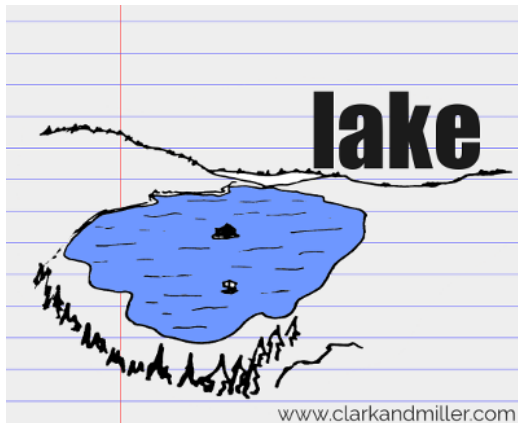


Ask and Talk About Geographical Features

Let's learn about it! Here are 47 geographical features in English.

Lake



What is it?

Ok. We all know this one, right?

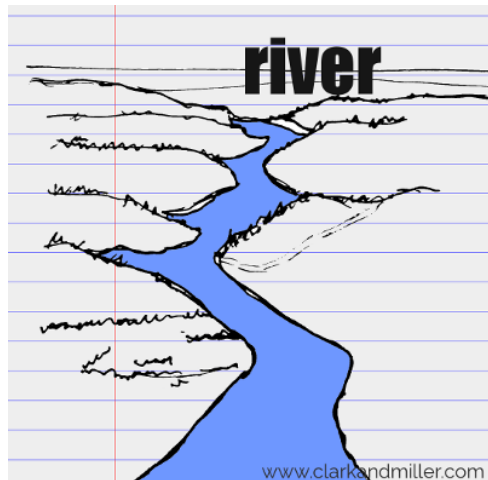
It's a big body of water, often found in the mountains.

Fun fact!

In the Philippines, there's an island in a lake on an island in a lake on an island.

No, really.

River



What is it?

Ok. We know this one, too – water running down towards the sea.

Sometimes in a panic and sometimes taking it easy.

Fun fact!

It seems that there's a river flowing *under* the Amazon that's even longer and even wider:
The Hamza River.

Go and check it out if you feel like digging four kilometers underground.

Stream



What is it?

A stream is just a small river.

Phrases with “stream”

We often associate streams with things flowing.

To stream in

When you set up a lemonade stall outside your house, maybe no one will come. But once everyone starts hearing about how awesome your lemonade is, then people will start **streaming in**.

We often talk about light streaming in as well:

“When she opened the curtains, sunlight came streaming into the room, killing all the Gremlins.”

We also have **streaming video**. And then there’s **stream of thought** – when our thoughts jump from one to another without us controlling them.

Brook



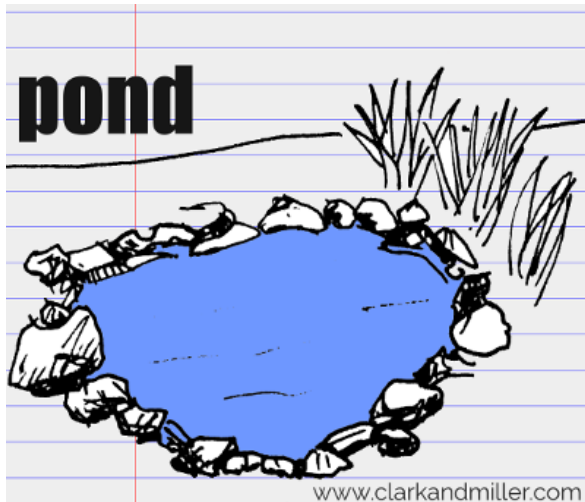
What is it?

“Brook” is sometimes defined as “a small stream” and sometimes “a small river.”

Essentially, it’s the same as a stream.

When I think of a brook, I can hear the sound of the water running and feel the warm sun on my face. It feels more ideal and natural.

Pond



What is it?

A pond is basically a small lake.

You can even have one in your garden.

Phrases with “pond”

A big fish in a small pond

Someone who is overqualified or has a lot of influence in a small area.

Imagine trying to become the most successful actor in Los Angeles. Kind of impossible, right?

Now imagine trying to become the most successful actor in the village of Scratchy Bottom (a real place in Dorset, I promise!).

Much easier, right? That's because you're a **big fish in a small pond**.

