

READING 5

Read the text and answer the questions that follow.

Death Valley: Land of Extremes

- I Death Valley, one of North America's great national parks, is a desert wilderness which extends along the south-eastern part of the state of California and across the border to Nevada. This unique land of beauty and danger is known for its extremes. It set a world heat record, that stands to this day, when its temperature rose to 57°C on 10th July, 1913. It's the lowest and driest place in North America. Parts of the park are 86 metres below sea level, yet it's surrounded by the snow-covered peaks of two towering mountain ranges.
- II Despite the dangers caused by the extreme heat and lack of water, visitors come to Death Valley to enjoy its pristine and rugged terrain. One of the area's attractions has always been its mysterious "rolling stones". These are groups of large boulders, some weighing as much as 320 kilos, which move hundreds of metres across the ground as if by magic. Behind them in the soil, their tracks leave geometric patterns of lines and zigzags.
- III The most logical explanation would be that the land is at a slight incline, but the rolling stones are all located in a dry lakebed in the flattest section of the park. Therefore, the cause of these movements had confounded scientists for many years. Some theories proposed that the rocks were moved by ice, wind or even aliens from another planet.
- IV In the winter of 2011, a team of researchers from the University of California fitted 15 rocks in the area with GPS devices to measure their locations. Then they prepared for a long wait of up to a decade, since the rocks move only once every few years. However, on 21st December, 2013 researchers found water in the lake bed, which then froze overnight. At noon the next day, the rocks began to move. The researchers could not believe their luck.
- V The ice was melting and breaking up into pieces. Together with a light wind, these pieces pushed 60 rocks simultaneously for a distance of 224 metres. Incredibly, in one of the hottest, driest places on Earth, frozen water turned out to be a force that can move giant boulders. In Death Valley, the land of extremes, it seems anything is possible!

1 Choose the correct answer.

1. Death Valley
 - a. doesn't allow visitors to enter
 - b. is the largest national park in North America
 - c. spreads over two states
2. The "rolling stones" are
 - a. rocks that move mysteriously
 - b. a magic show for visitors
 - c. mysterious lines in the ground

2 Decide if the following sentences are true (T) or false (F). Find evidence in the text to justify your answers.

..... 1. Temperatures higher than 57°C have been recorded in other places since 1913.

.....

..... 2. Some people thought that extraterrestrials moved the rolling stones.

.....

3 Rewrite the sentences without changing the original meaning.

1. Death Valley is the lowest and driest place in North America.

There is no place in North America that is

.....

2. Despite the dangers, visitors come to Death Valley.

Visitors come to Death Valley even though

.....

4 Answer the questions.

1. How do we know that the rolling stones aren't moved by gravity?

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2. Why did the researchers feel they were lucky?

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3. What did the researchers discover?

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4. Why does the writer say that this discovery is "incredible"?

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5 Find words or expressions in the text that mean the opposite of:

1. very low (paragraph I)

2. smooth (paragraph II)

3. significant (paragraph III)

4. freezing (paragraph V)

5. occurring at different times (paragraph V)