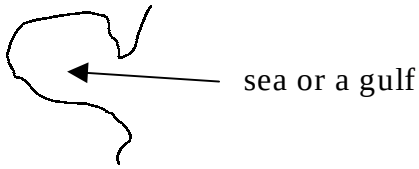
Physical Features

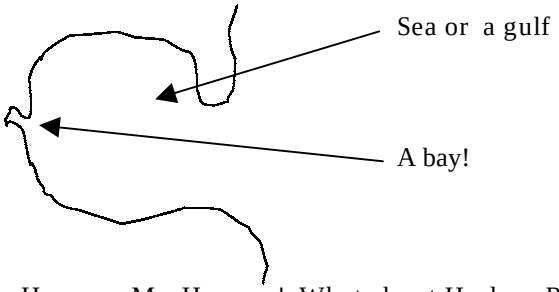
Political Maps – maps that show boundaries of countries, states, cities, etc. They show how humans have divided up the earth.

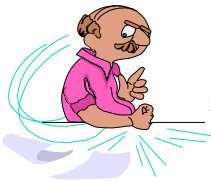
Physical Maps – maps that show the natural and geographic features of the earth – mountains, rivers, plains, etc. These maps show the earth the way it really is.

Seas & Gulfs – *large* bodies of water partially enclosed by land. Examples: Red Sea, Mediterranean Sea, Persian Gulf, and the Gulf of Mexico.



Bays - *small* bodies of water partially surrounded by land. Examples include Chesapeake Bay, San Francisco Bay, Tampa Bay, Bay of Fundy.



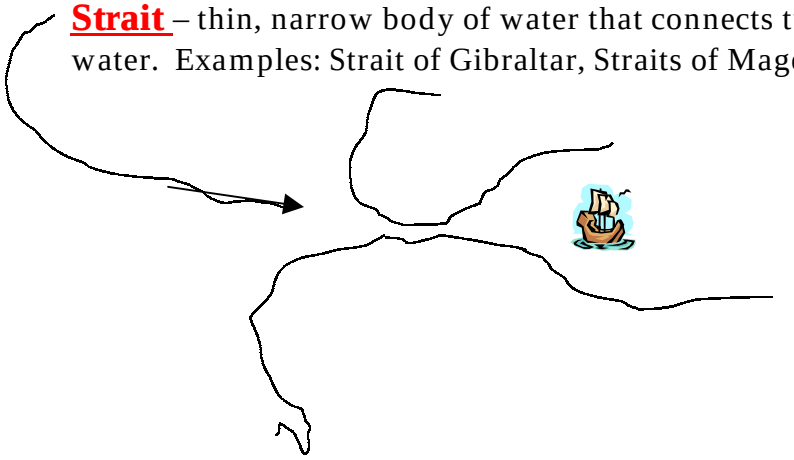


Oooo, oooo, Mr. Herman, Mr. Herman! What about Hudson Bay. It's a bay and it's not small. Yes your right Hudson Bay is huge and yet it is named a bay. The reason for this is that on occasion people ignore rules and definitions and name bodies of water names that are pleasing to them. Apparently Henry Hudson didn't want to call his body of water a sea or a gulf and so, despite the fact that it is wrong, decided to call it a bay. This has caused confusion for school children around the world for hundreds of years but it's not the only example. The Bay of Biscay, Bengal Bay and Baffin Bay are also seas and gulfs misnamed as bays. It's always confusing when people don't follow rules!

Harbors - small bodies of water that are protected and deep enough to provide anchorage for ships. These are many times found in bays but not all bays are good harbors because they are too shallow.

