



Canyon at Vøringsfossen, Norway

With a name that translates as ‘the esteemed waterfall’, Vøringsfossen is one of the grandest cascades in Norway, though it is far from being the highest. It claims a total drop of 182 metres, and the nearly vertical main section descends 145 metres into the head of a canyon. And it is this magnificent canyon that is perhaps the finest feature of the site, as it was largely excavated by sub-glacial meltwater. The Bjoreio river drains westwards from the Hardangervidda, Norway’s great central plateau, and its host valley of Måbødalen finally descends below sea level at Eidfjord to form the major arm of Hardanger Fjord. Set within the floor of that valley, the narrow canyon extends for little over two kilometres, from the waterfall at its head to where it breaks out into the lower part of Måbødalen. The broad glaciated valley descending from the Vidda plateau is notable for a gentle rise in its floor (the pale green ridge in the middle distance). It is easy to conceive how subglacial meltwater ponded behind this while the canyon was cut through it, right against its right-bank margin. The major part of the canyon’s excavation is likely to have occurred during the Devensian glaciation; additional contributions by post-glacial erosion, pre-Devensian initiation, and even some invasion by ice, are difficult to assess. Archaean banded gneisses have vertical joints that have been opened by stress relief, so that they define much of the profile of the canyon walls. With the new suspension bridge across Hardangerfjord, the road along Måbødalen now offers the shortest route between Oslo and Bergen, when snow conditions across the Vidda permit. This highway makes for easy access to Vøringsfossen, where short footpaths and viewing platforms are spectacular and delightful in the style that is typical of Norway. © *Photographs and text by Tony Waltham Geophotos*