

Landforms and Resources of Africa



A large plateau covers most of Africa, and natural resources made it appealing to European colonizers.

A Vast Plateau

Africa's shape and landforms are the result of its location in the southern part of the ancient supercontinent of Pangea. A huge plateau covers most of Africa, as it rises inland from narrow lowlands of the coast. The plateau is one of Africa's prominent physical features.



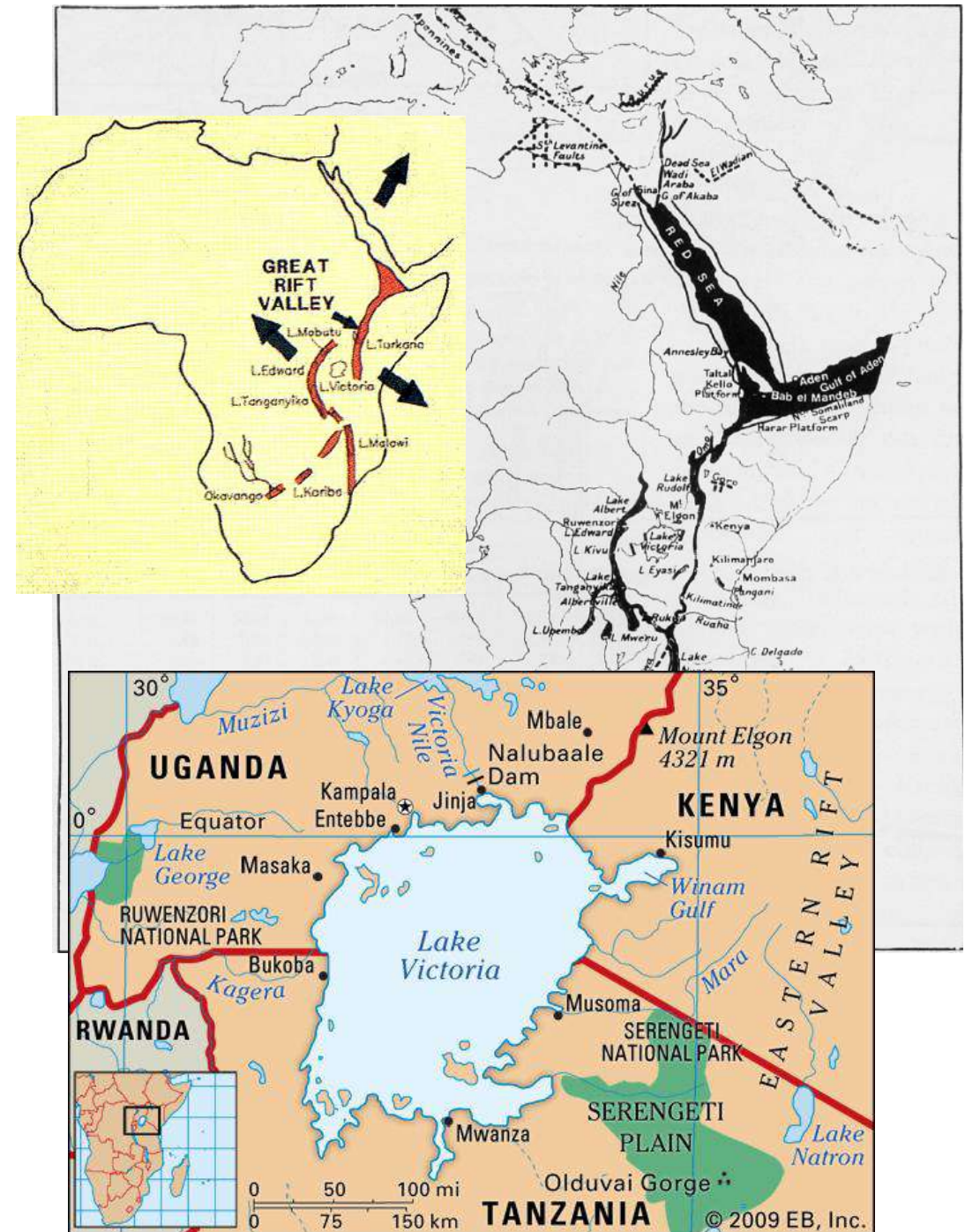
Basins and Rivers

Throughout this plateau lie several huge basins, a large dip in the earth- where water collects and rivers flow. The world's longest river, the Nile River- flows more than 4,000 miles through Uganda and Sudan into Egypt. Its waters have provided irrigation for the region for thousands of years. More than 95 percent of Egyptians depend on the Nile for their water.