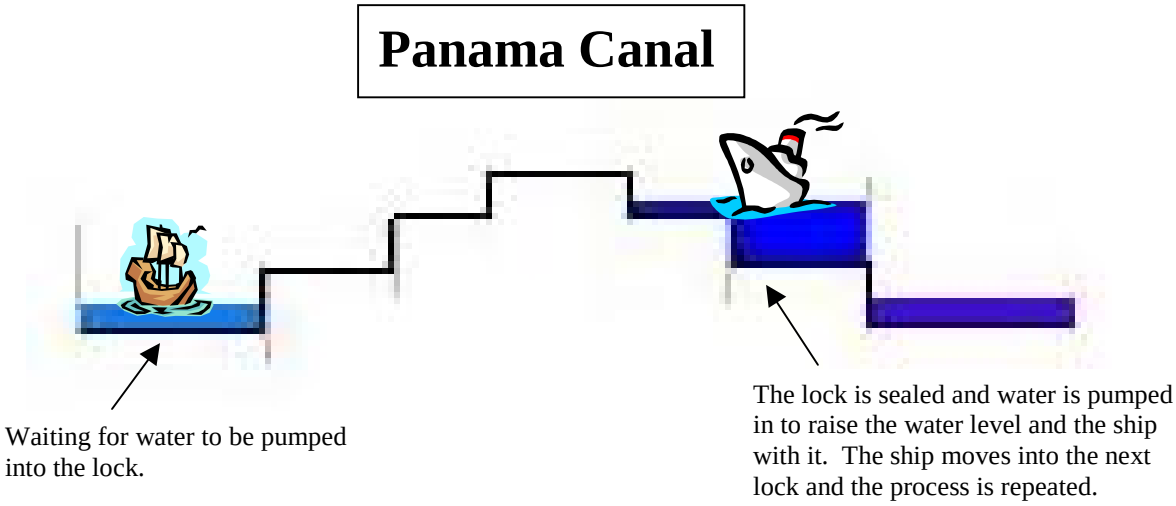
Port – city or town that has a harbor for ships

Strait – thin, narrow body of water that connects two larger bodies of water. Examples: Strait of Gibraltar, Straits of Magellan, Bering Strait.



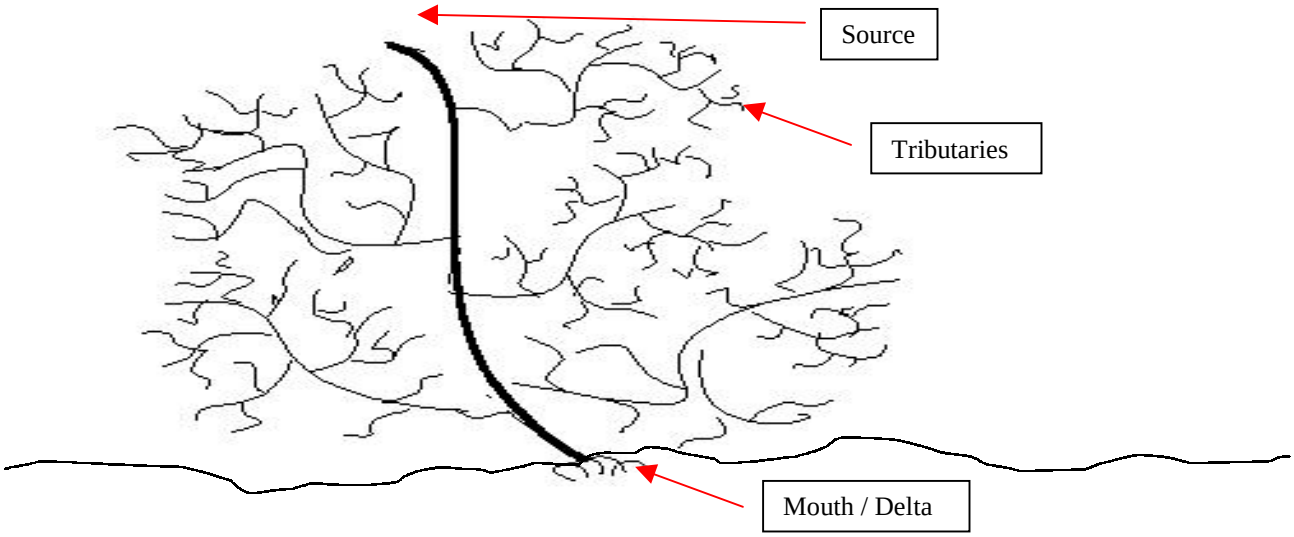
Canal – man-made waterway to connect two larger bodies of water. Best examples are the Panama and Suez Canals.

