

The Fairy, the Flora, the Leapers and the Lizard

Welcome to Brimham Rocks in the Spring! Of course, these rocks are very impressive aren't they. They can look different every time you visit, taking on different personalities through the year; altering against changing skies and when viewed from different angles. Over the years they have been given superb names such as Dancing Bear, Yoke of Oxen, Druid's Skull, Needle's Eye, Baboon's Head and Boar's Snout to name but a few.

All of these names have, of course, been invented; made up by us humans (after all, rocks don't have the ability to name themselves). Each name suggests a different personality, but who is to say which name and personality is right? Before we begin our story walk, we are all going to find a different position to stand around this rock; to look at it and decide what name we would give it. Once you have chosen an angle and a name for the rock, come back and we'll share our ideas. You may choose to look at it from a different height, climbing a bit of the rock if you feel confident, but do please take your grown-ups with you. I'd hate for any of them to get lost or scared. And do please come back to share your thoughts.

Return to share the names and ideas, discussing the possible characters and stories of this rock

That's brilliant. If you were to come at a different time of year, when the grass is less green and the rocks are less dry, when the skies are less bright and different flowers bloom, then you may have different thoughts. Such is the ever-changing nature of this site. In fact, these rocks weren't always separate rocks. They were part of one big mass of rock that stretched many metres above our heads and the same again beneath our feet. This rock was formed under a huge river – this is difficult for us to get our heads around, but then this was over three hundred million years ago. Since then, dinosaurs have come and gone....Abba have made several come backs.....and there has been a lot of erosion, wearing the rock away to reveal these brilliant natural sculptures, and Mother Nature's finest playground. So, these days, thankfully, where we are standing is not all rock. If it were, we would all be a little stuck – quite literally between a rock and a hard place. But here's the thing: despite its name, Brimham Rocks is no longer just *about* the rocks. There's a beautiful heather moorland over there, over there we have secret wooded valleys whilst in that direction we have ponds and bogs with a variety of grasses. Each of these bring different flora and fauna to the place and are every bit as important and impressive as these rocks. Just on a slightly smaller scale. Have you ever seen a Green Hairstreak or a Holly Blue? Well, you can here! (They are butterflies, by the way). The staff here are doing everything they can to encourage and conserve the diversity of wildlife at this "Site of Specific Scientific Importance". (That's a bit of a tongue twister – can you say 'Site of Specific Scientific Importance' really fast three times?) The plan is to help all the varied species thrive here long into the future. However, there is one creature here who very much belongs in the past. Come this way and we'll see if we can meet her.

New location – near York of Oxen

I'm sure you'll agree that Brimham is looking beautiful today. When Flora, the Roman Goddess of Spring, smiles upon the land there is a superstition that you should wash your face in the morning dew to ensure a beautiful complexion for the rest of the year. (You should give it a try, Sir!) Well, it is perhaps no surprise looking around that Brimham is awash with dew most mornings! However, not everything is blessed with beauty, on the face of it.

(Poem introducing Sally - to be repeated for each event)

When millstone grit washed from the mountains on high
And the weight of the stream pressed it down into rock
One little creature had nowhere to hide
Caught up in the rock, she was helplessly stuck

Through the magic of Brimham, her body preserved
Kept safe in a strange hibernation, of sorts
Till erosion freed her to the life she deserved
A carboniferous salamander, or Sally for short
(produce puppet)

After millions of years caught up in the stone
The world seemed a quite unfamiliar place
She had never set eyes on humans, let alone
The abundance of life in this alien space

She emerged from her fossil which still can be found
Imprinted in rock just a short hop from here
And she began to learn by looking around
And feeding off stories from throughout the year

For a mere salamander she has witnessed a lot
Meaning Sally has plenty of stories to share
Of the natural world and events on this spot
So lend us your ears and we'll start over....there!

