

## Is Yosemite's rare firefall too beautiful for its own good?

### Level 1 • Pre-intermediate / Intermediate

#### 1 Warmer

- With a partner, write the names of as many waterfalls as you can in two minutes.
- Have you ever seen a waterfall? Describe the waterfall and how you felt when you saw it.

#### 2 Key words

Match the key words with the definitions. Then find them in the article to read them in context. The paragraph numbers will help you.

cheer

angle

light up

sunset

view

- make brighter \_\_\_\_\_ (para 1)
- the time in the evening when the sun goes down and night begins \_\_\_\_\_ (para 2)
- give a loud shout of happiness \_\_\_\_\_ (para 2)
- the direction from which something comes \_\_\_\_\_ (para 3)
- when you can see something well from a particular place \_\_\_\_\_ (para 5)

uncertain

erosion

equipment

random

litter

- things such as pieces of paper that people have dropped on the ground \_\_\_\_\_ (para 7)
- when the surface of land is slowly damaged and begins to disappear \_\_\_\_\_ (para 7)
- the things that you need for a particular job or activity \_\_\_\_\_ (para 10)
- not clearly known or understood \_\_\_\_\_ (para 11)
- happening without any method or order \_\_\_\_\_ (para 12)

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#### 'It's a photo party': is Yosemite's rare firefall too beautiful for its own good?

Katharine Gammon

17 February, 2020

- 1 Photographer Aaron Meyer remembers his first firefall. This is when Yosemite's famous Horsetail Fall is lit up by the setting sun. It happens for just a few minutes each night in February.
- 2 "The clouds opened up just before sunset, and it looked like someone had set fire to the waterfall – we watched it light up from top to bottom," he says. "Everyone cheered; it was the most amazing thing I'd ever seen."
- 3 To have a firefall, there needs to be enough water in the falls, no clouds so that the sun can shine and the right angle for the sun's light to hit the 1,000-foot waterfall.
- 4 Photographers are one of the reasons why the firefall has become so popular. And in recent years, the firefall has become even more popular, thanks to social media.
- 5 Paul Reiffer, a photographer from the UK, doesn't go to Yosemite in February anymore because the firefall's popularity has made it too crowded. Reiffer says, when he visited in 2019, there were hundreds, maybe thousands, of people in the small areas with the best views of the falls.
- 6 "It felt like an outside concert, with everyone trying to find the best place to see the firefall," Reiffer says.
- 7 Reiffer also saw people leaving litter on the ground, breaking branches to get a better picture and leaving the viewing area to walk down to the riverbank for a closer view, causing large amounts of erosion.
- 8 "People forgot they were in Yosemite, in wilderness," he says. "Instead, they just wanted to get the perfect photo."
- 9 The park service says more than 2,200 people were at the falls on 22 February, the best day for viewing the firefall in 2019. The park's website says visitors walked on sensitive plants and left litter.
- 10 Phil Hawkins, a photographer who has been visiting the falls for 37 years and teaches photo workshops in the park, thinks the party atmosphere is positive. "Everyone is happy, everyone is in a good mood," he says. "People share equipment and food – it's a photography party."
- 11 In 2020, there was a dry winter so there was not much water in the park. Patrick Gonzalez, from the University of California, Berkeley, who studies climate change and national parks, says that climate change means the future of the firefall is uncertain.
- 12 The photographers are seeing the changes in the park, too. "Up until three years ago, you knew that there would be snow in February, spring conditions in June and July, and August would be dry," says Reiffer. But recently, he says, the seasons have become "completely random".
- 13 However, climatic change may give people a second chance to see the firefall: in late October, there's another short time where the sun's angle hits the falls. Usually, there's no water then – but there might be another chance to see the firefall if rain comes later in the year.

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#### 3 Comprehension check

Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. Where is the waterfall?
2. What is its name?
3. How high is it?
4. What makes it light up and turn into a firefall?
5. How often does this happen?
6. What problems and challenges does the firefall bring to the park?

#### 4 Understanding the title

The title of the article says that the firefall is *too beautiful for its own good*. What does this mean?

1. not lovely enough
2. so beautiful that it is a disadvantage instead of an advantage
3. It is good that it is lovely.

#### 5 Using the key words

a. Complete the sentences using key words from task 2.

1. Did the crowd \_\_\_\_\_ when their team scored a goal?
2. We are going to beach this weekend to help pick up \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Put all this camping \_\_\_\_\_ in the car.
4. After the race, the organizers did some \_\_\_\_\_ drug testing on the cyclists.
5. This is the best place to watch the \_\_\_\_\_.
6. This room has a fantastic \_\_\_\_\_ of the lake and the castle.

b. Write five more sentences of your own that include the key words you would most like to learn to use.

#### 6 Discussion

- What is the most beautiful natural sight you have ever seen? For example, snow on a mountain, a sunset, a wild animal ...
- What makes a photo beautiful?

#### 7 Webquest

- Search for images of the falls by typing *firefall Yosemite* into an images search field. Describe what you see.

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#### KEY

#### 1 Warmer

**Famous waterfalls (possible answers):** Niagara Falls (the US/Canada); Skógafoss Waterfall (Iceland); Angel Falls (Venezuela); Iguazu Falls (Brazil); Victoria Falls (Zambia/Zimbabwe); Yosemite Falls (the US)

#### 2 Key words

1. light up
2. sunset
3. cheer
4. angle
5. view
6. litter
7. erosion
8. equipment
9. uncertain
10. random

#### 3 Comprehension check

1. in Yosemite National Park
2. Horsetail Fall
3. 1,000 feet (around 305 metres)
4. the setting sun in late February; For this to happen, there needs to be enough water in the falls, clear skies and the sun has to be at the right angle in the sky.
5. It can happen each night if the conditions are right for a few weeks in late February. It may also happen again in October due to climate change bringing more rain later in the year, too.
6. It has become better known in recent years through social media, and more and more people want to be there to see it and to photograph it. Not all of these people respect the park – they leave litter, damage vegetation, break branches to get a better view, cause erosion and behave like they were at a party.

#### 4 Understanding the title

2.

#### 5 Using the key words

1. cheer
2. litter
3. equipment
4. random
5. sunset
6. view