

Africa Lecture Notes: Chapter 18, Section 1

A VAST PLATEAU

Africa's Plateau

Millions of years ago, Africa was the center of a super continent called PANGEA.

((Look at world map to show how the continents fit together))

Today Africa is the world's 2nd LARGEST continent.

It is also a GIANT plateau!! Most of it sits over 1,000 feet above sea level.

- Low along the coastline and then rises quickly when you move inland.

Known as the “plateau continent” by geographers.

Basins and Rivers

Within the plateau there are large depressions in the land called “basins”.

- Each is over 625 miles across
- Reach as much as 5,000 feet deep

The longest rivers of Africa flow through these basins:

- Niger River
- Congo River
- Nile River

Nile River is longest river in the world = more than 4,000 miles (6,000 km) long.

Starts in Uganda and flows north to the Mediterranean Sea (show on p. 403)

Egypt *HEAVILY* depends on the Nile River for its water: 95% of water comes from the Nile R.

- Egypt population density overall = 177 people per square mile
- Egypt along the Nile River = 3,320 people per square mile
(almost **19 times more people** live along the Nile than other places in Egypt!!!)

Since Africa is a giant plateau, when the rivers get to the edge of the plateau, they fall off the edge and create beautiful waterfalls, raging rapids, and deep gorges.

- i.e., Transportation is difficult along the rivers. Some parts are navigable, but many parts are not.

River systems are not like the other continents.

DISTINCTIVE AFRICAN LANDFORMS

No long chain of mountains exist in Africa (like the Rockies or Andes). But it has many valleys and lakes (especially in the east).

Rift Valleys and Lakes

East Africa = most distinct landforms.

When PANGEA was splitting apart, it cracked the African continent. The land in the cracks sank to form long, thin valleys – rift valleys.

p. 415 – notice how the eastern part of Africa is pulling away from the rest of the continent.

These rift valleys extend for over 4,000 miles from the southeast Africa all the way up to the Middle East! The Red Sea is a gigantic rift valley!!!!

Other lakes formed in the cracks too. TWO of them are practically right next to each other:

- Lake Tanganyika = 420 miles long, 4,700 ft. deep (rivals Lake Baikal in Russia)
- Lake Victoria = 2nd largest freshwater lake...
 - about 200 miles across,
 - but only 270 ft. deep.
 - About the same size as the state of West Virginia.

Mountains

Most of Africa's mountains are volcanic.

Most are located in the east

- Mt. Kenya
- Mt. Kilimanjaro
- Ethiopian Highlands

North = Tibesti Mtns.

West = Mt. Cameroon

Sahara Desert

Largest desert in the World (stretches about 3,000 miles across – Portland to NYC, and 1,200 miles north-south – Portland to San Diego, CA.)

Temperatures:

High = 136° in the summer.

Low = below freezing at night in winter.

Only about 20% is sand...the rest is dry mountains (as high as 11,000 ft), rock formations, and plains made of gravel.

- Aquifers = large underground stores of water.
- Oasis = a place where the water rises to the surface (supports vegetation and wildlife, and is critical for people living in the desert)

Desertification = an expansion of dry conditions into areas with moisture that are next to deserts.

The Sahara Desert is expanding!!!

Natural erosion:

- Wind blows the desert sand (but this is a small reason).

Erosion because of human activity:

- **Overgrazing of livestock:** exposes the soil...no vegetation makes it easier for the dry conditions to take over.
- **Livestock trample** the vegetation & soil causing erosion of fertile ground.
- **Clearing land for farms** (slash and burn) expose the soil to wind which causes erosion.
- **Drilling for water:** increases the salt level in the soil. This prevents plants from growing back.

More people = more need for food. Farmers clear more and more land for crops, burn more wood for fuel, and over-farm on the land they already have (decreasing the land's nutrients).

Serengeti Plain

Tropical grassland that covers most of Africa.

Dry climate & hard soil = hard to grow crops or even trees...

BUT grass grows very very well (some grass is as tall as a human)

Rainforests

Sit along the equator in west-central Africa.

Many species of plants and animals live in the rainforest.

Farmers are slash-n-burning the forest to extinction. Experts believe over half the rainforest has been cut down in the last 100 years.

AFRICA'S WEALTH OF RESOURCES

LOTS AND LOTS of minerals, but not enough industries or money to develop them.

A Wealth of Minerals

One of the richest continents because of so many minerals (over half of the export money comes from minerals!!)

1. Gold
2. Platinum
3. Chromium – used in stainless steel
4. Cobalt
5. Copper
6. Phosphates
7. DIAMONDS!!!

South Africa

- world's leading producer of chromium (your stainless steel fridge)
- 80% of world's platinum
- 30% of world's gold

South Africa is the wealthiest nation on the African continent. Today it is a key trading partner to many Westernized nations (Europe & United States).

South Africa has more in common culturally with Europe than with other African countries.

Oil Resources

Lots of Oil in the North and along the west coast

North

- Libya
- Algeria

West

- Nigeria (the largest oil producer in Africa – most oil rigs)
- Gabon
- Angola

About 7% of all oil is found in these countries.

However, there's a problem with the oil in Africa.

EXAMPLE:

Recent discovery = Angola has the largest reserve, but most of the population won't see any of the money.

Why?...oil companies from the U.S. and Europe pay the Angola government for access to the oil. The Angola government doesn't have the technology or infrastructure to get the oil themselves. Since the government needs money NOW, they allow others to come in to get the oil as long as the others pay the government a fee.

(((DRAW AN ILLUSTRATION to help with understanding)))

This happens in most undeveloped nations all over the world... wealthy companies come in to pay for access to the natural resources leaving the undeveloped nation with only a small slice of the profit.

Where does most of the profit go?... to the already wealthy company.

DIVERSITY OF RESOURCES

1. Minerals
2. Oil
3. Coffee = 20% of the world's coffee
4. Lumber = deforestation in the rainforest region (show on a map)
5. Sugar
6. Cocoa (for chocolate)

Agriculture is the main industry for most people = 66% of people earn their living from farming.

I know what you're thinking: *If Africa is so wealthy in minerals, then why don't most people earn a living in THAT industry?*

TRANSITION NOTATION

BUT...!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Africa's great mineral wealth does NOT mean that the countries are very wealthy.

Why??? IMPERIALISM in the late 1800's by European countries.

These countries colonized Africa and took the natural resources for themselves. When the European countries left, most African countries were left on their own – and most have been slow to develop the modern infrastructure to get these resources out of the ground.

Map on p. 404 for colonialism examples