

Rivers – Physical Features

Rivers are powerful natural features that shape the land through which they flow. A river's journey begins at its **source** – usually a spring, lake, or an area of high ground such as a mountain, where rainwater or melting snow collects and begins to flow downhill.

As the river moves downhill, small streams called **tributaries** join it, steadily increasing its volume and speed. The river flows within a **channel**, which has **banks** on either side and a **bed** at the bottom.

In its upper course, near the source, the river flows quickly and cuts steeply downwards, forming **V-shaped valleys** and sometimes **waterfalls**. As it reaches its middle course, the gradient becomes gentler, the river widens, and it begins to develop sweeping bends called **meanders**. When a meander becomes so curved that it is cut off from the river, it forms an **ox-bow lake**.

In the lower course, the river moves slowly across wide, flat land called a **floodplain**. When the river floods, it deposits **silt** – fine particles of rock and soil – which makes the surrounding land very fertile.

Finally, the river reaches its **mouth**, where it empties into the sea or a lake. Sediment dropped here may build up to form a **delta**.

Questions

1. Name three possible locations for a river's source.
2. What do tributaries do to a river?
3. What are the two parts that make up a river's channel?
4. What shape of valley does a river form in its upper course?
5. What is a meander?
6. How is an ox-bow lake formed?
7. What is a floodplain?
8. What is silt?
9. Why is land near a floodplain often very fertile?
10. Why do you think waterfalls are more likely to form in the upper course of a river than in the lower course?



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