Face to Face on the Niagara Escarpment

**Photos and story by
Daniel K. Wilson**

Can you see faces in these images? Daniel Wilson has been recording faces he sees in nature for a number of years. To find them takes a keen eye and a fair amount of imagination. Unleash your inner child and take flight!

Remember looking up at the sky when you were young and seeing familiar shapes and objects floating amongst the clouds? If you answered yes, then you're probably a bit like me. I've been spotting "things that look like other things" for a long time, including faces. But I don't just see them in the sky. I see faces everywhere.

When I was a little kid I saw faces and animals hiding in the clouds, just like the other kids. But being a creative and somewhat obsessive little guy, my fascination didn't stop there. I'd also see faces in floor tiles, trees, my cereal bowl – you name it.

And I still do. I can spend hours at Little Cove near Tobermory scouring the beach in search of boulders that seem to be staring back up at me, or carefully inspecting every frozen puddle I come across in Short Hills Provincial Park hoping to find something interesting to photograph.
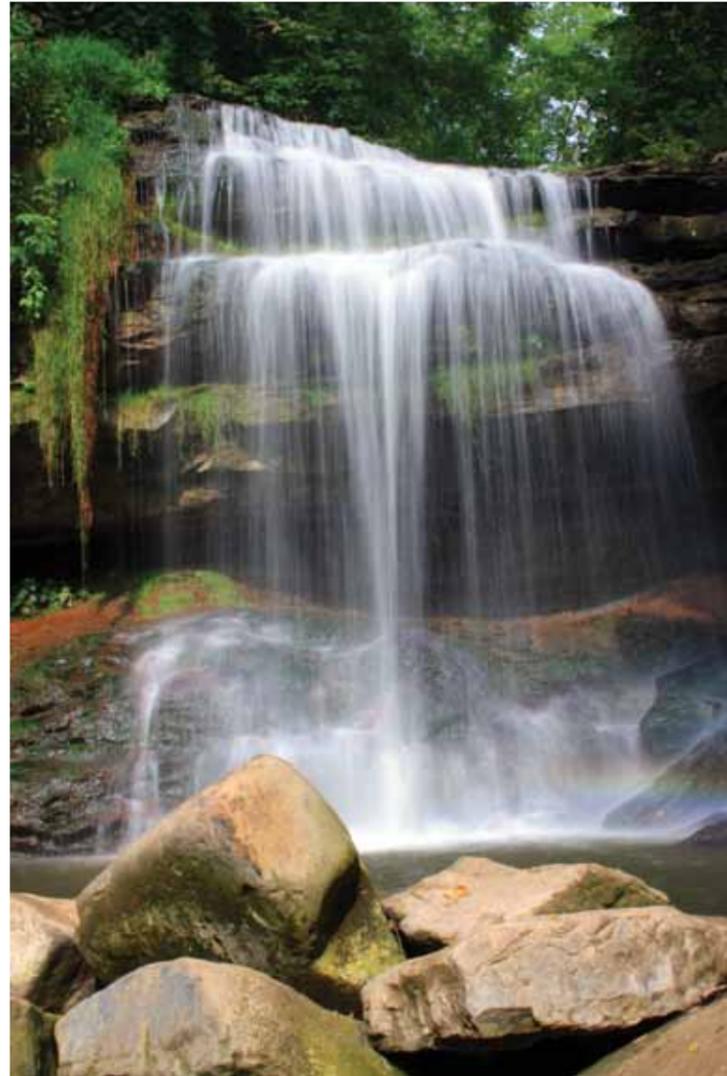
I always thought it was a little strange that I saw all these faces – especially faces that weren't really faces – so much, and kept it pretty much to myself. But it turns out that my "affliction" is quite common and actually has a name: pareidolia (pronounced *parr-i-DOH-lee-a*).

Pareidolia: a psychological phenomenon involving a vague and random stimulus being perceived as significant, a form of apophenia. Common examples include seeing images of animals or faces in clouds, the man in the moon or the Moon rabbit, and hearing hidden messages on records when played in reverse. (Wikipedia)

Pareidolia is a psychological term and it occurs when an individual encounters something significant or distinct – usually a sight or sound – in something that really isn't meant to be.

Thinking that you're hearing the phone ring while taking a shower is just one way that people experience pareidolia. Visually, it could be seeing a face in an electrical outlet, discovering Elvis on a cinnamon bun or spotting a dragon in a soufflé of clouds.

