we got into the car with Nature Conservancy employee Katherine Medlock. As we worked our way up through the hills along gravel service roads, past a coal slurry pond and numerous natural gas pumps, she told us a little about the program's efforts to improve the ineffective reclamation efforts on the strip mined hills.

When this area was reclaimed, after strip mining for coal, the soil was packed down hard to prevent erosion, and pine and locust trees were planted in a bed of non native grass. 30 years later, the only trees present were those planted by the workers, and they were stunted, their roots unable to penetrate into the compressed soil. That compression, and the dense thatch of grass that grew beneath and between the trees, prevented new seedlings from taking root. The aggressive grass also prevented other native plant species from occupying the reclaimed area.

As we continued up into the hills, we rose above the heavy fog into sunshine, beneath clear blue skies. In the vallies below, bright white lakes of fog shimmered against forested shores. It was a breathtaking view. Finally we pulled into a lot where other volunteers, mostly children with the Junior Marines, were gathering.

In order to solve the problems with the restored areas, a small patch of test area had been deeply plowed, and we were there to plant a collection of native trees that could grow in the loose soil, and allow the forest to develop. We planted red buds for their nitrogen fixing abilities, interspersed among several types of oak and chestnut. We

worked with not just the Nature Conservancy, but also the Dept. of the Interior Office of Surface Mining Division, the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, and the American Chestnut Foundation.

We were planting chestnut trees, which did not have the immunity to the chestnut blight, that has virtually wiped out the American Chestnut. These saplings were being planted to learn about how chestnut trees respond to such planting methods, to help ensure better success when planting the resistant chestnuts.

As we grabbed up dibbles and garbage bags full of trees, I wondered how long it would take us to plant this swath of plowed land. The answer was about three hours. Moving down the rows, alternating from left to right, we planted. Jake spearing a hole with the dibble, a volunteer from the DOI carrying the bag of trees, and me picking out trees and placing them into the hold while Jake pressed dirt in around them. The work was quick, and before long, we had warmed up in the sun. Here and there were pieces of coal, even a few fossils.

When we were done, we took the time to eat some snacks and listen to the various organizations involve explain their reasons for and roles in the work we had done today. As we headed back down to hill to our car with Katherine Medlock, I think we all felt a sense of satisfaction with the day's work.

You can read a little about this event on the Nature Conservancy's website.

<http://www.nature.org/wherewework/northamerica/states/tennessee/press/press3936.html>