

Physical Geography

What You Will Learn ...

Main Ideas

1. Southern Africa's main physical feature is a large plateau with plains, rivers, and mountains.
2. The climate and vegetation of Southern Africa is mostly savanna and desert.
3. Southern Africa has valuable mineral resources.

The Big Idea

Southern Africa's physical geography includes a high, mostly dry plateau, grassy plains and rivers, and valuable mineral resources.

Key Terms and Places

escarpment, p. 436

veld, p. 429

Namib Desert, p. 439

pans, p. 439

TAKING NOTES As you read, take notes on the physical geography of Southern Africa. Use a chart like this one to organize your notes.

Physical Features	
Climate and Vegetation	
Resources	

If YOU lived there...

You are a member of the San, a people who live in the Kalahari Desert. Your family lives with several others in a group of circular grass huts. You are friends with the other children. Sometimes you help your mom look for eggs or plants to use for carrying water. Your water containers, clothes, carrying bags, and weapons all come from the resources you find in the desert. Next year you will move away to attend school in a town.

How will your life change next year?

BUILDING BACKGROUND Parts of Southern Africa have a desert climate. Little vegetation grows in these areas, but some people do live there. Most of Southern Africa's people live in cooler and wetter areas, such as on the high, grassy plains in the south and east.

Physical Features

Southern Africa has some amazing scenery. On a visit to the region, you might see grassy plains, steamy swamps, mighty rivers, rocky waterfalls, and steep mountains and plateaus.

Plateaus and Mountains

Most of the land in Southern Africa lies on a large plateau. Parts of this plateau reach more than 4,000 feet (1,220 m) above sea level. To form the plateau, the land rises sharply from a narrow coastal plain. **The steep face at the edge of a plateau or other raised area is called an escarpment.**

In eastern South Africa, part of the escarpment is made up of a mountain range called the Drakensberg (DRAH-kuhnz-buhrk). The steep peaks rise as high as 11,425 feet (3,482 m). Farther north, another mountain range, the Inyanga (In-YANG-guh) Mountains, separates Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Southern Africa also has mountains along its western coast.

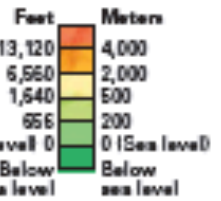


Interactive Map

Southern Africa: Physical

ATLANTIC OCEAN

20°E



COMOROS

MADAGASCAR

INDIAN OCEAN

Gape of Good Hope



Geography Skills

Regions Mountains and plateaus cover much of Southern Africa.

- 1. Locate** What two deserts lie on the Tropic of Capricorn?
- 2. Contrast** How do you think life in Comoros differs from life in Lesotho?

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1 Drakensberg means "Dragon Mountains" in Dutch. The Zulu, one of the peoples of the region, call the range Kwathlamba, which means "Piled-Up Rocks" or "Barrier of Pointed Spears."

Plains and Rivers

Southern Africa's narrow coastal plain and the wide plateau are covered with grassy plains. These flat plains are home to animals such as lions, leopards, elephants, baboons, and antelope.

Several large rivers cross Southern Africa's plains. The Okavango River flows from Angola into a huge basin in Botswana. This river's water never reaches the ocean. Instead it forms a swampy inland delta that is home to crocodiles, zebras, hippos, and other animals. Many tourists travel to Botswana to see these wild animals in their natural habitat.

The Orange River passes through the rocky Augrabies (oh-KRAH-bees) Falls as it flows to the Atlantic Ocean. When the water in the river is at its highest, the falls are several miles wide. The water tumbles down 19 separate waterfalls. The Limpopo River is another of the region's major rivers. It flows into the Indian Ocean. Features such as waterfalls and other obstacles block ships from sailing up these rivers. However, the rivers do allow irrigation for farmland in an otherwise dry area.

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY
features
characteristics

READING CHECK Generalizing What are Southern Africa's main physical features?

FOCUS ON READING

What generalization can you make about Southern Africa's climate?