How do canals work? Canals aren't big ditches dug into the land. They are rather more complicated that that. Most large important canals are a series of locks. The locks lock the water in and gradually bring ships across the land. Check out the diagram below.



Tributaries – smaller streams and rivers that flow into larger rivers – Oil Creek is a tributary of the Allegheny River which in turn is a tributary of the Ohio River which in turn is a tributary of the Mississippi.

River systems - a river and all of its streams – The Mississippi is made up of over 1,000 smaller streams and rivers that flow into it. Check out my river system below.

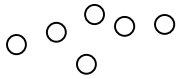


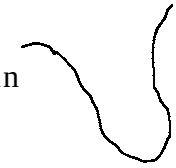
Source - the beginning of a river

Mouth - where a river enters into the sea

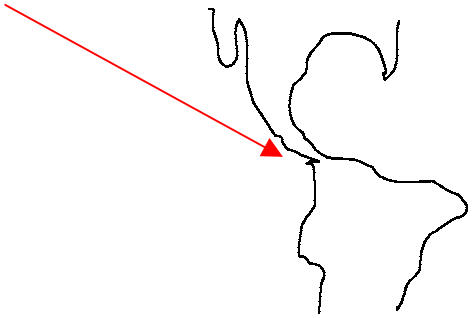
Delta - △ triangle shaped mouth of a river. As a river nears the sea, it slows down. All the sediment and dirt that the river was carrying now settles to the bottom building up the river bottom. As it keeps building it forces the river to split up into new channels. The river delta is extremely fertile soil.

Island – body of land completely surrounded by water 

Archipelago - chain or a group of islands 

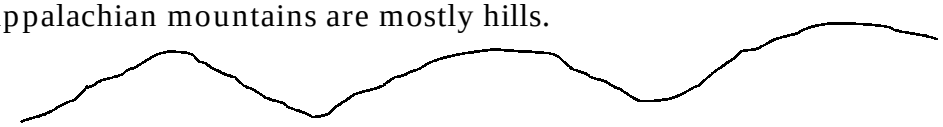
Peninsula - body of land surrounded on three sides by water – an example is Florida. 

Isthmus – narrow, thin strip of land that connects two larger bodies of land – examples are the Isthmus of Panama which we built a canal into.

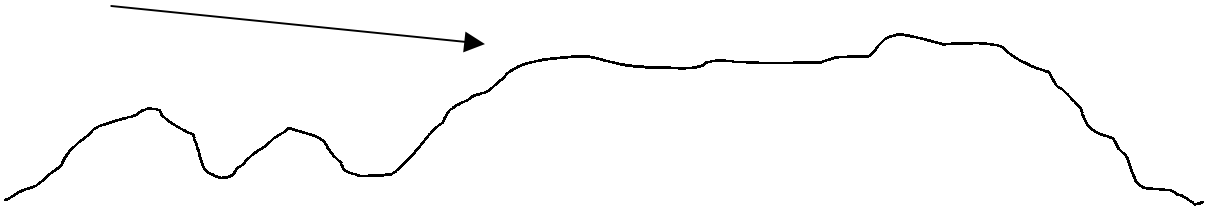


Mountains - high, rugged landforms

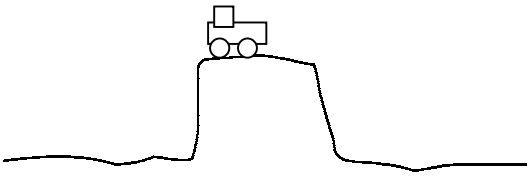
Hills - ancient mountains worn down by time. They are smaller and smoother. The Appalachian mountains are mostly hills.