Wishing rock – with puppet

One hot spring day, when the rocks were too hot to scamper across and the ponds had all but dried out, Sally sought shade in her favourite place, under the arching umbrella leaves of what she had learned was called bracken. There was no such thing in the days before her hibernation! It was useful stuff, but there did seem to be rather a lot of it around. This was her favourite spot because she enjoyed watching two young humans visiting the rocks around here: holding hands, kissing and canoodling. Just to be clear, she didn't actually like to watch them kissing – nobody likes it when there is too much kissing on show. Sometimes parents even kiss and I'm sure you will agree with me that nobody needs to see that! However, Sally Mander really enjoyed admiring just how much this young couple loved each other, and how frequently they returned to this same spot. She first saw them here several years earlier, linking their hands around the wishing rock over there. Legend has it that if you stretch your hands around that rock and make a wish then maybe, just maybe, it will come true. If you were to hold that rock and make a wish, what would you wish for?

For me to carry on the story? Very well then. On this morning, Sally just sat there in the shade, watching the young lovers and taking in all the different sights, sounds and smells that surrounded her. Take a moment to reflect on what different things can you see around you? What can you hear? What can you smell? Apart from the person next to you who forgot to have a shower this morning. Well, as Sally sat there, she became aware of a sound that she didn't like. The sound of crying. She nudged a frond of bracken aside and saw a fairy, sitting there in tears. Now, unless we have any volunteers, I will play the fairy – I've always wanted to be a fairy, to be honest.

Puts on tiara and fairy wings – made from natural materials?

"Excuse me?" said Sally

"Arghgh!!" said the fairy. Unfortunately, this was a fairly standard reaction to Sally Mander because, on the face of it, she wasn't quite as beautiful as the wonderful sights that people are used to seeing around here.

"What's the matter?" Sally asked. And she would be forgiven for wishing she hadn't!

"Well, it's like this. I've only gone and ruined Brimham Rocks forever" said the fairy, as she burst into a fresh flood of tears. (*cue over the top crying* – I didn't even go to drama school!). In truth, as an amphibious creature, Sally was grateful for the moisture. The fairy, Heather (named after her favourite variety of plants), explained how she had made a deal with the bracken. Her magic powers enabled her to speak with all the plants around Brimham. She valued the role that each of them played and the harmonious way in which they existed together. However, she had made a terrible deal with the bracken and, as she explained, it was all the fault of those two humans kissing and canoodling at the wishing rock over there.

New location – Rocking stones

lose puppet (to volunteer to move to next place she is needed) Or after rocking stones?

These two humans had names: they were called (*choose two adults*) what's your name? And what's yours? (*use their names and indicate them as playing the roles, but for now they are A&B*) A&B were

in love. They had been ever since they had set eyes on each other at a young age (I'm sure even they were young once). As soon as they were old enough to go out alone, they would escape to Brimham Rocks, a new visitor attraction that had recently opened up in the 18th century, to spend time together. Soon they knew every rock on this site, even the ones that could move. Yes, they discovered that, if you summon up all your strength, you can even make some of these rocks...rock! Of course, this takes great skill, not to mention unbelievable strength, so I don't suppose you'd manage. Oh, you can! Just be careful not to topple it. I'm quite into heavy rock myself but we're not wanting rock and roll today!

So, A&B would regularly escape here to Brimham. Why did they need to escape, you may ask? Well, A was the daughter of a respected squire who lived near York and had been brought up with all the airs and graces that made her destined to be married into status and wealth. In other words, she ate all her greens, spoke elegantly, never dropped her 't's and only occasionally picked her nose. B, on the other hand, was a local farm labourer who lived just a stone's throw from here. (And judging by the size of the stones, that can't have been very far). He had no manners whatsoever. He happily belched, farted and snorted his way through life and even occasionally scratched his bum in public. (You don't need to get too into character!). Despite this, A loved him and was determined to marry him, much to the disapproval of her wealthy Father. Sally Mander had often seen the young lovers excitedly meeting here in secret, but one day while she was sleeping, they came in an altogether different state.

New location – lovers leap

Lose puppet?

One morning the lovers came to Brimham with only one thing on their mind. B had asked A's Father for his daughter's hand in marriage and her father had said no. He had forbidden the two to ever see each other again. This was a fate worse than death to A&B. Much like two other young lovers you may have heard of, Romeo and Juliet, they were clearly prone to a little overreaction. They had decided that if they couldn't spend their lives together then they would rather not be alive at all. They fled to this place, with A's Father hot in pursuit, and planned to throw themselves off this rock, falling to their certain death. (It is worth noting that there are some pretty big drops around here so, much as you might love climbing on the rocks, do always be careful not to put yourself in danger!).