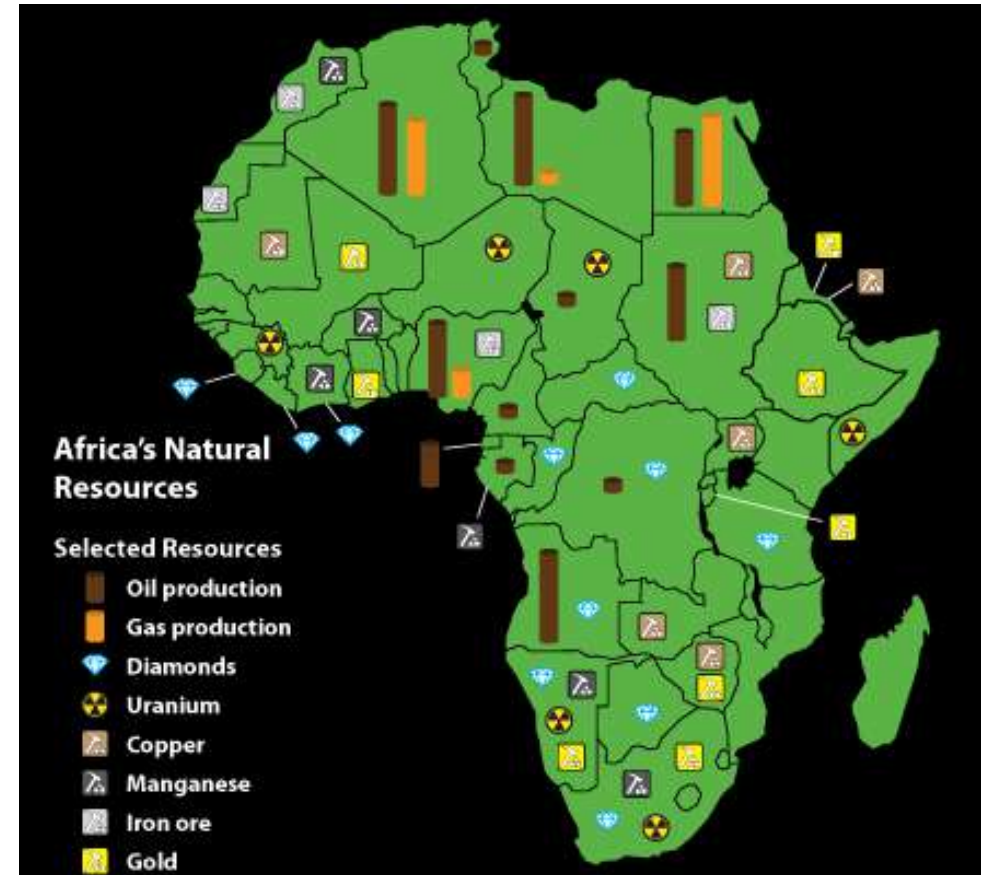
Africa's rivers contain waterfalls, rapids and gorges- which makes it difficult for extended travel. The Congo River forms the continent's largest network of waterways, but many obstacles, such as waterfalls, makes large portions of the river impassable.

The continent's most distinctive landforms are in east Africa. As continental plates pulled apart over millions of years, huge cracks appeared in the earth where the land sank creating thin valleys- called rift valleys. These valleys stretch over 4,000 miles and continue to pull away from the rest of Africa. A cluster of lakes formed at the bottoms of some of these rift valleys. Africa's largest lake, Lake Victoria- sits in a shallow basin between two rift valleys and is the world's second largest freshwater lake.



Africa's Wealth of Resources

Africa has a huge amount of the world's minerals, but many African countries lack the industrial base and money to develop them. African nation's contain large amounts of gold, platinum, cobalt, copper, diamonds and many other minerals. South Africa is a leading country in mineral production, producing nearly 80% of the world's platinum supply and 30% of the world's gold. Libya, Nigeria and Algeria are among the world's leading petroleum producers, with newly found oil reserves in places like Angola. However, many of the countries do not benefit from the money made in supplying these resources. For instance, American oil companies pay Angola a fee for drilling rights and the oil, but the government spends the money on an ongoing civil war. Many wars in Africa are caused by ethnic and religious divisions.



Diversity of Resources

From Rainforest to roaring rivers, Africa possesses an incredible diversity of resources. After oil, coffee is the most profitable commodity in Africa. Even though few Africans drink coffee, the continent grows 20% of the world's supply. Lumber is another important resource, but the loss of timber has depleted Africa's forests. Agriculture is the most important economic activity in Africa, with about 66% of African's earning a living through farming.

