

The Waterfalls at Ricketts Glen – Bucket List Worthy

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Figure 1: Cayuga Falls

In all my years of hiking in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, I have yet to find a place that packs as much natural beauty into an area as does the [Glens Natural Area](#) in [Ricketts Glen State Park](#). An approximately four-mile route, sometimes known as the Falls Trail Loop, meanders through this National Natural Landmark, leading to 21 named waterfalls. In mid-October, many of these falls are framed by vibrant autumn colors, creating a photographer's paradise. Named the "Best Hike in Pennsylvania" in 2009 by an outdoor magazine's Reader's Choice Award, this is a location you'll definitely want to add to your bucket list.

The 13,050-acre park is named after Civil War veteran and Gettysburg hero Colonel Robert Bruce Ricketts of Wilkes-Barre. He owned much of the land in the area, including the Glens Natural Area, which he purchased in 1868 for harvesting timber. In 1899, he hired six men who, over a four-year period, meticulously laid stones to create the trails and stairs that are still used by park visitors of all skill levels to access the waterfalls from spring to fall.

On a beautiful fall day, I commenced my hike from the [Lake Rose Trailhead parking lot](#), heading southeast. After about a tenth of a mile, the trail split, with the Highland Trail on the left and the Falls Trail on the right. I chose the latter, which took me counterclockwise, starting on the western part of the Falls Trail, known as the Canoga Glen side. Since the route is a circuit, it doesn't matter which way you go...but that can



be a problem during a pandemic. This hike is extremely popular and some parts of the trail are narrow, so with folks heading opposite directions, social distancing is impossible. I suggest doing this hike on a non-holiday weekday, making sure to bring a mask.

Ricketts named most of the waterfalls after Native American tribes or for his friends and family. The first two that I saw were called Mohawk Falls and Oneida Falls, both named after Iroquoian-speaking people.

