TEMPETING 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 of the Water Spirit by sending a maiden (young innocent girl) in a white canoe over the edge of the falls. The Iroquois believed that such sacrifices were the greatest honour and ensured a happy afterlife.

In 1837, a group of Canadian rebels fled to the United States after a failed revolution against the British rule (British colonial government) in Canada. They took refuge 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 steamboat SS Caroline. In reaction, Canadians loyal to the British rule got hold of the Caroline, towed her into the current, set her alight, and let her drift 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 abandoned before going over the edge.

Dangerous falls

The first person to survive a drop over the falls with just a life jacket was seven-year-old Roger Woodward. On July 9, 1960 a boat motor failure 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 drowned.

The first known person to survive the fall without a flotation device is Kirk Jones from Michigan. He went over the edge in October 20, 2003 and survived with only broken ribs. Unfortunately, every year there are 12 to 18 known suicides at Niagara Falls. Because of the rocks at the bottom, people expect
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.

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. 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. 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 barrel with the words “The Last of Niagara’s Daredevils” 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 twice and survive.

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

VOCABULARY

- to tempt [ˈtempt] – pokoušet
- to gain the favour of [ˈgeɪn daʊ fəvər əv] – získat přízeň
- edge [ɛdʒ] – okraj
- sacrifice [ˈsækrəfɪs] – oběť
- to flee [flɪ] (past tense: fled) – prchnout
- to take refuge [ˈrefjədʒ] – hledat útočiště / najít útočiště
- via the steamboat [ˈvɪə ˈsteɪmbɔt] – prostřednictvím přístavu
- to tow [təʊ] – vleci, táhnout
- current [ˈkɜənt] – proud
- to set sth alight [sət sth ˈaɪt] – zapálit
- to abandon [əbˈændər] – opustit
- drop – pad
- life jacket – záchranářské plovací zařízení
- failure [ˈfeɪlər] – selhání
- to drown [drəʊn] – utopit se
- to be content [kənˈtent] – být spokojený
- to undermine [ˌʌndərˈmaɪn] – podmímat
- glacier [ˈɡlæsər] – ledovec
- horseshoe – podkova
- boulder [ˈbɔldər] – balvan
- source of hydroelectric power [sɔrəs] – zdroj vodní energie
- honeymoon – líbánky, svatební cesta

The Niagara Falls were formed when glaciers 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 valued both for their beauty and as a source of hydroelectric power. It has become a popular destination for a honeymoon 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. 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. 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 barrel with the words “The Last of Niagara’s Daredevils” 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 twice and survive.

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