



Viewpoint

## Feel the force



Time: 15 mins

Region: North East England

Landscape: rural



**Location:** High Force waterfall, Forest-in-Teesdale, County Durham, DL12 0XH

**Grid reference:** NY 88498 28660

**Directions:** Park at High Force Hotel (charges between March and October). Follow the woodland path from the car park

**Keep an eye out for:** The dark band of dolerite at the top of the waterfall which created High and Low Force

High Force is one of the largest waterfalls in England. From here you can watch the River Tees fall in a single sheet of white water nearly 70 feet into a swirling pool below.

It's unlikely however that you're the only person here at this much visited and photographed spot. The car park, gift shop, pub and picnic tables all testify to its popularity.

Why are we drawn to waterfalls like High Force?



With the sound of crashing water filling your ears and the spectacular sheer drop of the river cascading over the rocks it's hard not to be stirred by High Force. But have you ever wondered why?

Many theories abound as to why we're drawn to waterfalls. One idea is that unlike a beautiful sunset or craggy mountain, waterfalls activate all five senses. From here you can experience the sight, sound, touch, feel and taste (if you choose!) of the water. The sudden stimulation has been likened to walking into a bakery and the sensory jolt experienced by the smell of fresh bread!

Our fascination with waterfalls may have begun during the 'Romantic Period' (around 1850-1880) when artists and writers advanced the theory of the Sublime . This was the idea that aspects of nature with terrifying wildness, force or scale appealed to us on a deeper level than 'tamer' landscapes and it remains with us today.

As poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote: *"My mind feels as if it ached to behold and know something great, something one and indivisible—and it is only in the faith of this that rocks or waterfalls, mountains or caverns, give me the sense of sublimity or majesty!"*

Scientists have also come up with a reason behind our fascination with cascading water. The rushing water releases negatively charged ions, which increase the production of serotonin - the chemical in our brain which can lift our moods and increase our energy.

Philosophers too have thought about the appeal of waterfalls. Dramatic ones like High Force create 'fascination' which according to thinker William James allows for *"a pause in time, a moment to rejoice, to be truly alive"*.

Perhaps this is the most likely reason for their allure. They make us feel alive. After all, water has been falling here since the end of the last Ice Age about 18,000 years ago and will continue to be here long after we're gone.

## Eye of the beholder

Before you leave, it's worth pausing for a moment to consider that not everyone sees the same thing. Some might look on a waterfall like High Force as a possible source of renewable energy, or see it's potential for tourism. How do we find a balance between the physical needs of our planets' people and the conservation of its natural wonders?