

Annual Examinations for Secondary Schools 2022

YEAR 9 ENGLISH READING COMPREHENSION

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A. Ashley's important role

At the summit of Devil's Head, the highest point in the state of Colorado's Rampart Range in Pike National Forest, 9,748ft above sea level, Ashley Farinacci-Silfies stood in her lookout tower, gripping a pair of binoculars: "That could be a fire," she said, looking intently into the distance. Shortly afterwards, she realised it was only dust, likely from a dirt bike, mimicking the smoky wisp of a new fire. "Luckily, not this time."

Ashley is employed by the US Forest Service. She is the last person working as a fire lookout in Colorado's Front Range. Her job, which she has been doing for two seasons, has largely been replaced by technology, such as 360-degree cameras, drones and aircraft equipped with heat sensors which are used to detect any fires in the area. However, according to Ashley, "Technology can't replace **me**." She points out that forest service teams appreciate the flexibility offered only by humans; the ability of fire lookouts to integrate information taken from the weather and surroundings and communicate **this** to rescue teams on the ground is something that "drones can't do".

B. _____

Ashley's job as a fire lookout requires her to spend six months of the year living in a remote log cabin accessible only on foot via a 1.25-mile hiking trail. Every day during fire season, generally running from May to November, Ashley climbs the 143 steps to her lookout tower to watch for signs of smoke, usually arising from campfires or lightning strikes. Once she detects smoke, she determines the fire's location using her Osborne firefinder, a measurement tool used to find the location of distant fire, developed in 1911 by US Forest Service employee William Osborne. She then radios down to the emergency centre staff, **who** send firefighting crews to respond. Last year, Ashley spotted five fires, though hundreds more burned throughout the state.

Ashley appreciates the novelty of her work, marvelling at the beauty of her surroundings. "Every hour the sun changes, illuminating something different that

I haven't seen before." Pike National Forest and the surrounding area offer a multitude of trails with breath-taking views. Visitors enjoy a variety of activities, including hiking, camping, fishing, mountain biking and horseback riding.

C. _____

Colorado's Front Range is prone to wildfires due to **its** dry climate. During the worst wildfire on record, nearly 700,000 acres burned.

Sitting at the desk in her lookout tower, she reflects on the devastating impact wildfires can have on the surrounding area. When there was the Hayman fire in Colorado in 2002, the largest wildfire in the region before that of 2020, huge areas of the forest burned down. Over the years, forest fires in the western United States have intensified due to people trespassing upon dry areas, leaving behind objects that can easily catch fire. Ashley points out that changes in climate have made the problem worse. In fact, the higher temperatures, changing rain patterns and early snow melts cause fires to burn longer than they ever have before.

D. _____

Despite her job's risks, Ashley feels she has a duty to preserve the forest, having built a deep connection to the wilderness as a child camping with her mother. Ashley wants others to experience the joys of hiking and camping for "generations to come", and sees her guardianship over the forest as a way to protect the environment for those around her. When Ashley is not fire spotting, she passes the time learning about the forest's various flora and fauna, understanding which cloud formations could mean that lightning might strike, talking with hikers and playing with her two cats, Fjord and Fiona.

When asked what she loves most about living in the forest, Ashley said, "Just waking up when the sun rises and going to bed when the sun sets – and getting to watch the way everything changes when the sun moves across the mountains. I'm most grateful for that unchanging tranquility that makes you feel calm and at peace. It is my happy place."

Adapted from <https://www.bbc.com>

