

Pewit's Nest and Falls, and Hoot Owl Hollow

Tales of Earlier Days

By Bob Dewel

If the word Pewit is unfamiliar, it is because the idyllic area which properly carries that name is better known as Pewee's Nest. Both it and Skillet Creek Falls are on Skillet Creek, as is Hoot Owl Hollow. All are only a short hike or drive west from the city limits of Baraboo on County W.

Of the three, the Nest and the Hollow are on public property. Not so for Skillet Creek Falls, rarely seen by the public in the last two or three decades but familiar to the early settlers. All three will be near the roadway of the proposed new Highway 12 southwest of Baraboo, but only accessible from that roadway by exiting County W. Hopefully the Creek and its geological features will not be damaged by road construction. They escaped the glaciers 10,000 years ago!

Pewit's or Peewee's Nest

Pewee's Nest is not only the best known of the three locations, it was well known by the early settlers. Sauk County's venerable historian, William Canfield, tells us almost all we need to know in his historic Sketches in 1870. First, he identifies a drifter named Pewit as the itinerant resident of the Nest as early as 1843, an "ingenious eccentric mechanic".

Pewit had taken advantage of a recess in the rock, a cave formed in previous

ages by the swirling waters of the once mighty creek. Here, some ten feet above the pool of water and within the sandstone cliffs, Pewit developed a machine shop of that day, including a workshop capable of repairing anything from watches to guns to kitchen utensils. A Mormon, Pewit occasionally preached in the area.

Power for major work on lathes was supplied by a water wheel fed at the top by water from the creek as it plunged past the swirled-out area down ten feet to the pool below. The access from the top was through a cut out hole resembling a trap door, and one climbed down the rock wall. From the pool below access was via a boat with a ladder.

The recessed dugout could not be readily seen from either below or above the creek as it passed through the small canyon. Canfield says Pewit could grind coffee, fiddle and tell a good story. Others followed Pewit, attracted by the free power supplied by the water power of the water wheel.

Now owned by the State park system the area has not been developed. It lies a hundred feet or so from highway W. Access is from County W, but largely unmarked. Someone familiar to the area is suggested as a guide, and access is not advised until after spring floods and the ground has stabilized.

Skillet Creek Falls.

A few hundred feet to the east of Peewee's nest, but not as far as the present highway 12, is a multi-layered waterfall of perhaps ten feet total. This has always been private property, but for a time in the 1980's it was available, with permission, for private picnics. There was a stone fireplace and picnic area.

These two small but remarkable geologic natural areas are part of Skillet



Pewitt's
(Peewee's)
Nest



Geographic features & Photographs around Hoot Owl Hollow, in Wisconsin, United States

Creek. It originates in the Baraboo bluffs not far north of the Ski Hi orchards, and gains strength across parts of the North Slope of the South Baraboo Range. Many rivulets and creeks contribute to its gathering flow as it passes northwest through the Falls, the Nest, and Hoot Owl Hollow via a tortuous route to the Baraboo river west of town. It is subject to flooding, as many of the residents of the area are aware.

Hoot Owl Hollow is simply a deep draw negotiated on Sunshine Road, formerly Hoot Owl Road if memory serves. Sandstone outcroppings and Sunshine Road's sudden conversion from a flat country road to that of a small canyon make it a short but interesting drive. Sunshine Road begins on County W a mile straight west of the new VA Clinic building on W. A visit is not advised until the wet spring roadway stabilizes.

Skillet Creek Falls