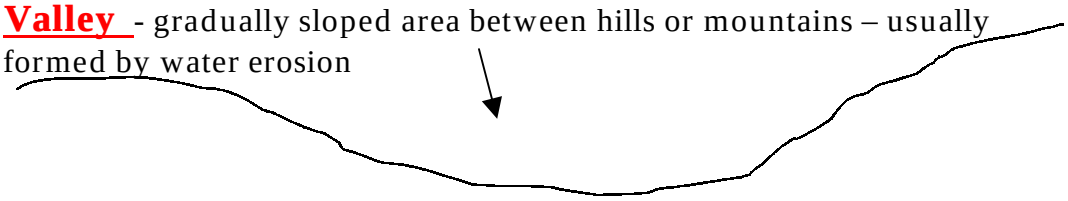
Plateau - level area at high elevation. They may have steep sides.



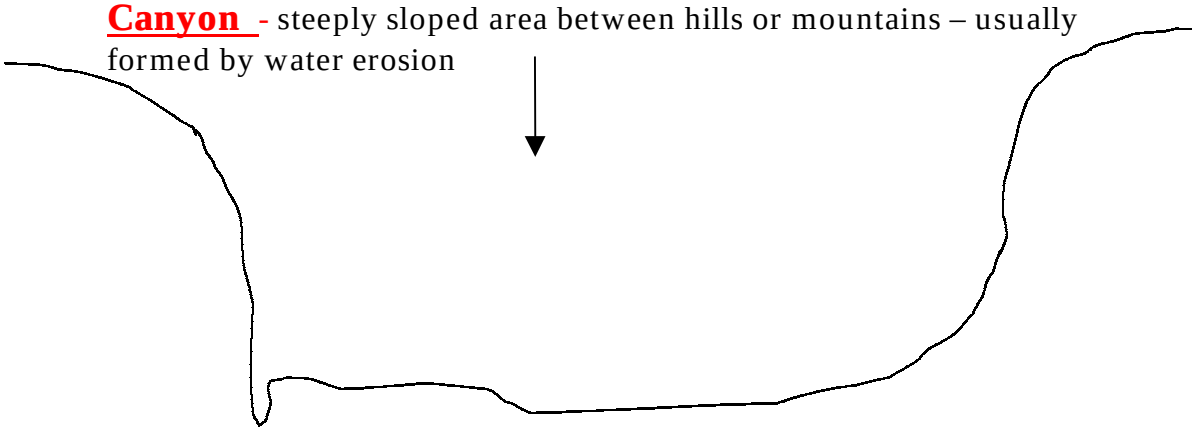
Mesa – small plateaus.



Valley - gradually sloped area between hills or mountains – usually formed by water erosion

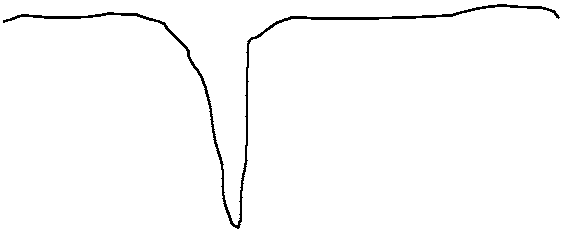


Canyon - steeply sloped area between hills or mountains – usually formed by water erosion

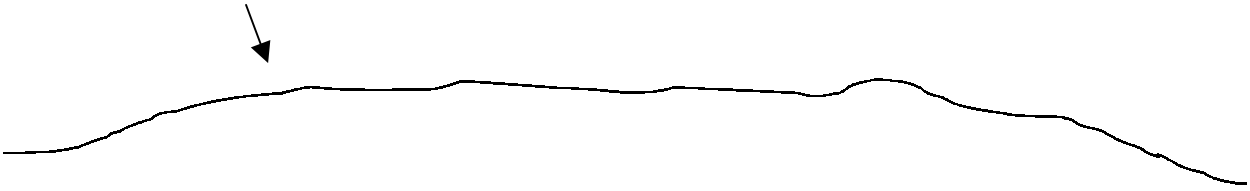


Gorge - a small canyon.

Ravine - a narrow, steep sided valley usually formed by water erosion.



Ridge – a long narrow elevation of land



Sea Level – height of the oceans