

Africa - Our Continent

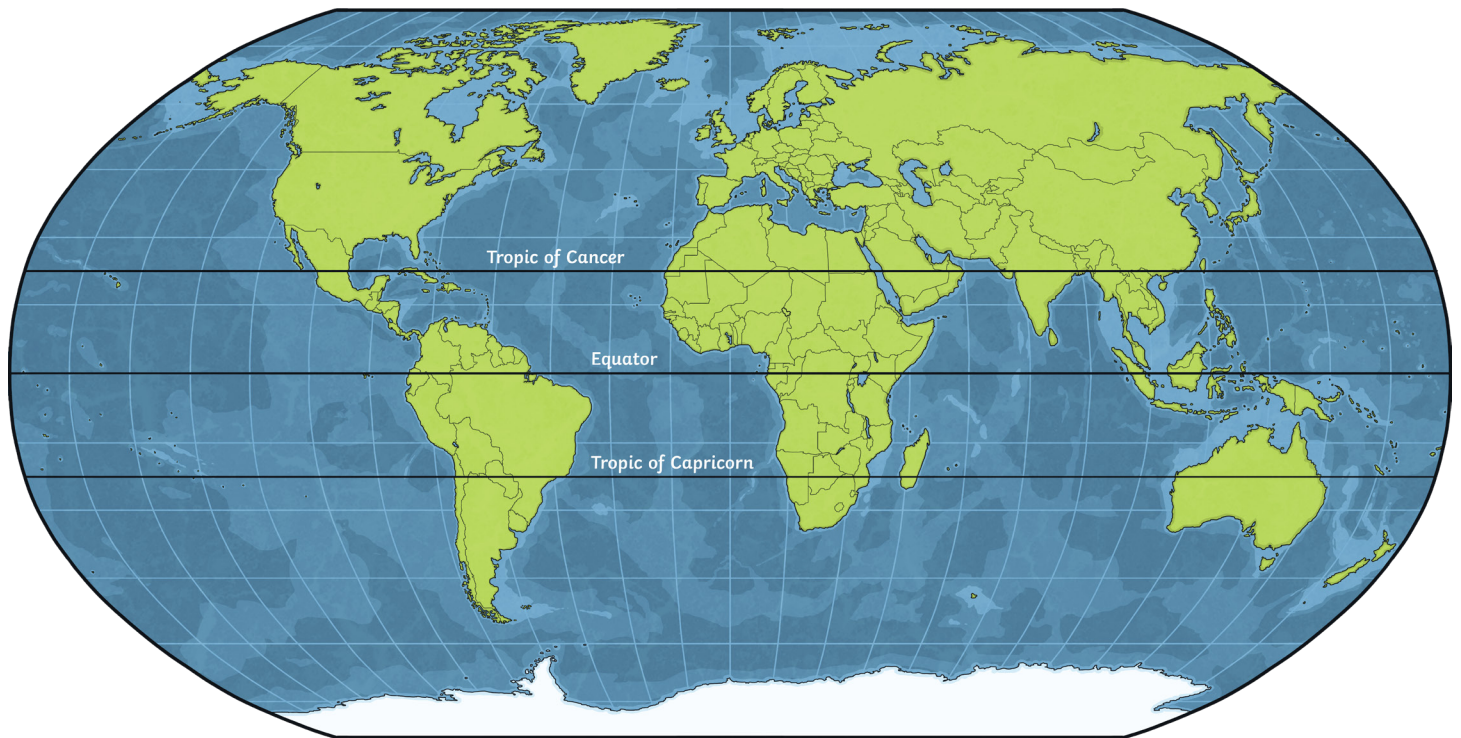
Africa, the continent we call home, was part of the single supercontinent on Earth called Pangaea. Pangaea was formed about 300 million years ago and was the largest landmass on Earth. About 250 million years ago, magma moving under the surface of Pangaea caused it to start splitting into two smaller pieces. A piece to the north known as Laurasia and a piece to the south known as Gondwanaland. The two pieces began to drift apart (continental drift) and break into smaller pieces about 180 million years ago. Gondwana split into Africa, the Indian subcontinent, South America, Madagascar, Australia, the Arabian Peninsula (Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen) and Antarctica.



