

Australia's Land, Climate, and Vegetation

Australia's Flat Dry Land

1 Australia is among the world's most exotic and remote places. Think of animals as unusual as kangaroos and platypuses, and plants that look like feathers. Many aspects of Australia are now familiar to us. However, much about this region still fascinates us. It is a region of great contrasts – from modern skyscrapers to ranch stations; from uninhabitable deserts to densely populated cities; from the harsh scrubland of the Australian outback to the rain forests of the Queensland. Once remote and isolated, today Australia is strategically located along the Pacific Rim – one of the world's fastest growing economic regions.

2 Australia is both a continent and a country. The nation is the only country in the world which covers an entire continent. It covers an area nearly the size of the contiguous United States. It is the world's sixth largest country and the smallest, flattest, and (except Antarctica) driest continent.

A Place Without Water

3 Slightly inland from Australia's east coast, lie the Great Dividing Range. Look at a physical map of Australia and find the Great Dividing Range, located about 20 to 200 miles inland from the east coast. The Great Dividing Range is the country's largest highland area. These mountains, which in most places are barely more than hills, extend from the Cape York Peninsula all the way to Tasmania.

4 Nearly all of Australia west of the Great Dividing Range is arid plain or dry plateau. The Murray River is one of only a few permanent bodies of water in Australia. Most other lakes and rivers become full after heavy rains then dry up in the burning sun. Australians often refer to the central and western plains and plateaus as the **outback**.

Australia's vast deserts are mostly uninhabited, although more and more people are now exploring the interior of the continent. Robyn Davidson traveled with four camels and her dog, Diggity, across one of these areas, the Great Sandy Desert in northwest Australia. Her journal describes the trip. *"The area was rougher than anything we had crossed before...The setting was lovely, an infinitely extended bowl of pastel blue haze carpeting the desert, with crescent-shaped hills floating in the bowl and fire-colored sand dunes...In the far distance five violet, magical mountains soared above the desert..."*

Linking Climate to Landforms

5 Almost all of Australia is hot and dry. The only areas that get significant rainfall lie along the coast. Compare a climate map of Australia with a physical map (p. 749, 750). Notice that Australia's climate changes abruptly at the Great Dividing Range. These mountains block the flow of moisture carried by the winds blowing westward from the Pacific Ocean. As a result, Australia's interior receives little rain throughout the year.

Linking Plant Life to Climate

6 Compare climate and vegetation maps of Australia (. Notice the link between Australia's climate and its vegetation. Where rainfall is heaviest, rain forests grow. In drier areas, the forests thin out into woodlands. These woodlands consist mainly of eucalyptus trees, which Australians call "gums." Eucalyptus have long leaves and they are not bushy, characteristics that help them to survive frequent droughts. Closer to the center of the continent, where hardly any rain falls, shrubs and grasses grow. Acacia trees, or "wattles," are also able to survive in the grasslands.

Reading Review Questions

Directions: For each paragraph, find the Topic, Main Idea, and one supporting detail and write each in the space provided. Then answer each of the following sentences **in complete sentences**. Your responses should completely answer each question. Refer to the reading and any maps to help you to answer the questions.

Paragraph	Topic	Main Idea	Supporting Detail
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			

1. Australia is a flat dry continent. Give two supporting details to prove this statement.

2. Define Outback.

3. Which are the areas of Australia that receive significant rainfall?

4. What are 3 physical features that make Australia unique?