Across the pond

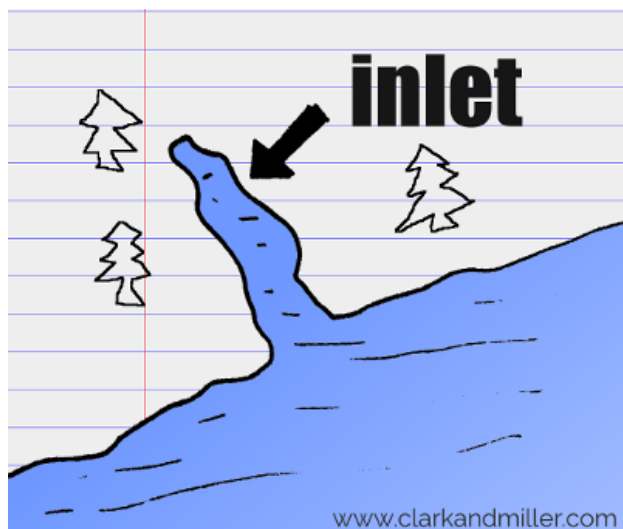
You're in the UK, but your favorite cousin lives in New York?

She lives **across the pond**.

"Across the pond" means the US when you're in the UK or the UK when you're in the US.

"The pond" is obviously referring to the Atlantic Ocean – the world's second-biggest ocean (and noticeably much larger than a pond).

Inlet



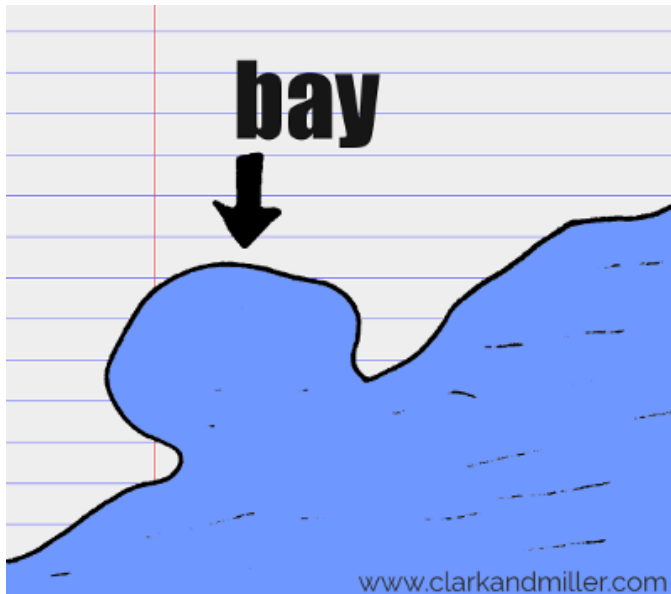
What is it?

Ok. We're in for some fun and small differences between "inlet," "bay," gulf," "lagoon" and "cove."

First of all, an inlet is the general word for ALL of these things.

It's basically when the edge of the sea, ocean, river or lake goes into the land a bit.

Bay

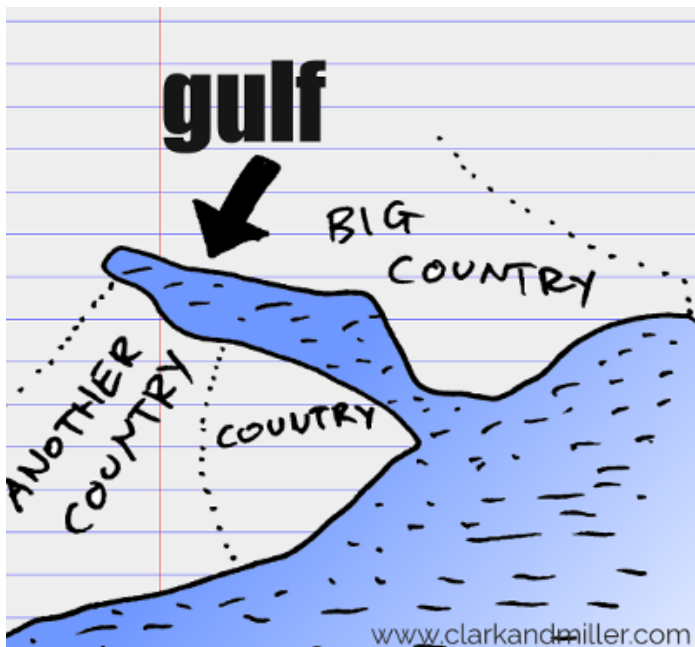


What is it?

A bay usually has land on three sides and sea or ocean on the fourth.

It's usually not that big.

Gulf



What is it?

A gulf is an inlet ... but a very big one.

