

✓ Question^[2]

What is the image's date, title, & creator? What does this suggest? 1865, Man seated beneath rock formation at the Upper Yosemite Fall, and Carleton Watkins. The title reveals the location "Upper Yosemite Fall" which is in the Yosemite Valley, California.

What type of person might have created this image? For what purpose? Carleton Watkins was a well-known photographer in the 19th century. He focused on landscapes, especially in the Yosemite Valley of California. He moved to California from New York in 1851 with hopes of finding gold. Unsuccessful, he then turned to photography as a career, making geological surveys and presenting public gallery shows. Watkins had a profound influence on the start of what we now call environmentalism, or the conservation movement. "Motivated by Watkins's pictures, Congress would pass and Abraham Lincoln would sign legislation setting Yosemite aside as a national preserve, the prototypical "national park" and the first such act of landscape preservation in the world."^[3]

Was it random or posed, amateur or professional, private or published? It seems to be posed, with the man looking off to the distance. The materials around the scene also look positioned to be noticeable to a viewer. The photographer is positioned at the back of the rock formation, which would have taken work to climb there.

When this photograph was taken less than 1% of US land was conserved (i.e., protected, preserved). In 2020, about 13% of land in the US was conserved, and there is a movement to conserve 30% of US land by 2030. What seemed like a good idea in the 1860s is now considered by some to be an essential element in human sustainability.

The man in the photograph is likely an adventurer and camper who climbed into the western Sierra Nevada mountains in California's Yosemite Valley to spend a few days on vacation. Also, clearly visible in the scene are a small hatchet, a large bowl, and a collapsible canvas tent which all suggest that he is camping. In response to the industrialization and urbanization of the previous decades, the mid-19th century was a time when recreational camping and hiking became very popular in the US and throughout much of the world. Many workers used their time away from their jobs to explore "the wilderness" and appreciate natural landscapes. The common perception of nature changed at this time: from a resource for humans to use, albeit responsibly and wisely, to an essential means for humans to experience physical and emotional well-being. **How can nature help promote physical and emotional well-being?** Urbanization and industrialization also profoundly changed the environment (i.e., deforestation, air and soil pollution, water run-off, etc.) motivating many concerned citizens to push for the conservation and preservation of nature. The first political victory of this new environmental movement occurred in 1864 when U.S. President Abraham Lincoln—who was convinced partially by the photographs of Carleton Watkins—provided federal protection for the Yosemite Valley to become a region "for public use, resort, and recreation." Decades later, the first international conference related to the environment was held in Stockholm (in 1972) and semi-regular meetings have been held since: for example, Vienna in 1985, Rio in 1992, and Kyoto in 1997.^[4] While the conferences tend to address many topics (i.e., preserve wildlife diversity, oceans and marine life), a reoccurring theme is sustainable development: development that produces a high quality of life now without sacrificing a high quality of life for future generations.

As the title states, this location is "Upper Yosemite Fall" in the western Sierra Nevada mountains in California's Yosemite Valley. It is 2,700' above sea level and home to North America's tallest waterfall. It was also home to a giant sequoia tree that stood 234' tall and 90' around (the tree died in the 1960s at an estimated age of 2,400 years old). The Yosemite Valley was the world's first federally protected land, the first political victory of the new environmental movement. In 1864, U.S. President Abraham Lincoln provided federal protection for the Yosemite. Other nations—Australia in 1879, New Zealand in 1897, South Africa in 1898, India in 1905, and Sweden in 1909—soon followed, also federally preserving lands. **Why might the environmental movement have started in the mid-1800s?** Concern for the human impact can be traced, at least, as far back as the Roman Empire; however, general concern rarely led to public action. That began to change in the mid-1800s as the health concerns associated with the Industrial Revolution and the perceived inability of classical liberal (i.e., laissez faire) economic and governmental policies to quickly respond, prompted like-minded and environmentally conscious people to form advocacy groups such as The Sierra Club (which formed in 1892). The Sierra Club still exists and currently promotes environmentalist policies, including sustainable development and reducing the effects of global warming. The club also opposes the use of coal, hydropower, and nuclear power.

✓ Observe

Watkins, Carleton. (1865). *Man seated beneath rock formation at the Upper Yosemite Fall*. Library of Congress, American Memory Collection.^[1]



✓ Reflect

The tripod may be a type of rudimentary stove that allows twine to elevate a dutch oven above a fire. Or the tripod could be base of a mammoth-plate camera, the type of camera often used for making landscape photographs at that time. International politicians found landscape photographs, like those produced by Watkins, very convincing when discussing environmental protections. There are currently 10 "Basic Principles" of International Law that relate to the environment; the first two cohere directly with the question around which this activity is centered. The first basic principle is state sovereignty (i.e., national sovereignty) and the second basic principle is common concern (i.e., international law). **Why would a nation sacrifice some "state sovereignty" to ease "common concerns" of other nations?** Many nations have met together to establish agreements and set principles that comprise the world's collective efforts to manage and solve serious environmental problems such as ozone depletion, mass extinction of wildlife, etc. However, not all environmental situations affect all nations to the same degree; for example, international whaling laws directly concern Australia and Japan more than Kosovo. Nations that attend international conferences are often encouraged to sacrifice some state sovereignty in order to benefit other nations, or perhaps the rest of the world, and are sometimes offered other advantages. International agreements tend to revolve around shared resources (rivers, oceans) and situations with global impact (climate change, trade).

How does this photograph compare with other information? This photograph explores international law as it concerns the environment, other photographs may explore outer space, conduct of war, or national sovereignty. Other information may challenge the notion that nations should sacrifice some national autonomy, or sovereignty, for the common interests of the international community.

Why might other information agree or disagree with this photograph? Other photographs or texts may explore international law from different perspectives that answer the overarching question differently. For example, information could be presented that emphasizes times when federally protected lands have been over-used or too-commercialized for tourism. Other sources may have different reasons for presenting data, such as to make their perspective seem more reasonable.

What else do you need or want to know about this photograph? At the subsequent conventions mentioned (Paris, Rio, Kyoto, etc.) what agreements or requirements have nations added to international law related to the environment? How have nations' policy-makers weighed decisions that concern international law, especially if the decision had potential to conflict with their state's national interests?

Watkins, Carleton. (1865). *Man seated beneath rock formation at the Upper Yosemite Fall*. Library of Congress, American Memory Collection.^[1]



Citations: [#] throughout the primer and script

1. Watkins, Carleton. (1865). *Man seated beneath rock formation at the Upper Yosemite Fall*. Library of Congress, American Memory Collection. https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/l?consrvbib:32:./-temp/~ammem_Zvf0::displayType=1:m856sd=cph:m856sf=3a47266:@@@
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4. Hunter, David. (2021). International Environmental Law: International treaties and principles protect the environment and guard against climate change. https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_education/publications/insights-on-law-and-society/volume-19/insights-vol--19---issue-1/international-environmental-law/
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Citations →