
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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MINNEHAHA FALLS & WATER NYMPH DELL

TOPIC

OUR MAY WALK

MINNEHAHA FALLS at
NORTH KATOOMBA and
WATER NYMPHS DELL at
WENTWORTH FALLS

Friday 16th May 2014

“Only once his pace slackened
Only once he paused or halted
Paused to purchase heads of
arrows

Of the ancient Arrow-maker

In the land of the Dacotahs
Where the Falls of Minnehaha
Flash and gleam among the oak-
trees Laugh and leap into the valley

With the Arrow-maker dwelt his dark-eyed
daughter
And Hiawatha named her from the river
From the waterfall he named her
Minnehaha – Laughing Water”

Well you may wonder, dear reader, how a waterfall in North Katoomba takes the name of the wife of Hiawatha - the legendary American Indian brave of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s 1855 poem *Song of Hiawatha*. Continue then to wonder as you further peruse the page, for the creek that provides the ‘laughing water’ which plunges over these falls takes its name from the Yosemite tribe of American Indians. Not only has this name been displaced halfway around the world but the word itself is a corruption of Yo Semitee, the name of a brave chief of a Miwok clan of American Indians; his children and eventually



Winter in the Bush

the whole tribe became known as the Yo Semitees. The creek and waterfall are not alone in being identified with American Indians; a large area of North Katoomba is known as Yosemite, indeed prior to 1946 it was called Yosemite Valley.

Why was it, one ponders, that this cluster of features in North Katoomba took on names associated with American Indians? What was it that influenced the adoption of these names? Was it the influence of someone with a love of that culture or perhaps an admirer of the bravery and

determination displayed by those tribes? Was it the influence of someone with a love of Longfellow’s writing and the characters of *Song of Hiawatha*?

It transpires that a large part of North Katoomba, from the late 1800s, was owned by the “Assets Realisation and General Finance Company Ltd”, an American company; the Yosemite Park Estate was subdivided in 1910. Another whimsical idealistic notion shattered.

On this rather idyllic summery late autumn morning eight walkers gathered in the park at the end of Minni-ha-ha Road. (Note different spelling - at least four spellings have been used on maps.) We welcomed Carol Conway, a friend of Anne Rodrigues and welcomed back Judy Tribe who has not walked with us for some time.

So settle back in your chair and join our little group now as we set off to view this Blue Mountains waterfall and perhaps be touched by the spirit of two legendary American Indians.

The track leads us to a rock platform crossing of Yosemite Creek where the water is running quite shallow at this time; a stark contrast to May 2007 when the depth and speed of the flow at this point forced us to abandon that first attempt by the group to do this walk. Just upstream of this crossing, viewed through a shaded tunnel of overhanging foliage, is a small cascade, its white ribbons of falling water illuminated by the bright sun; an exquisite light at the end of the tunnel.

A short section of fire trail leads us to a track which takes us through open heath, an area that can be quite swampy at times but which is mostly dry today. As the track begins to descend a diversion to the left takes us to a lookout area which offers views down into the deep gorge through which Katoomba Creek flows after picking up the waters of Yosemite Creek. Also visible from this point is the deep green pool at the base of Minnehaha Falls where a lone fisherman is trying his luck; the falls themselves remain hidden from view. The surrounding cliffs are spectacular; glowing brilliantly in the morning sun on the western side, brooding darkly in the shadows on the eastern side. Near the point of one of the sunlit cliffs stands a lone eucalypt, tall straight bare trunk carrying a dome of foliage; a magnificent sight silhouetted against the azure sky. No better place than this to pause and partake of morning tea.

Now the descent begins in earnest as we follow the steep steps cut into the cliff face. These stairs initially lead us away from the point where the creek plunges over the cliff; still we can hear the falls but not yet see them. Soon however a backward glance reveals, through the trees, a ribbon of water leaping from the rim of this little valley to strike a ledge about halfway down then drop into the pool at its base. As we progress the view back to the falls continually opens up, revealing more detail of this commanding cataract. The

rate at which I am taking photographs puts me in mind of the classic 100 Views of Mount Fuji; small changes in aspect presenting quite different perspectives of the same subject. (I managed to restrict myself to a tad less than 100 Views of Minnehaha Falls.)

