Rivers

**How Are Rivers Made?**

Rivers are large natural streams which flow to the sea or another body of water, such as a lake. Rivers begin life at the source which could be a natural spring, melted ice and snow, or rainwater running down the land. Most rivers start as a tiny stream, high up a mountain. Smaller streams merge into one larger channel and erode the land away until a river is formed. When the ground grows less steep, the river becomes wider and flows more slowly. Moisture from the land nearby finds its way to the river to add even more water. Often, it is forced to wind (meander) around the land more. Most rivers end up in the sea at the ‘mouth’ of the river.

**Stages of a River**

A river can be divided into different stages which look and act differently.

The stages are called: upper course, middle course and lower course.

**Upper course**

The source of a river is often found in upland areas which are mountainous and where there are steep slopes. There are high levels of precipitation, which means the high volume of water flows quickly overland, this results in the fastest flow on the whole river’s journey. The river bed is rocky and narrow. As the river flows, it moves over rocks – the speed of the water creates energy and the water is powerful enough to transport material like rocks and boulders.

**Middle course**

As the river moves into the middle course, the land becomes flatter. The river becomes wider and deeper and begins to loop, curve or meander. In the middle course, as the river moves it continues to erode so the shape of the river is constantly changing. As well as eroding, the river also transports and deposits soil and other material further along the path.

**Lower course**

In the lower course, the land is now very flat. The valley has changed from v-shaped to u-shaped. This means the valley is now wide with smooth sides. The river’s flow has now slowed. Its width is at its widest. As the river flows into the sea, it may have an estuary, which is a wide channel that flows out to sea.

**River Life**

Rivers are essential for life as we know it. They carry water and important nutrients all around the earth and provide habitats for millions of species of plants and animals. Every river is different and supports nature in its own unique way. Without rivers, many of our forests, lakes, cities and lives would not be the same. Humans use rivers in many different ways. In some countries around the world, rivers are a source of drinking water for people who live alongside them. Others use their rivers for washing and cleaning clothes. All over the world, fishing takes place so that communities nearby have enough to eat and other types of goods are transported on rivers to trade (with other locations). Did you know millions of people around the world rely on rivers to make their living?