Climate and Vegetation

Southern Africa's climates vary from east to west. The wettest place in the region is the east coast of the island of Madagascar. On the mainland, winds carrying moisture blow in from the Indian Ocean. Because the Drakensberg's high elevation causes these winds to blow upward, the eastern slopes of these mountains are rainy.

In contrast to the eastern part of the continent, the west is very dry. From the Atlantic coast, deserts give way to plains with semiarid and steppe climates.

Satellite View



Namib Desert

One of the world's most unusual deserts, the Namib lies on the Atlantic coast in Namibia. As this satellite image shows, the land there is extremely dry. Some of the world's highest sand dunes stretch for miles along the coast.

In spite of its harsh conditions, some insects have adapted to life in the desert. They can survive there because at night a fog rolls in from the ocean. The insects use the fog as a source of water.

Drawing Conclusions How have some insects adapted to living in the Namib Desert?

Savanna and Deserts

A large savanna region covers much of Southern Africa. Shrubs and short trees grow on the grassy plains of the savanna. In South Africa, these open grassland areas are known as the **veld** (VELT). As you can see on the map on the next page, vegetation gets more sparse in the south and west.

The driest place in the region is the **Namib Desert** on the Atlantic coast. Some parts of the Namib get as little as a half an inch (13 mm) of rainfall per year. In this dry area, plants get water from dew and fog rather than from rain.

Another desert, the Kalahari, occupies most of Botswana. Although this desert gets enough rain in the north to support grasses and trees, its sandy plains are mostly covered with scattered shrubs. Ancient streams crossing the Kalahari have drained into **low, flat areas, or pans**. On these flat areas, minerals left behind when the water evaporated form a glittering white layer.

Tropical Forests

Unlike the mainland, Madagascar has lush vegetation and tropical forests. It also has many animals found nowhere else. For example, some 50 species of lemurs, relatives of apes, live only on this island. However, the destruction of Madagascar's forests has endangered many of the island's animals.

READING CHECK Summarizing What is the climate and vegetation like in Southern Africa?

Resources

Southern Africa is rich in natural resources. Madagascar's forests provide timber. The region's rivers supply hydroelectricity and water for irrigation. Where rain is plentiful or irrigation is possible, farmers can grow a wide range of crops.



Interactive Map

Southern Africa: Vegetation

ATLANTIC OCEAN



Geography Skills

Regions Southern Africa has several different vegetation types.

- Identify** What area has the least vegetation?
- Contrast** How does Botswana's vegetation differ from Mozambique's vegetation?

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The region's most valuable resources, however, are minerals. Mines in South Africa produce most of the world's gold. In addition, South Africa, Botswana, and Namibia have productive diamond mines. Other mineral resources in Southern Africa include coal, platinum, copper, uranium, and iron ore. Although mining is very important to the economy of the region, the mines can have damaging effects on the surrounding natural environments.

READING CHECK Finding Main Ideas What are the main resources of Southern Africa?

SUMMARY AND PREVIEW Southern Africa is mainly covered with grassy plains and deserts atop a large plateau. Minerals are among the region's main resources. In the next section, you will learn about Southern Africa's history and culture.

Section 1 Assessment

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Online Quiz
KEYWORD: SK7 HPB

Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and Places

- Define** What is an escarpment?
 - Elaborate** How is the Okavango River different from most other rivers you have studied?
- Recall** Where in Southern Africa is the driest climate?
 - Explain** What caused minerals to collect in pans in the Kalahari Desert?
- Identify** What are Southern Africa's most valuable resources?
 - Elaborate** How do you think the gold and diamond mines have affected South Africa's economy?

Critical Thinking

- Categorizing** Review your notes and use a graphic organizer like this one to sort characteristics by location.

	East	West
Physical Features		
Climate and Vegetation		

FOCUS ON VIEWING

- Telling about the Physical Geography** Your TV news report might focus on some part of the geography of Southern Africa. Could you focus on the destruction of the rain forest or life in the desert?