Today Africa, as we know it, is the second-largest continent. It covers about one-fifth of the total land surface of Earth, covering approximately 30,365,000 square km. To the west of Africa is the Atlantic Ocean, and the east coast borders the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea. In the south, at the southernmost tip of South Africa at Cape Agulhas, the Atlantic and Indian Oceans meet.



The Equator (0° latitude) runs almost exactly through the middle of Africa. Most of Africa lies within the tropical regions between the Tropic of Cancer, in the north, and the Tropic of Capricorn, in the south. Because of the bulge shape, formed by West Africa, the largest section of the continent lies in the Northern Hemisphere.



Africa is also crossed by the prime meridian (0° longitude), which divides the Earth into the western and eastern hemispheres. The prime meridian also sets Coordinated Universal Time (UTC), which all countries use to measure their time zones.

Did you know that Madagascar, found off the east coast of Africa and one of the largest islands in the world, is actually part of the African continent? The small islands of Seychelles, Socotra, Comoros, Mauritius, Réunion, Ascension, St. Helena, Tristan da Cunha, Cape Verde, the Bijagós Islands, Bioko, São Tomé, Príncipe, the Azores, Madeira and the Canary Islands (to name a few) are all part of Africa as well.

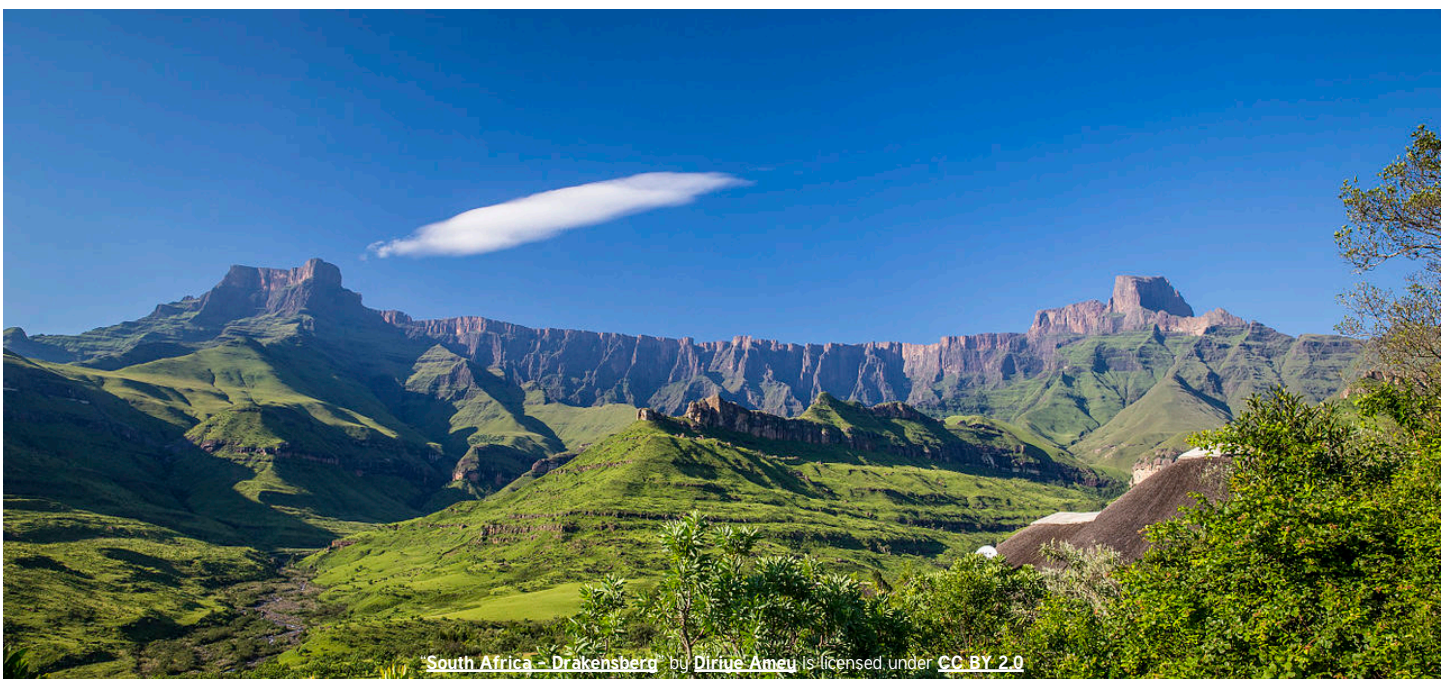


Did you know that Africa was joined to Asia by the Sinai Peninsula until the construction of the Suez Canal, built between 1859 and 1869?

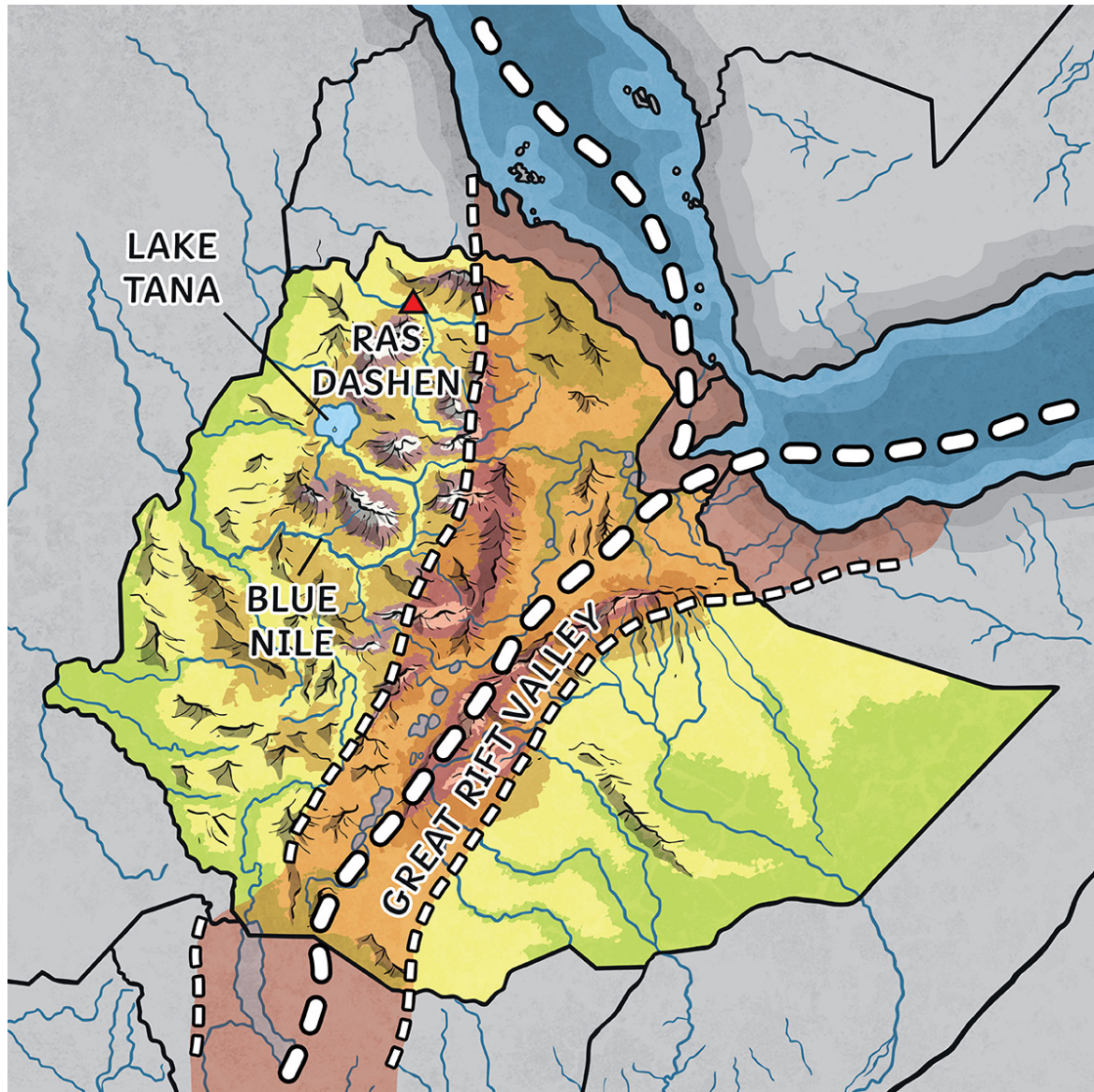
The whole of Africa is generally a large plateau consisting of ancient rocks rising steeply from narrow coastal strips. The plateau is higher in the southeast and tilts down toward the northeast. The northwestern part of Africa includes the Sahara desert, the Atlas Mountains and the Ahaggar Mountains in the Sahara.



