Along the River NILE



A long river, a long history

Sharon Parsons

Nelson Literacy Directions

For teachers' inspection ONLY

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Along the River Nile

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Dear Reader

Imagine if you could transport yourself to the source of the Nile River right now! To travel the entire length of the river, you would have to stop in Uganda, at the Murchison Falls. There you'd meet Jamie and his team who operate Kayak the Nile. On pages 28–29 of this book, you can see some great action shots of Jamie kayaking the Nile.

> "IT'S HARD NOT TO BE HAPPY ON SUCH AN AMAZING RIVER."
>
> JAMIE SIMPSON

Stop over in the Sudan, and you might also get the opportunity to observe the Nile Swimmers Project in action. It's an inspirational drowning-prevention program founded by two British lifesaving instructors. They train many people who live along the Nile, such as the Sudanese Sea Scouts, in water safety. Check out their story in Chapter 11, and enjoy your journey along the Nile.

My sincere thanks to the following people for their time, information, images and enthusiasm for this book:

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1 Introducing the Nile River

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The Nile has offered a life-sustaining environment for some of the world's oldest civilisations, and continues to do so for the 160 million people who rely upon it today. For those who learned to understand its features and seasonal changes, the Nile has been central not only to survival, but to the evolution of cultures, the development of agriculture and the flourishing of great civilisations, such as the ancient Egyptian kingdoms.

NILE MEANING

The Nile's name is derived from the Greek word *Neilos*, which means river valley.

For around 6 650 kilometres, the mighty Nile and its tributaries flow through 11 countries in northeast and central-east Africa – a vast region known as the Nile Basin. Today, as it has done for thousands of years, the impact of the Nile Basin's unpredictable rainfall and diverse climate zones continues to affect the rise and fall of the Nile River's water levels.



The Nile River's journey through eleven countries in Africa, from the south to the Mediterranean Sea in the north.

River Lengths

The Nile, Africa – 6 650 km

The Amazon, South America – 6 570 km

The Yangtze, China – 6 300 km

The Murray, Australia – 2 600

The Waikato, New Zealand – 435 km

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Demands on the Nile's Resources

In the past, people living along the Nile had to adapt to its seasonal variations. Today, however, careful management of this life-giving resource is helping to give stability to the growing population that depends on it.

Living in a region with limited fertile land and unpredictable rainfall makes water management critical. This, combined with the fact that so many different countries are reliant on the Nile River, means that governments and water experts must continually try to resolve conflict and inequality arising over use of this precious water resource. Every country has increasing demands for a greater share of the Nile River's water: to build more irrigation canals for crops (less than 10 per cent of the land that could be irrigated currently is), to build dams for water storage (for low-rainfall times of the year) and to generate electricity (only 15 per cent of people living in the Nile Basin have access to electricity).

The Nile: Longest River in the World

Depending on how it is measured, from its source in central Africa until it meets the Mediterranean Sea, there are varying estimates of the Nile's length. The most commonly accepted length is around 6 650 kilometres, which makes the Nile the world's longest river.

The Amazon: Second Longest River in the World

The Amazon in South America is 6 570 kilometres in length. The Amazon is the largest river in the world, by volume of water carried. On average, an incredible 219 million litres of water flows into the ocean from the Amazon every second. That's around 20 percent of all the fresh water flowing into the world's oceans.

The Yangtze: Third Longest River in the World

The Yangtze in China is 6 300 kilometres in length. The world's largest hydroelectric project (Three Gorges Dam, Hubei province) is on the Yangtze River.

The Murray: Longest River in Australia

The Murray in New South Wales and South Australia is 2 600 kilometres in length.

The Waikato: Longest River in New Zealand

The Waikato in the North Island is 435 kilometres in length.

2 The Nile Basin

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The Nile Basin is the area that encompasses the Nile River (including its associated tributaries, lakes and waterways) as well as the agricultural lands bordering the river. The Nile Basin covers an area that is equal to about 10 per cent of Africa, and includes parts of eleven countries.

Nile Basin Initiative

In 1999, the governments of ten countries in the Nile Basin (all the Nile Basin countries except Eritrea) formed the Nile Basin Initiative. Its key objective is "to achieve sustainable socio-economic development through the equitable utilization of, and benefit from, the common Nile Basin water resources".

THE NILE DELTA

In the shape of a triangle, the Nile Delta is about 160 kilometres long and 240 kilometres wide at the coast, and has highly fertile agricultural land, where rice and other crops are grown. Along its coastline are lagoons, wetlands, lakes and sand dunes. Its total area is estimated to be about 25 000 square kilometres.

The Nile Delta Ecosystem



The Nile Delta is one of the world's most vital migration stopovers for millions of birds, such as white pelicans, white storks, black storks and European cranes.

a migrating stork

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425 million People in 11 Nile Basin Countries

Population of Countries in the Nile Basin

There are 11 countries in the Nile Basin, with a total population of about 425 million. Of this population, over 160 million people are directly affected by and reliant on the Nile River. By 2050, the population of the region is expected to double.

