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Comment on “From Virtual Field Trip to Geologically-Reasoned Decisions in Yosemite Valley” by Barth et al

Christian Eide (Referee)

Referee comment on "From Virtual Field Trip to Geologically-Reasoned Decisions in Yosemite Valley" by Nicolas C. Barth et al., Geosci. Commun. Discuss., <https://doi.org/10.5194/gc-2021-28-RC1>, 2021

Review of “From Virtual Field Trip to Geologically-Reasoned Decisions in Yosemite Valley” by Barth et al

Dear NC Barth and co-authors,

The present paper is interesting and well-written. It presents an elegant Virtual Field Trip (VFT), the authors’ reasoning behind this VFT, some analysis on the technical solution for this VFT, some thinking on VFTs in general, and the instructor’s impression of the learning outcomes of the students exposed to this VFT. The VFT itself looks polished and is easy both to understand and to use, and will likely be interesting to many. I have only a few comments, and I think this paper only needs very minor revisions to make it accessible to as many as possible. Many parts are somewhat descriptive and describe basic functionality in the technological solution, or are somewhat repetitive. This could be streamlined a bit.

My specific comments to the paper can be found below.

Sincerely,

Christian Haug Eide

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October 5th, 2021

Main points 1: Present link to virtual field trip earlier in paper

Right now, the link to the VFT is not presented before Section 2, Line 55. I believe many readers would like to see the VFT itself as early as possible, and I think it would be useful

to place this link in the first paragraph of the introduction.

2: US-centric jargon

Many terms relating for example to how far students are into their study programme are US-specific and not immediately obvious to readers from other locations. Examples include *upper division, summer field, course, module, gradebook, major*.

3: Unnecessary sections?

I am not sure section 3.3 adds very much? (This might just be because I am a philistine). 3.4 also seems to me to be much longer than necessary?

4: Hillshade

It is not clear how the *hillshade* functionality was delivered in google earth? On lines 312-3 it is stated that Google Earth can remove vegetation, but this is not standard functionality as far as I know. This should be described better.

Minor points:

L17, L299 and 301: The term *scaffolding* is used but it seems vague to me what this actually means. Perhaps the authors could clarify this?

L30: "Most instructors" is a bit vague.

L32: "began organizing and meeting virtually in March 2020" – what was this forum called?

L44-45: Especially here, it should be clarified what a module is and what a course is.

L83: "What makes placemarks *truly standout*" – *unnecessarily loaded, change wording*.

L100-106: This is perhaps a bit too long and detailed?

L122: Exceptional quality. It would be better to provide some objective measures of quality such as resolution, or "largest feature that can be recognized"

L133, 134: Loaded terms *good, excellent*. Text should be rewritten here to be more formal and more descriptive.

L145: "steeped in the history of rock climbing". Vague, should be presented in a more informative manner.

L151: "An instructor-only file is provided with verified credentials." It is unclear to me what this means.

L178-9: "are held to a professional standard." It is unclear to me what this means.

L181-2: " these maps are among the best products students have produced in remote summer field alternative courses". Compared to what? Judged on what metrics? What is so good about them and how are these better than the ones they made before/in other modules?

L257: Another point that should be pointed out, I suppose, is that there might be no guarantee for longevity for these VFT products. I suppose google could change their

solutions and all this becomes obsolete? Or are there guarantees against that?

L296: What exactly is meant by "excessive cognitive demands" here? I can think of very many experiences in higher education that places much higher cognitive demands on students than such a VFT. Also, what is meant by *domain specific expertise* here (i.e. which domain are you thinking about – geology, general computer skills, google earth expertise)?