

Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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MINNEHAHA FALLS & THE ROUND WALK

TOPIC

OUR OCTOBER WALK

MINNEHAHA FALLS at
NORTH KATOOMBA and
REIDS PLATEAU plus THE
ROUND WALK near
KATOOMBA FALLS

Friday 16th October 2020

Today we will embark on two short walks; one to the north, the other to the south of Katoomba Township.

The walks are touched by legendary lovers on two different continents, by a NSW Premier and Australian Prime Minister, an American photographer and an airship tragedy. So join us dear readers as we explore these two venues, each of a very different character but both having a special charm.

We last walked to Minnehaha Falls in 2014 and I ask for your forbearance if I re-use the introduction that I wrote back then. I sat staring at the screen trying to come up with a different approach but my mind remained as blank as that screen so, to save time, and strain on my grey matter, I shall dive in and copy that text; hope you don't mind revisiting it.

“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 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

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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.

Sixteen walkers gather at the Minnehaha Reserve at the end of Minni-ha-ha Road (there are four or five different spellings on various maps and signs); there is a light cloud cover present but showers do not appear to be threatening. We welcome Jane Milojevic, Anne Rodrigue's sister, who is joining us for the first time. We also welcome back David Howell; a long time member who has not been with us for some time and our grand-daughter Rahni is joining us once again. Freda Moxom kindly agrees to act as whip today. To the rhythmic call of a multitude of cicadas we set off toward the falls.

The track leads us across a natural sandstone sluice carrying the shallow waters of Yosemite Creek; care is taken to test for slipperiness of the waterworn smooth surface. The track then leads us above the creek line and the soothing sound of cascading water blends with the chorus of the cicadas' song. We pass a couple of sidetracks leading down to the creek; we will explore them on our return.

Presently, across the gully, there is a fine stand of young Blue Mountains Ash (*Eucalyptus oreades*), their straight smooth white trunks all of a similar size, indicating the whole stand is regrowth after a bushfire.

Closer at hand the trackside is decorated with the Dog Rose or River Rose (*Bauera rubioides*) their plethora of soft pendulous pink flowers bowing shyly. The Rush Lily or Vanilla Plant (*Sowerbaea juncea*) is also present offering an early display of clusters of lilac flowers with prominent yellow stamens held aloft atop tall thin stems. One of the Beard-heaths (*Leucopogon setiger*) is

prominent along the track sporting its small white bell-shaped flowers hanging, in the main, on one side of the stems, the delicate flowers contrasting with the short sharp-pointed foliage. Small-leaved Boronia (*Boronia microphylla*) also adorns the trackside, their abundant flowers in various stages of development; from closed buds to fully open four-pointed pink stars. Along this section of track I note but one lone Purple Flag (*Patersonia sp*) holding aloft a single conspicuous three-petalled purple flower competing with this line up of plants of the heath.

We then reach a vantage point where a rather special view of the full drop of Minnehaha Falls is to be had. The waters of Yosemite Creek emerge from behind some creek side shrubbery and drop a short distance to a rock ledge. They then leap off the edge of this ledge and drop freely as a silver ribbon to a lower cliff edge. Here they cascade over the rock face until a final free drop to form a white circle of disturbed water on the surface of the deep green pool at the base of the falls; a truly remarkable sight.

The track now descends via steps hewn into the cliff face and as it twists and turns there are glimpses back to sections of the falls. We come across an area where a rock fall, since our last visit, has obliterated part of the original steps. Near the base of the steps the track swings back toward the falls and cuts in under the cliff face. Here ironstone bands form intricate patterns on the smooth ochre sandstone walls. And suddenly we are beside the pool at the base of the falls.

Here each walker chooses a spot around the deep green pool to take in the beauty of this idyllic spot and pause for morning tea. Slices of Libby's Bushwalker Cake, again supplied by Michael Ihm's wife Beth are distributed; many thanks Beth for the delicious contribution.

Now we begin the ninety vertical metres climb out. Back on more level terrain we take a couple of diversions to small cascades on the creek, one of which consists of five drops into

a shallow pool. Here there are examples of the *Grevillia acanthifolia ssp acanthifolia*, its pink to red flowers are carried above horizontal stems giving them a brush-like appearance; the unopened pinkish grey buds are also very attractive.

Soon we are back at the cars to complete part one of the walk. We now make our way across to Katoomba Park near the Katoomba Falls Kiosk to continue with part two.

By now the sky has cleared just in time for the expansive views soon to be on offer. We make our way past the old wishing well and down to the four-way junction where we continue straight ahead and climb the few steps to Reids Plateau. The word *plateau* usually refers to 'a tabular surface of high elevation, often of considerable extent.' This area is tabular and of high elevation but it is certainly not of considerable extent. Perhaps this is why it has been known previously as Reids Platform and Reids Point. Nonetheless it was named after the Free Trade Party's George Reid, Premier of NSW from 1894 to 1899 and Prime Minister of Australia in 1904 / 1905.