Maybe it's got a round shape, like the Gulf of Mexico:



Gulf of Mexico location map by Tentotwo | CC BY-SA 4.0

Or maybe it's long and thin, like the Persian Gulf:



Persian Gulf EN by Hégésippe Cormier | CC BY 3.0

Either way, and as you can see, they're pretty big things.

Fun fact!

The Gulf of Mexico has over 750 shipwrecks dating back as far as the 1600s.

Wanna go and look for some gold? That's probably a good place to go.

(Or the gold market. There's always that, too.)

Lagoon



What is it?

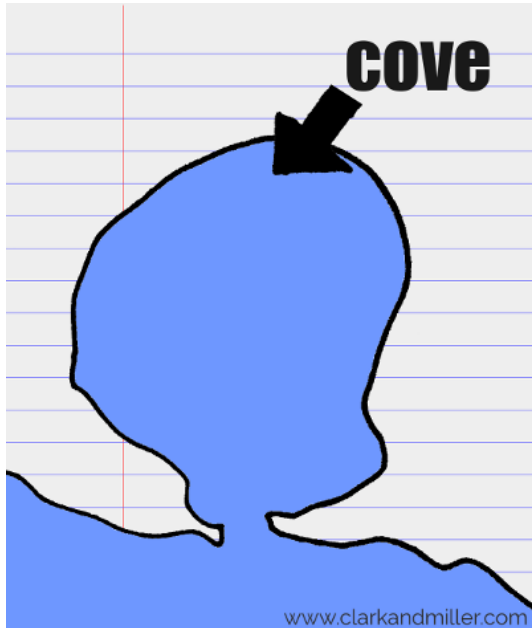
Out of all these watery geographical features, lagoons are probably the most beautiful.

They're very similar to bays – they're round inlets of salt water – but with a pleasant difference.

A lagoon is separated from the rest of the sea by a sandbank or a coral reef.

This means that the waters are calmer and might be a nice place for more fish to hang out.

Cove



What is it?

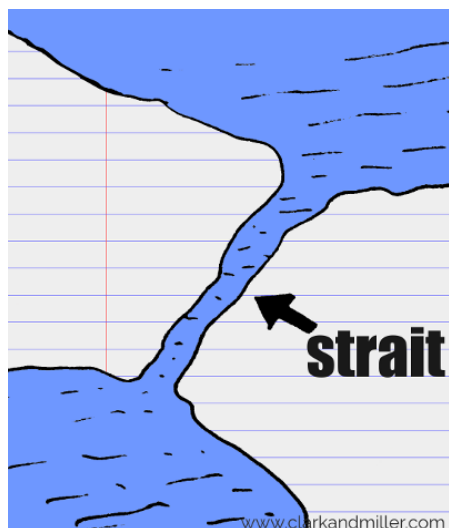
A cove is like a bay, but it isn't open to the sea.

It's almost completely surrounded by land or rocks, so it feels like a secret, sheltered little place.

I always associate coves with pirates.

It makes sense, right? I mean, it's a great place to hide from ... other pirates? Who do pirates hide from? The police?

Strait



What is it?

A strait is a long body of water that connects two larger bodies of water – usually two seas.

Go ahead and look at a world map and check out the bit where the Mediterranean meets the Atlantic.

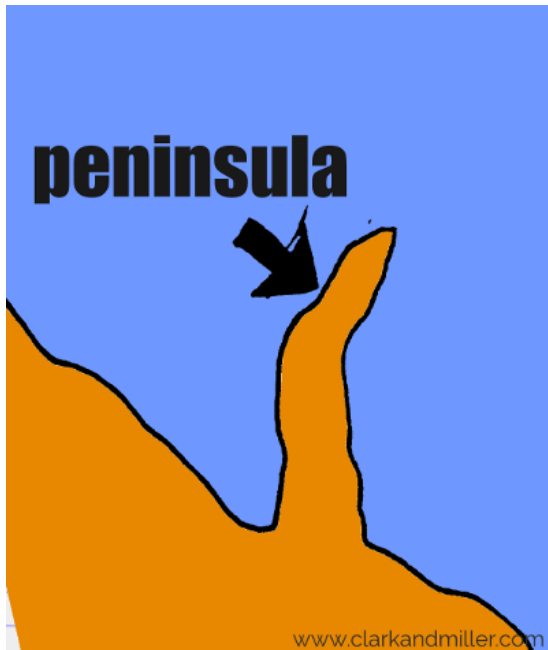
Narrow isn't it? That's the Strait of Gibraltar.

But my favorite example is the Bosphorus Strait. Why? Because it slices through the massive city of Istanbul and separates the Asian side from the European side.

