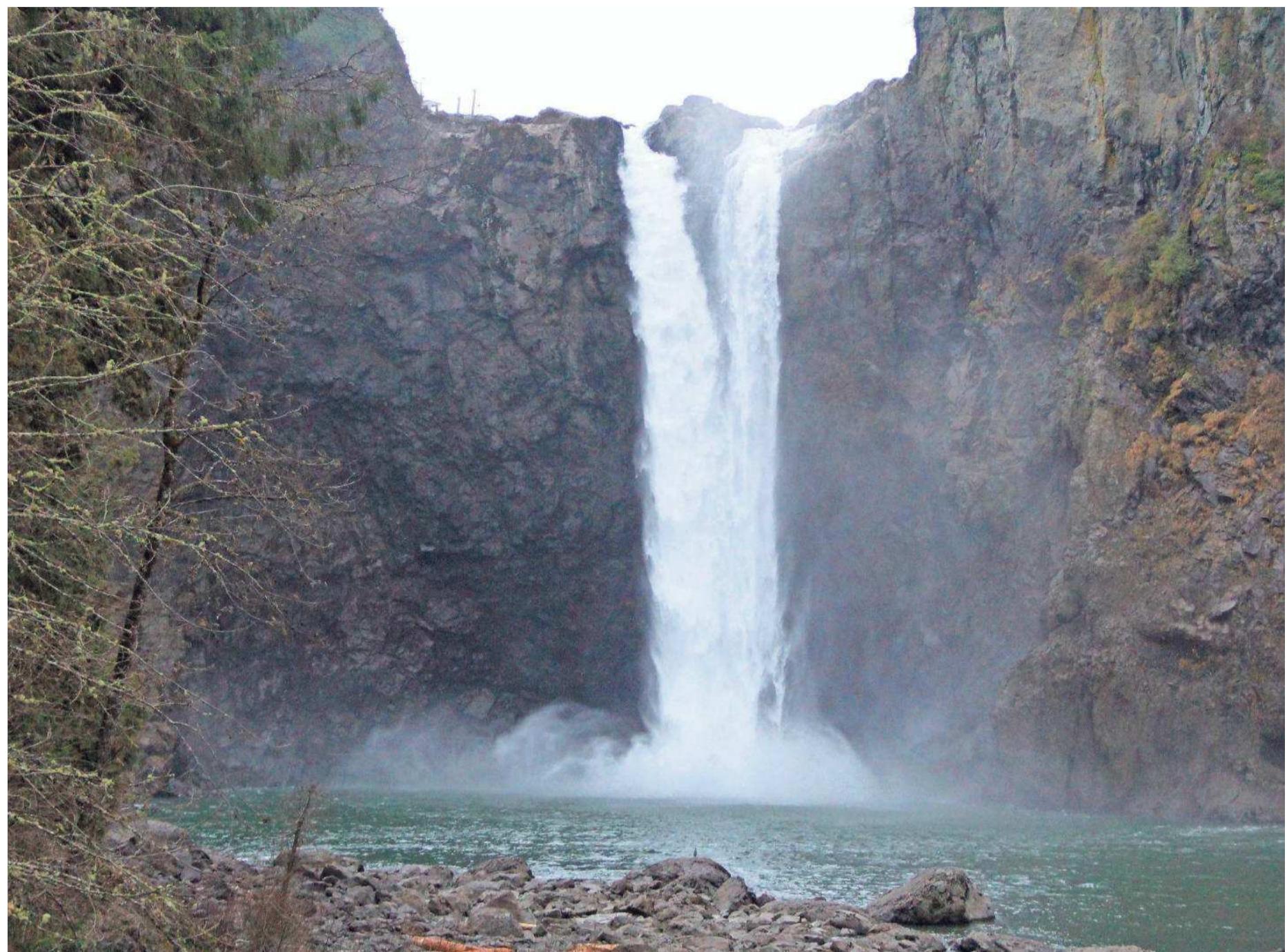


# Life *in the* Valley

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PHOTOS BY ZACH URNESS/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Snoqualmie Falls as viewed from the lower viewpoint.

## *Snoqualmie Falls: A mix of beauty and utility*

*Science and technology shine at this waterfall east of Seattle that was the world's first underground power plant*

ZACH URNESS  
STATESMAN JOURNAL

There are so many similarities between Oregon's Multnomah Falls and Washington's Snoqualmie Falls that it's difficult to name them all.

Both are iconic cascades located close to a major metropolitan area, Portland and Seattle.

Both get massive annual visitors — 2.5 million for Multnomah and 1.5 million for Snoqualmie. Both are touristy, with restaurants and gift shops, and both are popular spots to host weddings.

Despite these similarities, the experience of actually visiting the waterfalls couldn't be more different.

Multnomah is a long and elegant silver rope in a lush rainforest setting. Ornamented by the stylish Benson Foot Bridge, Oregon's most famous falls is an oil painting come to life.

Snoqualmie, by contrast, is a model of utility. The world's first underground power plant was built here in 1899. It's now home to two power plants. Huge penstocks — high-pressure pipes that carry water into the plants — are visible on a hike through a park suffused with utilitarian spirit.

That was my impression, anyway, during a stop here last week. After visiting family nearby, I decided to see Snoqualmie with my daughter and dad.

A trip here starts with a drive east of Seattle to the towns of Snoqualmie and North Bend. Much of the cult-classic television show "Twin Peaks" was filmed here, and the waterfall is apparently featured. (I haven't seen the show).

In terms of experiencing the waterfall, there's two options. From the parking area, you can easily walk to a viewpoint overlooking the waterfall as it roars 268-feet into a basin below. It's a great view.

The better option is a short but semi-steep hike to a lower viewpoint. This route takes you through an outdoor museum of hydrologic equipment from past to present.

The hike follows a gravel road 250



Lucy Urness walks through old hydro-power equipment on the trail down to the lower viewpoint of Snoqualmie Falls.

### **Snoqualmie Falls**

**In a nutshell:** A large, 268-foot waterfall east of Seattle in the town of Snoqualmie.

**Highlights:** Viewpoints of the falls from top and bottom; an outdoor museum of hydrologic equipment.

**Hike:** A short hike drops 250 feet from the parking lot to a lower viewpoint. The climb back up can be steep.

**Other highlights:** Gift shop, restaurant, lodge.

feet down to river level, where you can see the powerhouse, penstocks and turbines.

A boardwalk travels out over the river to a viewpoint of the falls from near its base. As a dad with an energy-

filled 2-year-old, I was grateful for the gigantic fence that made it near impossible for my daughter Lucy to fall into the river.

If there's one thing disappointing about Snoqualmie Falls, it's that the

power plants divert much of the river, so the waterfall isn't roaring at full strength. I've seen pictures of it at truly impressive flows, but it wasn't on my trip, despite a lot of recent rain.

Even so, a quick trip to Snoqualmie Falls was worthwhile. It's not as cool as Multnomah Falls, in my Oregon-centric opinion, but it's still an impressive waterfall.

*Zach Urness has been an outdoors writer, photographer and videographer in Oregon for eight years. He is the author of the book "Hiking Southern Oregon" and can be reached at zurness@StatesmanJournal.com or (503) 399-6801. Find him on Twitter at @ZachsORoutdoors.*