

Summary: Geography South of the Sahara

Land and Waterways of Africa

Africa has two major kinds of land. Lowlands are in the north and west. Highlands are in the south and east. Most of Africa south of the Sahara lies on a plateau.

The tectonic plates beneath Africa have been slowly pulling apart for millions of years. This has formed broad valleys called rifts. The Great Rift Valley of Africa stretches from the Red Sea to Mozambique.

Parts of the Great Rift Valley have filled with water, forming huge lakes. The world's longest river, the Nile, is in Africa. Some African rivers have powerful waterfalls. Lakes and rivers provide fresh water and fish.

Many Climates

Africa South of the Sahara has four major climate regions. They are desert, semiarid, tropical, and equatorial. Desert climates have little rain, high temperatures, and few plants and animals. Semiarid regions are near deserts. These areas have high temperatures but get more rain than deserts. Many places in Africa are experiencing desertification. One cause of desertification is drought. Other causes are overgrazing and overuse of land for farming. Desertification is a serious problem. When land becomes desert, there is less land for farming. This adds to the problem of hunger in many African countries.

Africa's tropical regions have a rainy season that can last for six months. Semiarid and tropical regions have savannas. Africa's equatorial region has two rainy seasons and two short dry seasons each year. This region gets a lot of rain and has high temperatures. There are rain forests, and many animals live in this region.

Africa is rich in resources. Gold, diamonds, copper, and tin are some of Africa's many minerals. Minerals are nonrenewable resources. Africa also has renewable resources, such as trees, nuts, coffee, bananas, and rubber. Another important resource is wildlife. Every year, African wildlife draws people from all over the world.



Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

plateau *noun*, a raised area of relatively level land

desertification *noun*, a process by which a desert spreads

drought *noun*, a lack of rain

savanna *noun*, flat grassland with scattered trees and shrubs

nonrenewable resource *noun*, resources that cannot be replaced or can be replaced only over millions of years

renewable resource *noun*, resources that can be replaced over a relatively short time period



After You Read

REVIEW What are some benefits provided by Africa's lakes and rivers?

Draw a box around the sentence that tells how African lakes and rivers benefit the people living there.

REVIEW How does the great area of desert and semiarid land impact the lives of many Africans?

Underline two sentences that explain why desert land creates challenges for people.