Interestingly, some psychologists use pareidolia to try and

▲ Face in the Falls, Waterdown. If you use your imagination, you can see two eyes near the top of Great Falls and the cave in the center of the picture is the gaping mouth. The water coming over the falls below the eyes looks like teeth, or fur, or both.

▲ Mr. Big Chin, Eugenia Falls near Flesherton. Although the retaining wall at this popular nature park is man-made, I doubt the face was intended by its creators.

▲ Polydectes. Named for the king who was turned to stone after gazing upon the severed head of the Gorgon Medusa. I found him in Meaford.

▲ Smiley Face, Niagara Falls. Ice that had formed on the iron barrier broke off and fell in the snow, along with a few flecks of paint. Fortunately for me, they fell in just the right position.

Entish, near Welbeck, Ontario. This strange looking creature reminded me of the tree herders in J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings. ▶

▲ Snow Demon, Niagara Falls. It's amazing how the elements - snow, wind and dust - can all come together to create such a recognizable image. This was shot at the base of the American Falls from the Canadian side.

understand our mental states. Both the Rorschach Inkblot Test and Holtzman Inkblot Technique encourage this phenomenon to examine personality characteristics and emotional functioning.
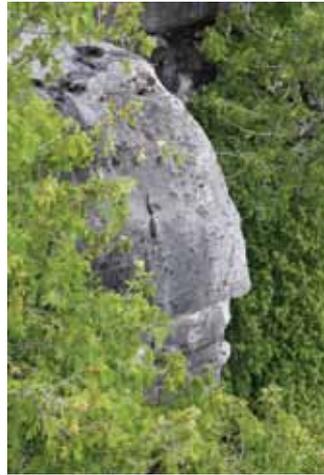
The late great Carl Sagan thought we were hardwired to identify the human face for survival, allowing us to use only minimal details to recognize the "enemy" in places with limited visibility. Others believe we have just learned to be very careful about potential adversaries over time, with the brain simply overreacting to something that looks like a possible threat in order to survive.

Whether it's an evolutionary trait or not, I've certainly had a lot of fun with it. And while I've photographed faces from just about everywhere I've travelled, I feel the Niagara Escarpment, with all its interesting limestone formations, diverse shorelines, cliff "faces" and old growth forests, is one of the better places to go "people" watching. **NEV**

Daniel K. Wilson is a nature and wildlife photographer whose pictures have appeared in a number of Canadian publications. Some of these photos appeared recently in The Standard *of St. Catharines. He currently resides in St. David's. Some of his more unique nature photography will be on display at the Niagara Falls Public Library during the month of June 2014. For more: danielkwilsonphotography.blogspot.ca.*

▲ **Samurai Rock, Dyer's Bay near Cabot Head Lighthouse, Bruce Peninsula. I was instantly reminded of the classical Japanese paintings of the samurai when I stumbled upon this hardened warrior.**
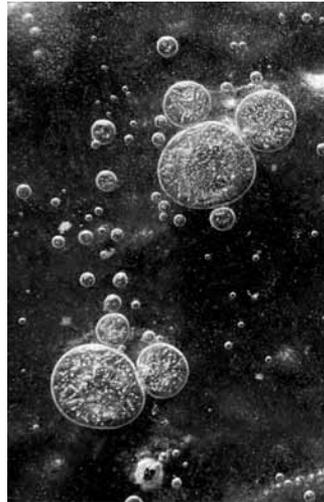

▲ **Nosey Joe, near Lion's Head. There's a slightly more famous cliff face at Lion's Head but I like this one better.**

▲ **Skull Rock, MacGregor Point Provincial Park. I seem to find a lot of creepy looking faces during my travels.**

▲ **Ghostcicle. Snow and ice formations have always fascinated me. I spotted this grim spectre haunting Great Falls in Waterdown.**

▲ **Mickey & Minnie, Eramosa Karst Conservation Area, Stoney Creek. Air bubbles trapped in the ice made me think of the famous mouse couple.**

▲ **Happy Beech, near Owen Sound. I think the smile says it all.**

▲ **Ghostcicle, Silver Creek Conservation Area. This "face" was probably caused by the tree growing next to, and finally absorbing, part of a barbed-wire fence. The rest of the fence has since been removed, but the peaceful smile remains.**

▲ **Serpent Rock, Burnt Point Loop Trail, Tobermory. This is one of my favourite places to hike when I'm at the tip of the Bruce. The rocks, as well as the wildlife (I've spotted a bear, rattlesnakes and gigantic wolf spiders here) are so diverse and interesting. Flowerpot Island can be seen in the background.**