- Egypt: 83 million
- Ethiopia: 82 million
- Democratic Republic of the Congo: 68 million
- Tanzania: 45 million
- Kenya: 41 million
- Sudan: 37 million
- Uganda: 35 million
- Rwanda: 11 million
- South Sudan: 9 million
- Burundi: 9 million
- Eritrea: 5 million

On 9 July 2011, the Republic of South Sudan gained independence from the Republic of Sudan.

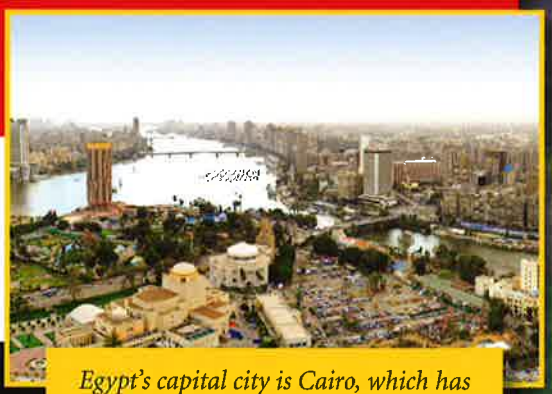
Eritrea is not an official member of the Nile Basin Initiative, but takes an interest in its management.



The Arab Republic of Egypt

Egypt is a desert-dominated country with minimal rainfall and less than four per cent of its total land suitable for growing crops. As a result, its reliance on the Nile River and the fertile land around it is absolute.

About 25 per cent of its working population are engaged in agricultural jobs and it is unlawful to build on land suitable for crops.



Egypt's capital city is Cairo, which has a population of nearly 20 million people.

In 1959 Egypt and Sudan made an agreement to share the Nile River's resources, with Egypt allocated 75% of the water and Sudan allocated 25%. That law is still in place and a source of ongoing discussion amongst other countries in the Nile Basin.

3 Journey Along the Nile River

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TEXT TYPE
Description

The Nile River in Africa is the world's longest river, with a five-thousand-year history of human settlement and agricultural activity along its fertile banks. The civilisations that grew up along the Nile's long path included some of the world's earliest urban, literate societies, as well as many nomadic and village-based cultures. There are an array of agricultural, architectural and artistic traditions and techniques that have been practised by the peoples living along the Nile for thousands of years.



an aerial view of the Nile River today

One River, Many Countries

The Nile River and its tributaries flow through 11 different countries. The Nile is actually an intricate series of rivers, streams, waterfalls and rapids, combining to become a single mighty river. The main part of the Nile River begins in Uganda, flows through South Sudan and Sudan and finally reaches Egypt. There, the river flows past the famous pyramids, through the city of Cairo, and further north into the Nile Delta at the mouth of the river, where it joins the Mediterranean Sea.



the White Nile, Murchison Falls, Uganda

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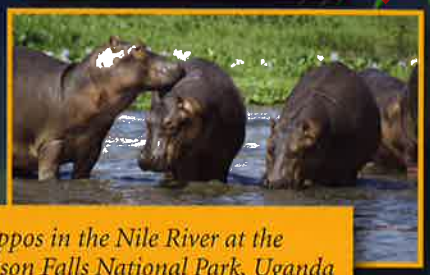
Diverse Environments and Wildlife

The Nile River winds its way through diverse and often impenetrable environments. It passes through a huge freshwater lake (Lake Victoria), tropical rainforests, bird-rich wetlands, grasslands, desert, hippo-filled marshes, swamps, mountains, plateaus and a river delta. As the Nile River winds its way northwards, it flows though increasingly expansive areas of desert in Sudan, until it finally reaches Egypt, which is about 96 per cent desert. Here, the Nile is the only plentiful source of fresh water.

A rich variety of plant and animal life has also made a home along the river's long and circuitous route northwards. Many animals, such as crocodiles and elephants, live in or beside the river year round, and others migrate with the seasons. Many migratory birds stop over in one of the world's largest wetlands, Al-Sudd (which means "the papyrus" in Arabic), in South Sudan.



Murchison Falls on the White Nile, Uganda



hippos in the Nile River at the Murchison Falls National Park, Uganda



an elephant on the shore of the Nile River in Uganda

The White Nile

There are three main streams that form the Nile River. In the south, Kagera River in Burundi flows into Lake Victoria, the second-largest freshwater lake in the world. Lake Victoria is so vast that it extends into three countries: Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. The water then flows on from Lake Victoria in a number of streams that become the river known as the White Nile. Its name comes from the colour of its water, which is a cloudy grey due to particles from a whitish clay sediment.

The White Nile continues for about 800 kilometres. It flows through Lake Kyoga and Lake Albert, and on into South Sudan. There it is joined by the river Bahr al Ghazal. At that junction, the White Nile flows northwards through South Sudan's grasslands, tropical rainforests and swamps. There, the White Nile meets the Blue Nile.

NILE RIVER'S SOURCE

The furthest source of the Nile River has long been debated, but in recent times, Nile Basin authorities agree that the river's southernmost source is a headstream called the Ruvyironza in Burundi.



the White Nile in Uganda