

The Waffle Rock: A big attraction to the thousands of visitors at Jennings Randolph Lake each year.



*Written by Norm Dennis, Ranger, Jennings Randolph Lake,
With permission from Ms. Betty Webster Bishop*

Once upon a time, about 300 million years ago, a sparkling little stream slowly made its way downhill depositing some sand on its banks. Along the way, a tyrannosaurus rex bent down to get a cool drink. The sand on the banks slowly built up while the triceratops walked back and forth across the little stream searching for food or to get a drink of water. Eventually, (about another 50 million years), the sand started turning to rock under its own weight and the combined weight of all of the huge animals that started using the smooth banks as game trails.

The little stream was located on a continent called Pangaea and the period of time was known as the Permian Period. Pangaea was the only land mass during this time but it was beginning to feel the strain of moving plates deep underground. Above ground the surface was changing as well. The huge continent started to breakup and pull itself apart. The sandy rock formed from our little stream, (now called sandstone), was also feeling the strain and was starting to get pushed up into the air from the underground tectonic plate shifts. The Appalachian Mountains were being formed and our sandstone was part of it. This time period was known as the Appalachian Orogeny and was about 200 million years ago.

Meanwhile back on the surface, the dinosaurs had all but disappeared being slowly replaced by mammals, the surface had also become drier and the soil turned reddish

colored because of drying trapped ocean water which formed a mineral called Halite, (salt), which had a reddish color because of iron oxide mixed in with it from the evaporating seawater and surface iron.

As our little bit of sandstone kept getting pushed higher and higher, from colliding tectonic plates, it began to fold on itself and then folded on itself once again creating cracks in the sandstone. Over time, about another 100 million years, the cracks began to fill with iron oxide, (Hematite), leached from the surrounding rock by the percolating water. This iron oxide mixed with the sand gains in the cracks and formed a super cement holding the surrounding sandstone pieces together. This iron oxide mixture was much more resistant to weathering than the surrounding sandstone pieces. As the Alleghany mountains began to weather and erode our sandstone rock was exposed to the outside world. The sand without the iron oxide slowly washed away, while the sand mixed with the iron oxide did not, leaving a waffle appearance.

After a long time period the mountain thus formed began to age and became weathered and rounded. Hardwood trees starting growing on the mountain side and another little stream formed at the base of it from the rainwater runoff and snow melt. As the mountain continually became smaller more and more of the sandstone rock began to be exposed. The rock, perpendicular to the mountain was sticking straight out from the mountain side forming a ledge. Eventually, a piece of the ledge broke off and slide down the mountain until it was stopped by trees and boulders.

Much later, people starting moving into the area cutting the hardwood trees and mining the rich underground coal. One particular family, the Webster family, moved into a "shanty" on the side of the mountain above a logging town called Shaw, West Virginia. The family consisted of husband and wife and their three children, two girls and a boy.

At this point, Ms. Betty Webster Bishop has given the writer permission to quote excerpts from her very interesting account of life around Shaw back in the 1930s.

"Dad was a 'logger' and he had to go where the timber could be found. Our permanent home was in Hambleton, WV at this time. We often followed him from one timber area to another, and stayed with him during summer months. This particular assignment appeared to be on a larger scale, so we 'moved' to the back woods, amid virgin timber, near Shaw, WV, located in Mineral County, WV."

"Our 'shanty' was a straight row of rooms, fifty feet long, made of upright boards. The construction left cracks at various intervals. Our first winter there, the snow would come through the cracks and pile up on the bedroom floor. One winter like that was enough. The outside was eventually covered with tar paper, one of those 'tar paper shacks' that folks laugh about today. (The floor was also covered in tar paper where the wind would blow through)."

"The only way to town, which was a couple of miles, and boasted a couple of tiny stores and even tinier post office, with about a hundred residents was by walking the rails. We

became very adept at this, as Rattle Snakes and Copper Heads would lie between the ties and we chose not to disturb them.”

“Our Sundays were for worship and rest. The one allowed activity was a walk in the woods. It was on one of these walks that my Mother discovered ‘her’ rock, as we often referred to it. She loved God and all aspects of nature, with a special fondness for rocks, large and small. This big rock, the subject of this story, was her ‘pot of gold’ at the end of the rainbow. She never tired of taking visitors to see it, whether local or out of town. She called it ‘The Indian Rock’, but we later referred to it as ‘Mom’s Rock.’ It was located a short distance up the hill. All who came were granted the privilege of visiting Mom’s ‘Indian Rock’. We felt it belonged to us and we reveled in the sharing of it. Many spoke of it and the awe it inspired, even after many years, and the many miles that separated us.”