Every year, the people of the city gather on the shores of the Bosphorus. At precisely 12:18 in the afternoon, the Europeans and the Asians start shouting at each other about who makes the best breakfast. At 12:42, they walk to the bridge, meet in the middle and have a breakfast party.

I might've just made all of that up.

Peninsula



What is it?

Ok – technically this is a piece of land.

But it's coastal, so it's totally related to water.

That bit of land that sticks out into the sea? That's a peninsula.

I guess it's the opposite of an inlet.

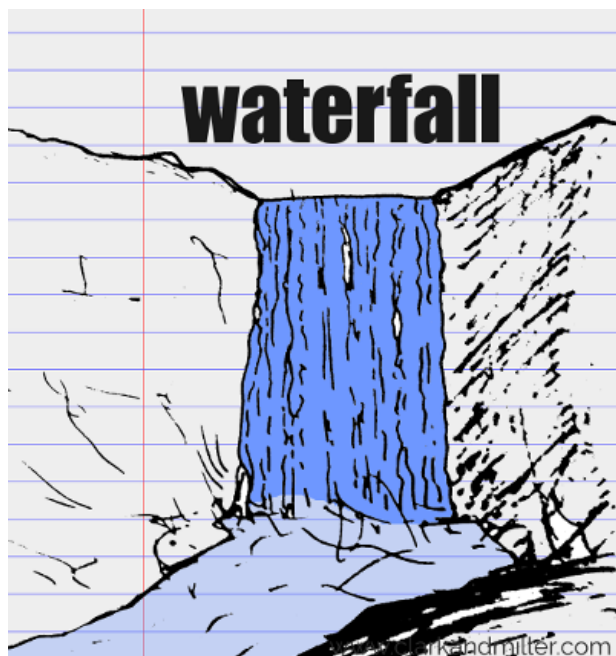
Fun fact!

I wouldn't go as far as to say that this fact is fun – but it's interesting if you like language. And I'm assuming you do, otherwise you wouldn't be here, right?

The fact? "Peninsula" actually means "almost an island."

Not fun. Interesting.

Waterfall



What is it?

We all know this, right?

Even if we didn't, we can figure it out from the word itself.

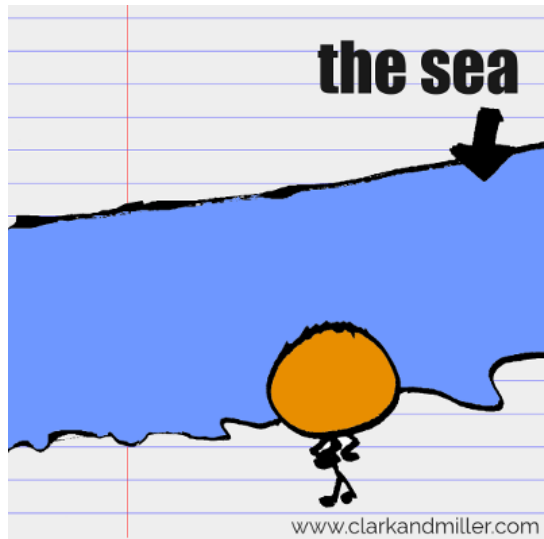
When we name waterfalls, we just shorten the word to "falls."

So you have Niagara Falls, Havasu Falls and so on.

Fun fact!

Unbelievably, there were no weird and fun facts out there about waterfalls.

Sea



What is it?

The sea!

Where all the mermaids live!

Seas are smaller than oceans, but when we want to bring up the “spirit” of salty water and seahorses and *Finding Nemo* and Neptune and anything like that, we talk about “the sea,” not “the ocean.”

We should stop here and just admire how awesome Neptune is:



Louvre Neptune RF3006 | CC BY 2.0

Phrases with “sea”

Plenty more fish in the sea

One of your best friends has just broken up with her partner.

Ok – it was just 10 months, but she’s still feeling down.

And you’re there to make her feel better.

You’re there to remind her that it’s Ok. She’ll find someone else.

I mean – the world is a massive and even frighteningly overpopulated place! She has a menu of people to choose from!

