



The Niagara River marks the natural border between the US and Canada.

TEMPTING THE WATER SPIRIT

Going down the Niagara Falls

Where on the horizon do the Earth and the heavens meet? One of these places is the Niagara Falls. Speaking of falls, people have been falling over the Niagara Falls for centuries.

Until the mid-18th century, the Iroquois people tried to gain the favour of² the Water Spirit by sending a maiden (young innocent girl) in a white canoe over the edge³ of the falls. The Iroquois believed that such sacrifices⁴ were the greatest honour and ensured a happy afterlife.

In 1837, a group of Canadian rebels fled⁵ to the United States after a failed revolution against the British rule (British colonial government) in Canada. They took refuge⁶ on a little island in the Niagara River and declared themselves the Republic of Canada. American sympathizers supplied them with money, provisions and arms via the steamboat⁷ SS Caroline. In reaction, Canadians loyal to the British rule got hold of the Caroline, towed⁸ her

into the current⁹, set her alight¹⁰, and let her drift¹¹ over the Niagara Falls. Press illustrations showed the burning ship going over the falls with men falling into the depths. These reports were false – the ship had been abandoned¹² before going over the edge.

Dangerous falls

The first person to survive a drop¹³ over the falls with just a life jacket¹⁴ was seven-year-old Roger Woodward. On July 9, 1960 a boat motor failure¹⁵ during a boat ride sent him, his 17-year-old sister and their family friend James Honeycutt towards the falls. When the boat neared the falls, the waves turned it over. Two men on the river bank managed to pull Roger's sister out of the water. Roger was in Honeycutt's arms as they approached the falls, but the strong water pulled them apart. Roger survived the fall but James Honeycutt drowned¹⁶.

The first known person to survive the fall without a flotation device¹⁷ is Kirk Jones from Michigan. He went over

DISAPPEARING FALLS

Niagara Falls is slowly moving south. The huge power of the Niagara River going over the cliff causes the erosion of the cliff. At one period in history, the falls were located 11 kilometres north of their current location. Engineering has slowed the erosion and movement of the falls. The current rate of erosion is approximately 30 cm per year, down from a historical average of 91 cm per year. However, it is estimated that 50,000 years from now, even at this reduced rate of erosion, the remaining 32 km to Lake Erie will have been undermined²⁶ and the falls will no longer exist.



the edge in October 20, 2003 and survived with only broken ribs¹⁸. Unfortunately, every year there are 12 to 18 known suicides¹⁹ at Niagara Falls. Because of the rocks at the bottom, people expect



Annie Edson Taylor – a teacher who decided to go over the Niagara Falls in a barrel.

a quick death and hope their body won't be found. Only one other person survived an unprotected trip over the falls, as reported on March 11, 2009.

VOCABULARY

- ¹ **to tempt** ['tem(p)t] – pokoušet
- ² **to gain the favour of** – získat přízeň
- ³ **edge** [edʒ] – okraj
- ⁴ **sacrifice** ['sækrifəs] – oběť
- ⁵ **to flee** [fli:] (past tense: fled) – prchnout
- ⁶ **to take refuge** ['refjju:dʒ] – hledat útočiště / najít útočiště

- ⁷ **via the steamboat** ['vi:a,'væɪə] – prostřednictvím parníku
- ⁸ **to tow** [təʊ] – vleči, táhnout
- ⁹ **current** ['kɑrənt] – proud
- ¹⁰ **to set sth alight** – zapálit
- ¹¹ **to let sth drift** – nechat unášet
- ¹² **proudem**
- ¹³ **to abandon** [ə'bænd(ə)n] – opustit
- ¹⁴ **drop** – pád
- ¹⁵ **life jacket** – záchranná vesta
- ¹⁶ **failure** ['feɪlʃə] – selhání

WATERFALLS IN THE MIDDLE OF A TOWN



The Niagara Falls were formed when **glaciers**²⁷ during the last glacial period melted and moved back north. The same activity created the North American Great Lakes and the Niagara River.

The Great Lakes mark the natural border between the US and Canada. The Niagara Falls lie on the Niagara River that flows from Lake Ontario to Lake Erie, marking the international border between the Canadian province of Ontario and the US state of New York.

Niagara Falls, the most powerful waterfalls in North America, gave their name to the town that rose around them. One would think that the Niagara Falls, famous for their beauty, are in the middle of the countryside. On the contrary, they are in the middle of a town.

The Niagara Falls are formed by two main waterfalls, the **Horseshoe**²⁸ Falls on the Canadian side of the river and the American Falls on American side. The Horseshoe Falls, formed in a shape of a horseshoe, drop for about 53 metres. The American Falls drop from 21–30 metres because of the giant **boulders**²⁹ at their base. If a visitor wants to see both waterfalls, then he has to enter both Canada and the US.

The Niagara Falls are valued both for their beauty and as a **source of hydroelectric power**³⁰. It has become a popular destination for a **honeymoon**³¹ stay, which is why many hotels were built along the Niagara River.

Did you know that some scenes from the movie *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End* were filmed at Niagara Falls?

Going down for fun

Many of the people risking their lives have chosen to do so in specially constructed **barrels**²⁰. On October 24, 1901, a 63-year-old teacher, Annie Edson Taylor, was the first person to go over the falls as a publicity **stunt**²¹. The trip took less than twenty minutes and she survived with just a small wound on her head.

Since that time, 14 other people have gone over the falls in or on some sort of a device. On July 3, 1984, Karel Souček, born in Czechoslovakia in 1947, went over the falls in a bright red, nine-foot **custom-made**²² barrel with the words "The Last of Niagara's **Daredevils**²³" written on it. He was fined \$500 for performing the stunt without a licence because it is illegal, on both sides of the border, to attempt to go over the falls, but he was certainly not the last daredevil. In August 1985, Steve Trotter became the youngest person ever, at the age of 22, to make the trip in a barrel. Ten years later he repeated the experience and became the second person to take the **plunge**²⁴ twice and survive.

Why this fascination with the Niagara Falls? The answer is very individual: while some are **content**²⁵ to just stare into the depths, others find it necessary to jump. **Hana Škrdllová** (Canada)

- ¹⁶ **to drown** [draʊn] – utopit se
- ¹⁷ **flotation device** [fləʊ'teɪʃ(ə)n dɪ'veɪs] – plovací zařízení
- ¹⁸ **rib** – žebro
- ¹⁹ **suicide** ['su:isaid] – sebevražda
- ²⁰ **barrel** ['bær(ə)l] – sud
- ²¹ **stunt** [stʌnt] – kaskadérský kousek
- ²² **custom-made** ['kʌstəm meɪd] – vyrobený na zakázku
- ²³ **daredevil** ['deɪdev(ə)l] – odvážlivec
- ²⁴ **plunge** [plʌn(d)ʒ] – pád, skok střemhlav

- ²⁵ **to be content** [kən'tent] – být spokojený
- ²⁶ **to undermine** [ʌndə'main] – podemílat
- ²⁷ **glacier** ['glæsiə] – ledovec
- ²⁸ **horseshoe** – podková
- ²⁹ **boulder** ['bəuldə] – balvan
- ³⁰ **source of hydroelectric power** [sɔ:s] – zdroj vodní energie
- ³¹ **honeymoon** – líbánky, svatební cesta