Here on Reids Plateau we decide to pause for lunch. We enjoy magnificent views stretching from the Three Sisters along Kedumba Walls below Kings Tableland, across the vast expanse of the Jamison Valley to Mount Solitary, the Ruined Castle, Narrow Neck Plateau and beyond, Castle Head, Malaita Point and back to Orphan Rock. A superb vista enhanced by the cotton wool clouds scudding across an azure blue sky.

A little aside: David Howell asked Rahni what she thought the lone rock formation nearby might be called. Think of someone all by themselves, someone with no parents, he prompted. 'Depressed' was Rahni's logical reply. I will never be able to view Orphan Rock again without thinking of it as Depressed Rock.

Orphan Rock by the way has been closed to walkers since about 1958 due to unstable rocks, but that did not stop the two people we saw near its summit as we were having lunch.

Following lunch we check out the various lookout points on Reids Plateau to Katoomba Falls and Witches Leap before we head off down the zig zagging Falls track which leads into cool rainforest terrain, a contrast to part one of our walk. This track leads us to the bottom of Witches Leap.

Here we pause to take in the view of the 'leap' and pareidolia once again sets in with Rahni. She points out the image of a witch in the rock face over which Witches Leap leaps. Even I could see this one, when it was pointed out. There were a pair of deeply hooded eyebrows with sunken dark eyes, a quite prominent nose, a scowling mouth and jutting chin; our pareidolia expert Simon was very impressed.

We continue on and cross the waters below Witches Leap and soon arrive at some cast iron pipes running beside the track. The date of manufacture, 1909, was cast into each length of pipe along with the manufacturer's name, G & C Hoskins, indicating they were made in Lithgow.

Soon we arrive at a tee intersection where the left hand track heads down toward Furber Steps and Federal Pass; we continue straight ahead on the Round Walk.

We begin the climb back up out of the valley and take the short detour on the left. We climb the foot-worn steps cut into the sandstone to reach a feature which gives us the connection to our second pair of legendary lovers, Juliets Balcony. This long narrow eyrie was named from the tragic characters in Shakespeare's play, Romeo and Juliet. (One could be excused for wondering why, but that applies to many feature and place names bestowed in the Blue Mountains during the late 1800s and early 1900s, including the next lookout we will visit; cultural cringe perhaps.) We take in the spectacular view of virtually the full drop of Katoomba Falls, which is on offer from here, and continue our climb.

We reach the short sidetrack on the right which leads us to Vanimans Lookout where another impressive view of Katoomba Falls and Jamison Valley is to be had.

Vaniman was an American opera singer, photographer and adventurer who was also talented in aeronautics and engineering. He developed a reputation for taking spectacular panoramic photographs. The Oceanic Steamship Company noted his talents and employed him to take photos in Australasia in order to promote tourism to the area. Thus, he and his wife Ida toured New Zealand and Australia from 1902 to 1904; in Australia he used a balloon to take panoramas of Sydney, other capital cities and rural areas.

Back in America he and an associate were funded by the Goodyear Tyre and Rubber Company of Akron, Ohio to construct an airship which he called Akron. After a successful trial flight in late 1911 Vaniman and four crew members took off on 2 July 1912 and the Akron immediately crashed in a ball of flames killing all on board; thus ending the very adventurous forty five year life of Chester Melvin Vaniman.

We now take the short climb up to the Prince Henry Cliff Walk (cultural cringe again; the Prince visited Katoomba Railway Station for a full 20 minutes in 1934) and take the short walk back to the cars at Katoomba Park.

So ends another very nice day in these mountains. Two walks in very different terrains, both full of impressive views and interesting features in very pleasant weather. Even the weather gods are looking after us, for as we drive up Katoomba Street the heavens open up and it buckets down.

John Cardy

OUR NOVEMBER WALK

FRIDAY 20th NOVEMBER 2020

Open Forest, Caves, Creeks and Rainforest

Birdwood Gully and the Magdala Track at Springwood

Another double header. Birdwood Gully is a first for this group. Each of these walks is relatively short and easy.

Meet in Perry Avenue just off Bednal Road in Springwood at 10.00am. Turn off the Great Western Highway at the lights at the western

end of the Springwood bypass into Moorecourt Avenue, then left at the tee intersection into Boomerang Road which swings to the right and becomes Bednal Road then right into Perry Avenue. Those wishing to car share from Mt Wilson meet at St George's Church for an 8.30am departure

For those wishing to come on the second walk of the day we will take a short drive across to Picnic Point Reserve south of the highway. Cross the highway back at the lights, go under the railway and immediately turn right into Macquarie Rd, left into Homedale Street and left into Valley Road, keep to the **right** of the centre island as indicated and you are at the Reserve.

Bring morning tea, lunch and plenty of water.

Contact Helen and John Cardy on 9871 3661 or on mobile 0400 444 966.

FUTURE WALKS

FRIDAY 4th DECEMBER – NB: First Friday in December, only 2 weeks after our November walk. Tessellated Pavements at Mt Irvine followed by our Christmas / belated 30th Anniversary get together at the Mt Wilson Village Hall.

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.

Friday 13th November – Queens Avenue, opposite Windy Ridge

Friday 11th December – Queens Avenue, opposite Windy Ridge

Mt Wilson contact Alice Simpson 0414 425 511 or 4756 2110

Council contact Tracy Abbas 0428 777 141