

Geographical Links – A Geographical Pastiche

In Chambers' English Dictionary a "pastiche" is defined as a "jumble," a "potpourri," in other words a colourful mixture, a miscellany. Our course will have order to it but will be composed of a colourful mix of landscapes and adventures. Where appropriate I'll link a landscape to a well-known painting.

The Geographical Links courses are always PowerPoint presentations because geography is very visual, and I do not have the textbooks and magazines in the US that we could use as illustrations. I try to include some discussion, I invite suggestions from the group and sometimes set small tasks to be done at home, but always voluntary. Class participants can sit back and listen, or they can be more involved.

The main theme of the course is landscapes, both natural and man-made. To make the subject manageable I have grouped landscapes into several categories. For example: watery landscapes which may well occupy two sessions, one for fresh water landscapes and one for salt water (alternatively land based water, which can be salty, and the oceans). How does water move from the sea to the land and back to the sea? What happens to it en route? And, principally, how do people affect its quality, its nature, its use? It would be easy to spend all 7 sessions on water! Partly for this reason it would be good if participants let me know if they have any particular requests – for example they really want to know about some particular river, aquifer, marsh or aspect of the water cycle.

I shall devote one session to arid and semi-arid landscapes. Why are some regions so very dry? How do people manage to live in such areas? Have they always been dry? Do cave paintings of animals known to live in more humid areas indicate that the climate was once wetter in that area or simply that some people have traveled and are illustrating what they have seen elsewhere?

Volcanic landscapes are always fascinating, and I'll select a few with your help. They are likely to include Iceland and the Mediterranean area and the causes of the vulcanicity. In order to reduce time spent on the mechanics of plate tectonics, I may prepare handouts for everyone that can be looked at in advance by those who are interested and then speed through this topic in order to concentrate on the resulting landscapes and consequences.

By iconic landscapes I mean those well known, and often touristy, areas of interest. These could include Uluru in Australia (unless already covered under deserts), limestone towers of Guilin in China, the Grand Canyon in the US, the Amazon rainforest, the Dutch polders . . . ? The choice will depend on what has already been covered and requests from the group.

The impact of man, both good and injurious, will be examined as we go through the course, but it might develop into a session of its own. Examples might include: building on barrier islands, withdrawing too much water from aquifers, destruction of rainforest in S E Asia for palm oil, the notorious Aral Sea disaster plus good news from Kazakhstan, plastic in the oceans and elsewhere.

The final session will be about the British Isles and will be shaped by possible requests from the group. We'll go from pre-historic Skara Brae (a 5,000 year old settlement in the Orkneys) via Stonehenge, to the growth of London. We'll look at the Giant's Causeway and Edinburgh Castle and

we'll visit several English pubs! We may even play the pub sign game that keeps children engaged on long car journeys.

Leader: Helen Goddard is a former geography teacher in the United Kingdom.

Thursdays: 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., 7 weeks: September 26 through November 7

Location: PSRC, Maximum 22 seats