As the track swings back toward the falls it tucks in below cliff overhangs. The rock faces here are decorated with ironstone inclusions; dark veins of ironstone banding form intricate patterns across the faces of golden sandstone. Soon we are beside the pool at the base of the falls.

The pool is obviously quite deep and takes on a beautiful green hue, mainly because of its depth but it also reflects the greens of the sumptuous hanging gardens on the enclosing cliffs. A band of shimmering silver stretches across this verdant surface, the reflected image of the lowest portion of the falls.

What a pleasant place to sit awhile and take in the grandeur and beauty of the surroundings, especially so on a day such as this. The falls, viewed from this low elevation, appear to drop directly out of the brilliant blue sky – a wonderful sight. I venture that Minnehaha and Hiawatha would have been well pleased to sit on one of the rock shelves beside the pool and take in the lilting sounds of this ‘laughing water’.

Eventually we manage to drag ourselves away from this idyllic place and climb the ninety vertical metres out of this charming little valley. Making our way back beside Yosemite Creek we pass several small cascades plashing over cupreous rock ledges. We divert down to creek level at one point to a sandy beach. Here a series of cascades feed a mirror-surfaced pool; surrounding ferns, trees and the clear sky are brilliantly reflected - a delightful spot.

All too soon we are back at the cars but the day is far from over. We bid farewell to the spirits of American Indians and after a short drive to Wentworth Falls we head for the world of the guardian spirits of nature - the nymphs of Water Nymphs Dell.

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A short walk along Railway Parade delivers us to the very short Dell Road; this takes us, where else, but to Nymphs Dell Reserve.

Initially this very old track leads us through open forest where we pass good examples of that most tactile of trees, the Smooth-barked Apple (*Angophora costata*). Their smooth, sometimes knobbly, sometimes dimpled bark crying out to be touched as you pass. A few flowers of the ubiquitous Mountain Devil (*Lambertia formosa*) add flashes of red to the scene.

As we zig zag down the slope there is a change from open to more enclosed forest. We enter the rainforest zone; there is an immediate and quite distinct drop in temperature. Though it is a bright sunny day there is also a dramatic lowering of the light level; the canopy is now quite dense.

The track curves in below a rock overhang and the gentle tinkling of falling water is heard. A ray of sunlight spearing through the canopy catches a beaded curtain of water droplets spilling down from a rock ledge overhead; a glistening highlight in this now quite dimly lit glen. Smooth lichen-mottled trunks of Coachwoods (*Ceratopetalum apetalum*) and scaly-barked trunks of Sassafras (*Doryphora sassafras*) soar skyward out of this deep steep-sided little valley seeking the energy of the sun.

As the path leads us closer to the head of this little valley it passes under a wider section of rock overhang where the ceiling is decorated with clusters of speleothems; microstalactites having a greenish brown coating, almost hidden in this dim light.

A more forceful sound of falling water is heard and as we round a corner we see the main waterfall in this dell dropping onto a dark rock face and cascading into a clear pool that is bordered on the downstream side by a wide sandy beach. The track leads us behind this waterfall and we view the reflective pool and the beach, surrounded by a host of Tree Ferns, through a diaphanous curtain - a truly exquisite scene. I reach the other side of this dell in time to look back and see some of the

group, dwarfed in this landscape, passing behind that filmy curtain of water.

We choose to settle down for our lunch break under a large overhang, with a view framed by towering columnar trunks of rainforest giants, directly onto the face of the waterfall. One could not imagine a more magnificent place to dine.

