



Trucks did a funky "Hey Jude"; and I think there were others. I should add, I heard quite a bit of Grateful Dead covers, too, played by bands other than Dark Star Orchestra and Phil and Friends.)

Mid-set, the sky turned pink and the air cooled down. Blue rolling hills provided a peaceful backdrop for every band, and girls skipped through the crowd in fairy wings and tattoos, past the line of Port-o-pots and vendors and traveling beer stands.

By night, the festival was transformed to include even more ridiculous costumes, glow sticks and fireworks (even though they were technically not allowed -- and rightfully so [my friend's tent caught on fire because of one]). Nightfall meant the big name bands were coming, and the party got turned up a notch.

The crowd shifted its gaze from Main to Magic Hat stage to hear Lettuce, who had some great horns and readied us for the Friday night headliner, Phil and Friends.

I realize Phil and Friends changes members a lot, but this arrangement sounded different than any other I've ever heard. They even did a song that could almost pass for electronica -- a sort of STS9 vibe (and very danceable). Their jams were a little shorter and a little less Dead-sounding.

Regardless, they were on.

"Ripple" and "Brokedown Palace" both brought little tears to my eyes, and I know I wasn't the only one. "Not Fade Away" was fun.

SOJA, a regional favorite on the reggae scene, followed with a chill 45-minute set, and then Gov't Mule came on at 2 a.m., playing their usual "Soul Shine" and a very impressive Zeppelin cover of "No Quarter."

Because the majority of us had no cell phone reception on the Mountaintop, we estimated the time of day by the bands onstage. I checked the music schedule frequently, but by halfway through Gov't Mule, I didn't need a festival schedule to know that it was late, and I was tired. I headed back to camp, watching fireworks occasionally go off, and curled up in my sleeping bag, where I could hear the end of the Gov't Mule show as I drifted to sleep.

Day Two.

There might have been one or two of us awake before 10. Really, the mountain is quiet. The stage area is a wasteland of last night's party, and the only noticeable movement are the vendors, readying themselves for the morning rush.

A few hours later, I made my way through a sea of tents to get some coffee and came across a campsite with two radiant people pointing at a hole they dug in the ground. They explained that there were two people already underground and at least one more was going in.

"You haven't seen the tunnel yet?" they asked, beaming.

Um, no.

Was this in an effort to keep cool? Or were these kids just crazy? Regardless, these kids were just crazy.

The sun was hot.

Six bags of ice cost \$18.

I heard "Cumberland Blues" for the second time coming from the stage area, which was fairly empty at 3 in the afternoon. Considering some treks from camp to stage are at least 35 minutes in the sun, a lot of people made only one trip each way, each day. The Magnolia Circle camping area, though one hassle of a hike, had amazing views of the Appalachian Mountains.

The Saturday evening line-up promised a massive amount of good music: Tea Leaf Green, Mike Gordon, Derek Trucks, Keller Williams, Widespread Panic, Dark Star Orchestra -- and a few surprises.

Like Bassnectar.

I heard a lot of anti-Bassnectar talk around the campfire, and apparently some DJs think he takes the easy way out, but I'm thinking 1) Who cares? 2) Are they jealous? 3) Do they hear this? Are they dancing yet? (Note: his online videos don't do him justice.) During his set, the San Francisco-based DJ not only perfectly exemplified his stage name but brought with the music a film shown on a large screen behind him that sequenced bizarre, abstract images. And there was an all-out glowstick war, reminiscent of Phish tour days.

Another surprise came when the jampop band Tea Leaf Green covered The Doors' "Five to One." Who would dare cover that? I thought only frontman Jim Morrison had the dark powerhouse personality to pull that off, but they did it. Trevor Garrod on keys helped.

And yet another, when Derek Trucks took the stage with Widespread, about halfway through their show. So nice. Crowd loved it. It was as if both bands' helped pushed the other over the edge, magnifying their sound.

A third stage was located on Shakedown Street, in the heart of the camping area. Named Ropeadope, but referred to as Rubadub, this was the place small bands could randomly jam together. It was also used for Thursday night performances and music seminars and workshops throughout the weekend -- yogalates, jewelry design, body painting (I saw the results of that), drums, hula hooping, and so on.

Nearby was Frederick artist Brian Slagle's sculpture which, at one point, was used to house a drum circle.

Sunday morning began with the "Star Spangled Banner," played Jimi style. During a break in the storm, I decided to search for my car and drive home, even though I wanted to hear Michael Franti and Spearhead headline later in the evening. Like I said, there's only so much roughing it I can take before camping is no longer fun.

And let me just say, I was never so happy to see my little hatchback, all alone at the end of a dead end road. I threw out the blackened banana in the backseat and dumped the cooler water, eyed the unfortunately skunky 30-pack I had planned to give to a friend, and started on the cattle roads back to I-68, a collection of weathered festival fliers in my cargo pocket.

A Bear's Picnic in Pennsylvania, Camp Bisco in New York, Trinumeral in North Carolina...

I think All God was enough for one year.

Then again, the Harvest Time Music Festival is coming to Cumberland in September, and I'm always in the mood for some bluegrass in the fall.

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