

Encyclopedic Entry

landform

For the complete encyclopedic entry with media resources, visit:
<http://education.nationalgeographic.com/encyclopedia/landform/>

A **landform** is a feature on the Earth's surface that is part of the **terrain**. **Mountains**, **hills**, **plateaus**, and **plains** are the four major types of landforms. Minor landforms include **buttes**, **canyons**, **valleys**, and **basins**.

Tectonic plate movement under the Earth can create landforms by pushing up mountains and hills. **Erosion** by water and wind can wear down land and create landforms like valleys and canyons. Both processes happen over a long period of time, sometimes millions of years.

It took 6 million years, in fact, for the Colorado River to carve out the **Grand Canyon** in the U.S. state of Arizona. The Grand Canyon is 446 kilometers (277 miles) long.

The highest landform on Earth is a mountain: **Mount Everest** in Nepal. It measures 8,850 meters (29,035 feet) above **sea level**. It is part of the Himalaya range that runs across several countries in Asia.

Landforms can exist under water in the form of **mountain ranges** and basins under the sea. The **Mariana Trench**, the deepest landform on Earth, is in the South Pacific Ocean.

VOCABULARY

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
basin	<i>noun</i>	a dip or depression in the surface of the land or ocean floor.
butte	<i>noun</i>	single hill or rock formation that rises sharply from a flat landscape, usually in a desert.
canyon	<i>noun</i>	deep, narrow valley with steep sides.
Earth	<i>noun</i>	our planet, the third from the Sun. The Earth is the only place in the known universe that supports life.
erosion	<i>noun</i>	act in which earth is worn away, often by water, wind, or ice.
Grand Canyon	<i>noun</i>	large gorge made by the Colorado River in the U.S. state of Arizona.
hill	<i>noun</i>	land that rises above its surroundings and has a rounded summit, usually less than 300 meters (1,000 feet).
Himalaya Mountains	<i>noun</i>	mountain range between India and Nepal.

landform	<i>noun</i>	specific natural feature on the Earth's surface.
Mariana Trench	<i>noun</i>	deepest place on Earth, located in the South Pacific Ocean at 11,000 meters (36,198 feet) at its deepest.
mountain	<i>noun</i>	landmass that forms as tectonic plates interact with each other.
mountain range	<i>noun</i>	series or chain of mountains that are close together.
Mount Everest	<i>noun</i>	highest spot on Earth, 8,850 meters (29,035 feet). Mount Everest is part of the Himalaya range, in Nepal and China.
plain	<i>noun</i>	flat, smooth area at a low elevation.
plateau	<i>noun</i>	large region that is higher than the surrounding area and relatively flat.
sea level	<i>noun</i>	base level for measuring elevations. Sea level is determined by measurements taken over a 19-year cycle.
tectonic plate	<i>noun</i>	large, moveable segment of the Earth's crust.
terrain	<i>noun</i>	topographic features of an area.
valley	<i>noun</i>	depression in the Earth between hills.
wind	<i>noun</i>	movement of air (from a high pressure zone to a low pressure zone) caused by the uneven heating of the Earth by the sun.

For Further Exploration

Websites

- National Geographic Science: Surface of the Earth



© 1996–2015 National Geographic Society. All rights reserved.