Now, I'd love to tell you that Sally Mander saw all of this and was able to talk them round to their senses before they jumped but, as I've mentioned, she was fast asleep. The young lovers did reach this rock, now known as Lover's Leap and, guess what, they leapt. Her Father couldn't reach them in time, and he watched in horror as his daughter disappeared over the edge of the rock. (To A&B) Please don't feel tempted to act this bit out, much as you may love each other. But what of Heather the fairy? Could she possibly do something to help save them?

New location – grassy glade below Lover's Leap

What magical powers do fairies have, do you think? They can fly? Cast spells? Communicate with animals and plants? All correct. They can also move incredibly fast, and so when Heather the fairy saw A&B leaping from the rocks, she still had plenty of time to react. Unfortunately, one power fairies don't possess is great strength. There is no way that a flying fairy could have caught two fully grown humans in mid-air and guided them safely to the bottom.

The quick-thinking fairy went to grab a huge clump of bracken with the plan of attaching it to the lover's clothes as they fell, providing a kind of natural parachute to slow their fall. (Fairies really can move fast – that's why you can never see them!). The bracken itself protested at being cut for this purpose and, in her haste, Heather the fairy agreed that, in return, she would grant the bracken a wish. Satisfied with this, the bracken allowed itself to be pulled. As A&B continued to fall, Heather sped up to them, attached the bracken and ensured that their slower descent was broken by yet more bracken for a soft landing.

The lovers were saved from their terrible fate and landed unhurt. A's Father was so astonished by this that he began to wonder whether there may be more to B than he had originally thought. He decided to set the young lad an impossible task; saying that he would offer his daughter's hand in marriage if B was able to prove that he was worthy by moving one of these rocks! Well, as we already know, this is in fact possible. B led A's Father to the rocking stones, summoned up all his strength and rocked the mighty stones. A's Father had no choice but to give the union his blessing. All ended happily for the humans, and the lovers returned to Brimham for many years after to show their gratitude for the magic that had saved them.

A happy ending? Well, not entirely.

New location – bottom of Lover's Leap.

Puppet reappears

And so, we come back to Heather the fairy and Sally the Mander. Why was Heather so upset that day? Well, you may recall that, in her rush to save the lovers from this fall, Heather granted the bracken a wish. The bracken held her to this promise and made a wish for it to be able to spread across the land here at Brimham and to grow wherever it desired. In granting this wish, Heather had limited the opportunities for other rarer and more beautiful flora to thrive here, including her beloved varieties of heather. You see, the bracken has spread, claiming more land and threatening to shade out the protected heathland species.

When Sally found Heather the fairy in tears, she encouraged her to put her trust in the very people who Heather had saved in granting the wish: humans. Sally had observed human activity here over centuries and told Heather how the bracken used to be kept in check naturally with the help of a little human interference.

“The Monks of Fountains abbey used to graze cattle and keep horses here and they also used to fish and maintain the ponds. Horses would roll to flatten the bracken and the footfall of cattle would break up its roots. Perhaps we could influence the humans to try this once more.”

Now, we humans can't fully understand the magic that has been used to put these ideas back into our heads, but here at Brimham that is exactly what is being planned. Horse rolling has already successfully taken place here and there is a long-term vision to maintain the heathland through natural grazing. And as for the ponds, they have been enlarged and are maintained annually, which Sally here has been particularly grateful for.

New Location – salamander fossil

So, to end our story I want to reassure you that stories aren't necessarily just made up. You might not see Heather the fairy around here – she's too fast! You may not even see the real Sally Mander, but her 300-million-year-old fossil is still here to be found if you know where to look. Thankfully, we do! In fact, you are standing right beside it! Thank you for joining me at Brimham this Spring. I will be back in the Autumn for another story, but for now I hope you'll leave with a spring in your step.

© Richard Kay 2022