This little gem is not one of the most visited features in the Blue Mountains but its beauty has long been appreciated. The 1879 *Railway Guide of New South Wales* strongly recommended a visit if you ever alighted at Weatherboard Station; portion of the guide's description follows:

“Directly opposite to the Weatherboard Station (or rather Platform) there is a very pretty waterfall, in a curiously-secluded narrow glen; both waterfall and glen being well worth a visit. ---- The bottom and sides of this gully are shaded with tall trees of coachwood and sassafras, every-where interlaced with vines; and in the lower portions of the gully there is an abundance of ferns, mosses, and lycopods of all descriptions – some of them very choice and rare. Tree ferns – (the *Alsophila australis* and the *Dicksonia antarctica*) display their graceful fronds on all sides of you, in this cool umbrageous place; and when you stand upon the lower ledge of rock, at the base of the tortuous path, the pleasant rippling sound of falling water becomes distinctly audible. Proceeding further still, the noise of a waterfall is soon heard, and over the grey cliff opposite, across the gorge (draped in the glittering, dark foliage of trees and arborescent plants) a charming cascade comes down, whispering and murmuring into the glen. ---- At the termination of the path, and below the cliff, lies a pool of limpid water, wherein Egeria herself might not have disdained to bathe. This pool is supplied by the waterfall, descending at the back of it, from the precipice, in several broken rills, for more than 50 feet. The dark sides of the rock and the edges of the basin in this Water Nymph's Dell are fringed and decked with mosses and

creeping plants of a wonderful beauty and variety.”

That writer was obviously impressed! My goodness, his writing is almost as flowery as some of mine.

(Egeria or Ægeria was a Latin Goddess of Healing, Springs, Sacred Knowledge and Inspiration and was also concerned with Birth. As well as obviously being a multi-tasker she was one of the Camenae, a group of prophetic Water Goddesses or Nymphs.)

Reluctantly we leave this little piece of paradise and follow the stream fed by the waterfall as it courses toward Blue Mountain Creek. The stream provides a pleasant accompaniment of rippling water as we proceed but this water music abruptly becomes inaudible when we turn left into a side gully and begin the climb out. Initially the track takes us through ferny, mossy terrain but soon we are once again in open forest and emerge onto Glenview Road. It is then just a short stroll along Taylor Avenue and Railway Parade to return to the cars in Wigram Road.

It is decided we will drive to the picnic area beside Wentworth Falls Lake for our usual after walk cuppa. Originally constructed by the Railways in 1878 as a reservoir to supply water for the steam locomotives this now recreational waterway is a wonderful area in which to relax. In weather so sublime, what a pleasant way to end our walk, a walk where we experienced two beautiful waterfalls, each quite different yet each spectacular in their own way.

The only spirits of American Indians or water nymphs encountered were any which may have popped into the imaginations of each individual walker; I had a very pleasant time with mine.

John Cardy

OUR JUNE WALK

FRIDAY 20th June 2014

Open Forest and Spectacular Views

**Radiata Plateau and Megalong Head
between Katoomba and Medlow Bath**

This is a new venue for the group. It is a relatively easy walk with an optional steep sidetrack. There are magnificent views into the Megalong Valley and of the cliffs which rim the valley, jutting rock formations at Megalong Head and the remnants of the 1960s Pinus radiata plantation.

Meet at the gate at the end of Pulpit Hill Road at 9.30am or at Merry Garth for an 8.45am departure. If travelling from the east turn left at the Explorers Tree and proceed to the end of Pulpit Hill Road. If travelling from the west turn right into Explorers Road (at the Explorers Tree sign) and right into Pulpit Hill Road.

Bring morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea and plenty of water.

Contact Libby Raines on 4756 2121 (after 7pm) or Helen and John Cardy on 9871 3661 or on mobile 0418 646 487.

FUTURE WALKS (Tentative schedule)

Friday 18th July 2014 – Jellybean Pool and Red Hands Cave at Glenbrook.

Friday 15th August 2014 – Popes Glen and Evans Lookout at Blackheath

Friday 19th September 2014 – Evans Crown at Tarana

BUSH CARE

Bush Care is held on the second Friday of each month from 9am to Noon. Any help, even for a short time, would be appreciated both by the other workers and by the native vegetation.

13th June – Meet at Silva Plana

11th July – Meet at Silva Plana

8th August – Meet at Hay Lane – Ferny Cnr

Contact Libby Raines on 4756 2121 for details