The southeastern part includes the Ethiopian Plateau, the East African Plateau, and the Drakensberg range South Africa, where the plateau edge forms an escarpment.



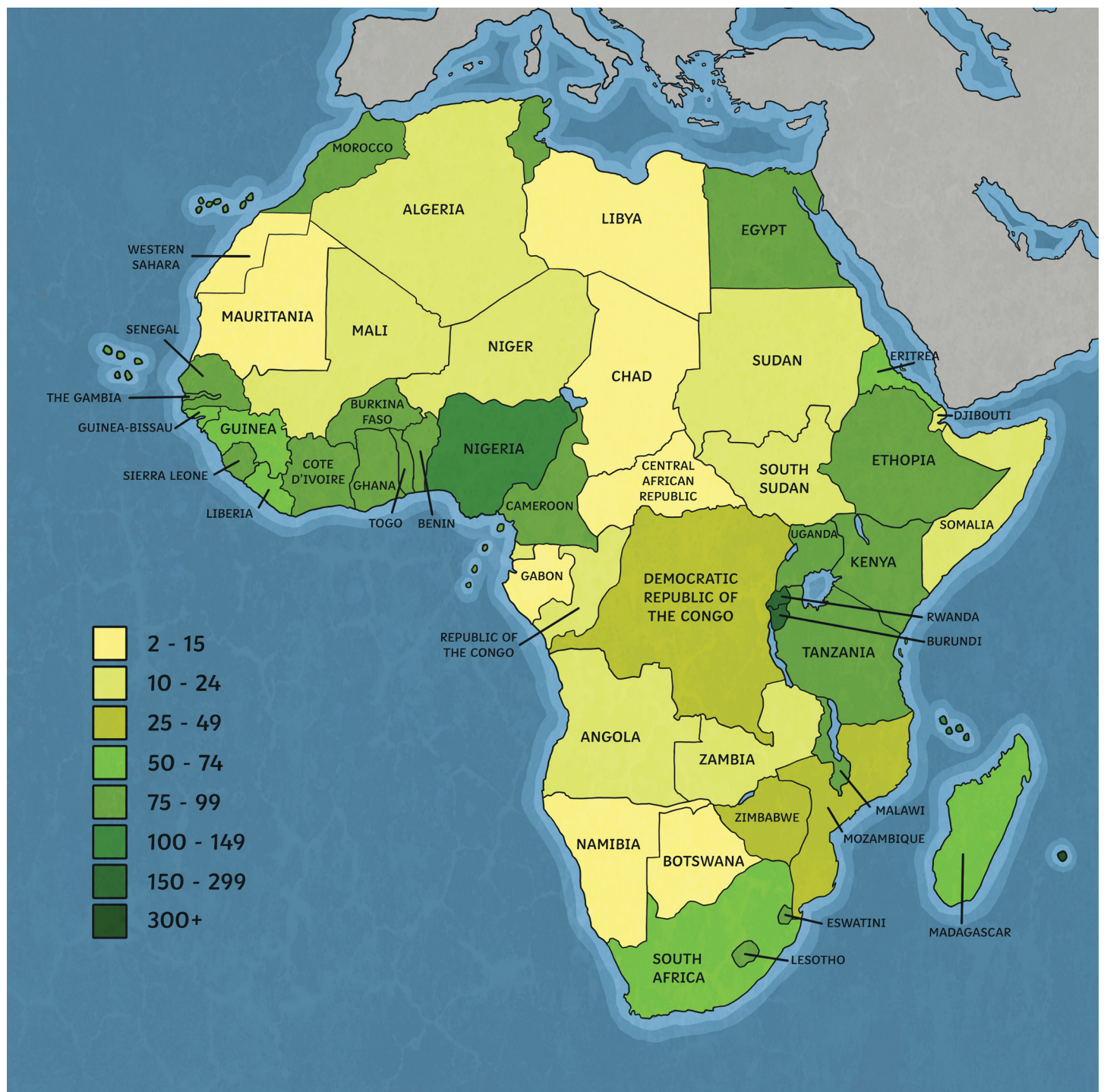
One of the most amazing geologic structures of Africa is the East African Rift System or Valley. It lies between 30° and 40° E and is one of the longest rifts, cracks, on the Earth's surface. It starts in Jordan in southwestern Asia, and extends southward, through eastern Africa all the way to Mozambique. The rift is approximately 6400km long and averages 48 to 64km wide.