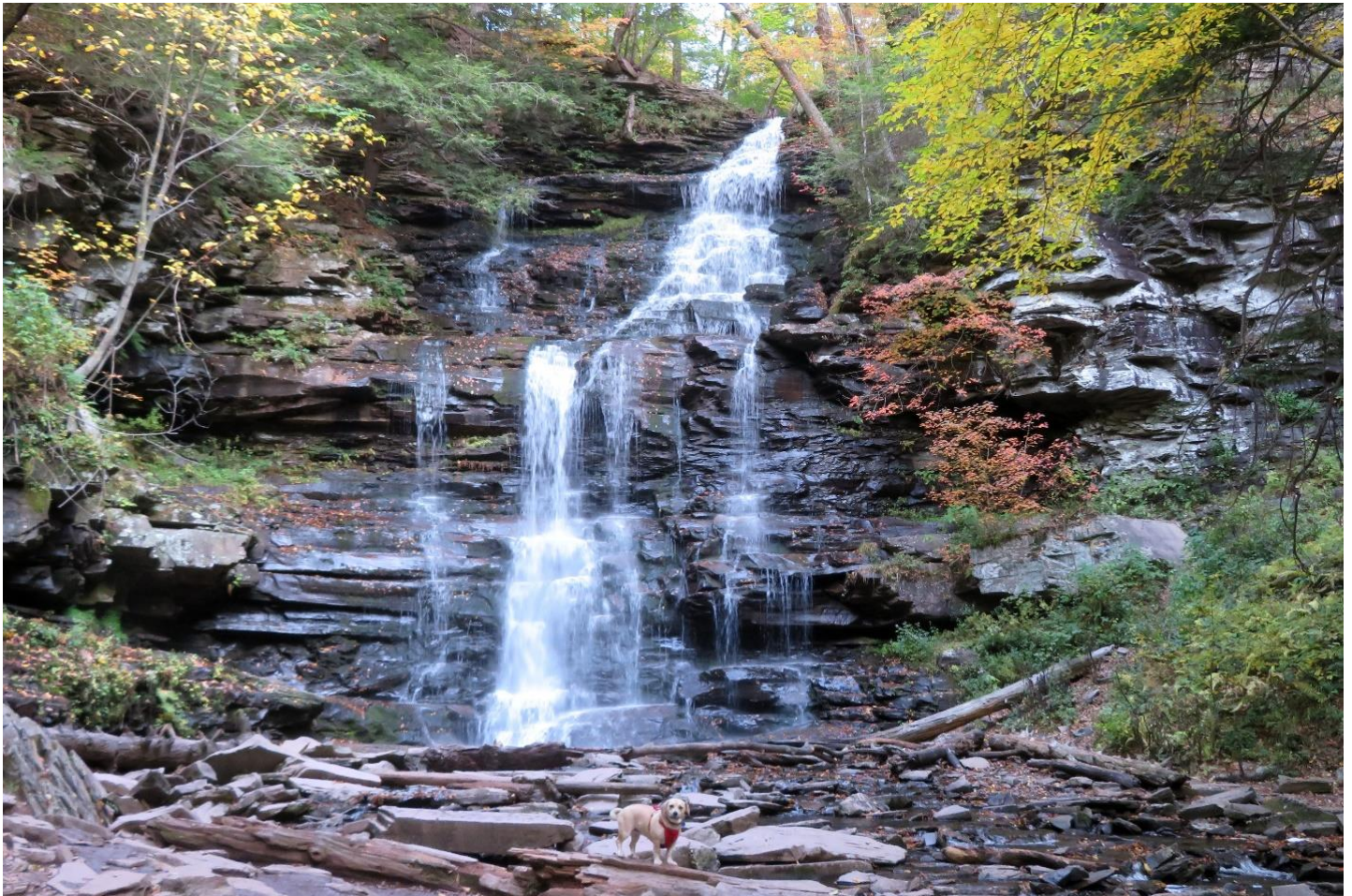


*Figure 2: Oneida Falls*



Cayuga Falls (shown at the top), at 11 feet, is the smallest of the named waterfalls, but in my opinion, perhaps the most scenic. That got me thinking...is there a minimum height for a waterfall? Yes, water must drop at least five feet to be considered a true waterfall.

Ganoga Falls, at 94 feet, is the highest waterfall in the park and a naming exception. It is neither tribe, friend, nor family, but rather a Seneca word that Ricketts thought meant "water on the mountain." However, it turns out that Ganoga is actually a Cayuga word that means "place of floating oil."



*Figure 3: Daphne at Ganoga Falls*

Downstream of Ganoga lies Seneca, Delaware, and Mohican, one right after the other in short succession, followed by Conestoga, Tuscarora, and Erie, all named in honor of Native American tribes.





*Figure 4: Conestoga Falls*





*Figure 5: Tuscarora Falls*

While the waterfalls are definitely the main attraction, there are other reasons to visit, especially for birdwatchers. The Pennsylvania Audubon Society has designated the entire park a Pennsylvania Important Bird Area. This means it is a globally important habitat for the conservation of bird populations. Northern goshawks, northern harriers, and American bitterns have been reported to nest in or near the park.

About a third of the way into my hike, I came to a place called Waters Meet, which as the name implies, is the confluence of Kitchen Creek and the unnamed creek that feeds the waterfalls I had just seen. Downstream, it continues as Kitchen Creek, feeding other falls which I explored, including Harrison Wright Falls, an example of a “bridal veil” waterfall, a type that drops vertically over hard sandstone ledges.





*Figure 6: Harrison Wright Falls*

Retracing my steps, I crossed the bridge at Waters Meet and then walked upstream (north) along Kitchen Creek, still on the Falls Trail but now on the Glen Leigh side. I saw B. Reynolds Falls and then Ozone Falls, another naming exception, named after the Ozone hiking club of Wilkes-Barre.





*Figure 7: B Reynolds Falls*

One of the last waterfalls I encountered, F.L. Ricketts Falls, is an example of a “wedding cake” waterfall, formed when water falls over thick sandstone, descending in a series of steps.





*Figure 8: F.L. Ricketts Falls*

To complete the circuit, I walked west on the Highland Trail, navigating through the Midway Crevasse, a narrow passageway that lies between large blocks of Pocono sandstone conglomerates deposited by glacial movements. Had I headed east on the Highland Trail, I could have explored Leigh Lake or several other, less traveled trails that meander through the park, where one could more easily maintain social distancing.





*Figure 9: Beaver dam at Leigh Lake*

One more named waterfall resides further south in the park. I saw it on a separate hike on the [Evergreen Trail](#), an easy one-mile loop that presents a not-so-easy view of the 36-foot-tall Adams Falls - challenging due to the narrow rock opening through which it is seen. This trail passes through one of the few stands of [old-growth forest](#) remaining in the state, where one tree is believed to be over 500 years old!





*Figure 10: Adams Falls*

Cool autumn nights at Ricketts Glen contribute to its stunning fall colors, which may be best viewed from open areas like Lake Jean, located near the main park entrance. This trout-stocked lake, named after Rickett's eldest daughter, is popular in the summertime with beachgoers and open to ice fishing in the wintertime.





*Figure 11: Fall colors at Lake Jean*

Nature packs a punch at Ricketts Glen State Park, leaving lasting memories of breathtaking beauty around every turn. The waterfalls at the Glens Natural Area on the Falls Trail Loop are particularly magnificent, bucket list worthy, and well deserving of earning the title “Best Hike in Pennsylvania.”

For more information, see

- [Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources – Ricketts Glen State Park](#)
- [Wikipedia – Ricketts Glen State Park](#)
- [Wikipedia – Waterfalls in Ricketts Glen State Park](#)
- [Uncovering PA - Pennsylvania Waterfalls: The Waterfalls of Glen Leigh in Ricketts Glen State Park](#)
- [Great Lakes Waterfalls & Beyond – Ricketts Glen State Park](#)
- [Falzguy – Glossary of Waterfall Terms](#)
- [Old-Growth Forest Network - Glens Natural Area - Ricketts Glen State Park](#)