“As children, this became the center of, and inspiration for, our mental meanderings. At times, we were certain that ancient Indians had gathered here for ‘Pow Wows,’ and the markings were secret messages left for other Braves to follow. We could almost see their ghosts rising from around the rock to engage in tribal dances. They would speak to us in a language we could understand. Other times, our scenarios took a different direction.”

“At that time, we weren’t too versed in Egyptian history, but had read enough to imagine that these were hieroglyphics, left here by the ancient Egyptians for us to decipher. Maybe this stone was a misplaced part of a pyramid. Other times, other people, other worlds, all came together to enhance the lives of two small children, in the West Virginia hills. It was a world of make believe for us, but also caused much speculation among the adults.”

“We eventually moved from our little haven to a more, so called, civilized area, and our rock from childhood was pretty much left behind. As we adjusted to our new environment, Tidioute, PA, made new friends and grew up it was nearly forgotten. There would be those times, though, that something would remind us, then we’d recall those wonderful mental excursions conjured up by that rock.”

“Many years later, September, 1984, to be exact, I read an article in the Saturday Evening Post, pertaining to some strange rock formation that was found. According to the author, there was much speculation among those researching this strange rock formation, but no definite conclusions. The rock of my childhood was brought to mind and prompted my search for old pictures of it. Upon locating a fairly clear one I wrote to the magazine, describing the rock, and enclosing a picture. Having heard nothing regarding my letter, I assumed it didn’t hold enough interest to take note. The issue was once again forgotten.”

“My brother meanwhile, decided to take a trip back to WV to visit old friends that were being forced to move by a dam the government was planning to build. I was made aware of this possibility several years prior to its becoming a reality. I was saddened to realize that the mystery of ‘our rock’ would be forever buried beneath the massive lake, but not forgotten by the many who had viewed it.”

"When I received my December 1984 issue of the Saturday Evening post, I was surprised and pleased to see my letter published, along with the picture I had sent. I proceeded to show everyone the article which, once again evoked so many wonderful memories, while explaining and retelling my story."

"My brother returned from his trip soon after this and his first words to me were, 'Guess where the Indian Rock is.' He informed me that it had been rescued and placed as a monument at the entrance of the beautiful Bloomington Lake Park---the lake which now covered our shanty and so many memories."

"I was overwhelmed with this news, but had mixed emotions. I was very happy that someone else recognized that the rock was something special and that it wasn't buried, as I had feared, after all; yet it brought a feeling of loss. It had been so personal and almost like a family possession. Now we had no connection with it, making me a wee bit jealous of it becoming famous."

"In April, 1985, I picked up the Saturday Evening post, and scanned the 'letters to the editor' page. There was a different picture of my rock---then my name jumped out at me as I read the article accompanying it. That really got my attention. It was a letter from Col. Martin W. Walsh, Jr., Corps of Engineers Commander, in Baltimore, MD. His letter was in response to my earlier published one. The following is a quote from his letter concerning said rock. 'Speculations range from the impressions of the skin pattern of a giant reptile, to evidence of space travelers on earth. Upon examination by geologists from the U.S. Corps of Engineers, and other agencies, it was concluded that the rock was a natural geologic formation.'"

"It is my hope to one day, make this trip, and see again, this old friend of mine who has evidently withstood all elements for the past 250 million years. While it holds such a strong fascination for me, I am sure those who visit and view this piece of the past, will come away with a feeling of awe, and will be affected some way with its mystery and majesty. For those who are interested in vacationing in such a beautiful area of the country, where the scenery and serenity, will take you back to 'how life used to be', this would be worth the visit, but to those who are interested in geology, or just plain love rocks, you are in for a real treat."

The "Waffle Rock" is on display at the West Virginia Overlook at Jennings Randolph Lake, Mineral County, West Virginia. The overlook area is open to the public seven days a week from 8:00 A.M to 8:00 P.M. A small piece of the rock is also on display at the Smithsonian Institute of Natural History, Washington, D.C.