Africa contains some of the world's largest reserves of fossil fuels, metallic ores, gems and precious metals. It also has a great diversity of fauna and flora. Africa is covered by lush equatorial rainforests and large populations of the wildlife, especially in the eastern and southern parts of the continent.

Did you know that Accra, Ghana is one of the closest cities in Africa to the prime meridian?

The wide range of climates, and other factors like accessibility to food and water, has influenced where humans have settled across Africa. Our continent has been inhabited continuously since the dawn of humanity, which is why Africa, and specifically South Africa, is called the Cradle of Humankind. Other parts of Africa however, especially areas like the Sahara, have only been inhabited for short periods due to the harshness of the climate. So although Africa is the second-largest continent, it is only home to about 10% of the population of the world.



Africa - Our Continent Questions

Circle the correct answers

1. Africa can be described as:

- a) The smallest continent.
- b) The biggest continent.
- c) The third biggest continent.
- d) The second biggest continent.

2. The line of latitude 0° , that runs through Africa, is known as the:

- a) Tropic of Cancer.
- b) Prime Meridian.
- c) Tropic of Capricorn.
- d) The Equator.

3. The Equator divides the Earth into:

- a) The western and southern hemisphere.
- b) The western and eastern hemisphere.
- c) The northern and southern hemisphere.
- d) The northern and eastern hemisphere.

4. The Prime Meridian is also known as:

- a) 0° longitude
- b) 0° latitude
- c) The international date line
- d) The Equator

5. Where does the East African Rift System run?

- a) From Egypt to Kenya.
- b) From Jordan to Mozambique.
- c) From the Red Sea to Zimbabwe.
- d) From Jordan to South Africa.

6. List three things that make Africa a unique continent.

7. Explain the purpose of the Prime Meridian?

8. Give a reason why Africa has large areas that are not inhabited.

9. Explain in a paragraph about how the continent of Africa was formed.

Africa - Our Continent Answers

1. d) The second biggest continent.
2. d) The Equator.
3. c) The northern and southern hemisphere.
4. a) 0° longitude.
5. b) From Jordan to Mozambique.
6. Any of the following: Africa contains some of the world's largest reserves of fossil fuels, metallic ores, gems and precious metals. It also has a great diversity of fauna and flora. Great Rift Valley. Cradle of Humankind.
7. The prime meridian also sets Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) which all countries use to measure their time zones.
8. Much of the continent is covered by deserts such as the Sahara.
9. Pangaea was formed about 300 million years ago and was the largest landmass on Earth. About 250 million years ago, magma moving under the surface of Pangaea caused it to start splitting into two smaller pieces. A piece to the north known as Laurasia and a piece to the south known as Gondwanaland. The two pieces began to drift apart and break into smaller pieces about 180 million years ago. Gondwana split into Africa.