That’s when you can say, “Don’t worry. **There are plenty more fish in the sea.**”

Sea legs

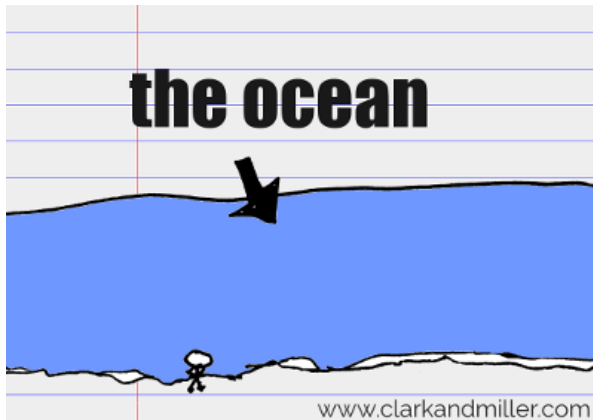
This basically means being able to balance yourself while on a ship and maybe also not get seasick and vomit everywhere.

We usually use it with verbs like “get,” “need” or “find.”

“You’re going to need your **sea legs** for this one – it’s going to be pretty rough.”

“After just a couple of days on board, I really found my **sea legs**.”

Ocean



What is it?

Well ... it's big. Very, very big.

And deep.

And terrifying.

I've always been a little afraid of the ocean. There's so much we don't know about it. And some really, really weird stuff happens in it.

Fun fact!

Nothing fun.

Just terrifying.

Phrases with "ocean"

A drop in the ocean

So you owe the mafia several hundred thousand euros?

Oh – that’s not good.

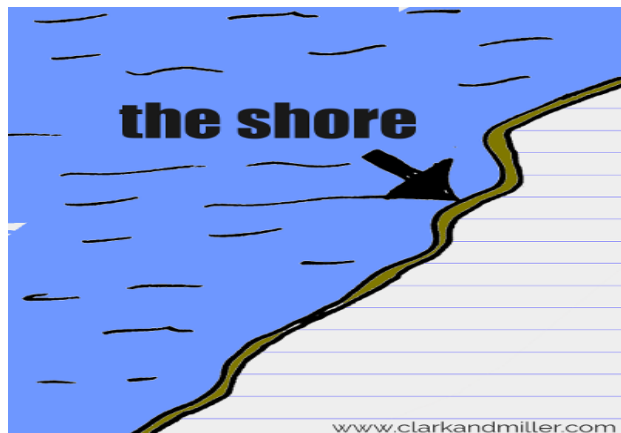
I could help you out with €50.

But that’s not going to help, is it?

It’s just **a drop in the ocean** compared to what you need.

Looks like you might need a plane ticket.

Shore



What is it?

The shore is the land on the edge of the sea, a lake or a river.

The beach, for example, is always along the shore.

A similar word is “coast,” though when we think of “coast,” we think of the shape of the shore:

“Canada has the longest **coast** in the world.”

While “shore” is often used in contrast to being at sea:

“I can’t wait until we’re back on **shore**. I’m sick of this ship!”

Phrases with “shore”

To shore up support

When politicians are campaigning for an election (this happens in the UK every few months at the time of writing), they need to **shore up** support.

It basically means “collect support from lots of different places.”

Riverbank



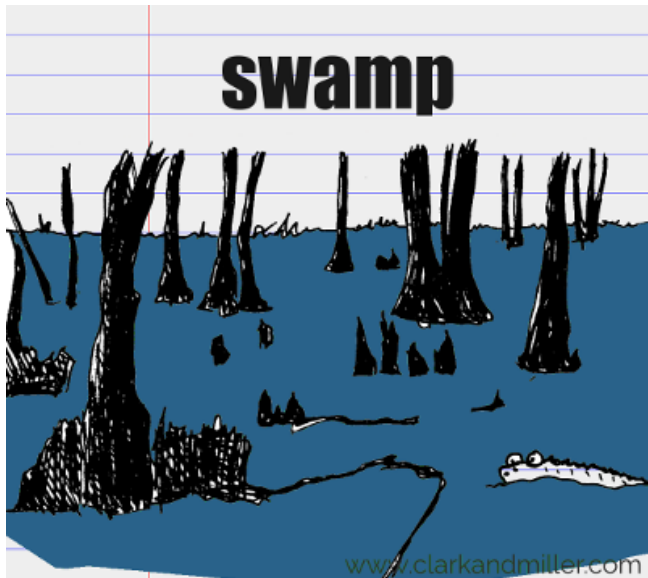
What is it?

The riverbank is basically the edge of the river.

You know – the parts that slope down into the river.

Great places for sitting and watching the world go by on a summer afternoon.

Swamp



What is it?

Basically, a swamp is just a very wet area of land.

But it's so much more.

We think of alligators and Florida and monsters made out of mud when we think of swamps.

In short, a swamp is like a forest where the ground is water.

There are also marshes. They're very similar but don't usually have as many trees.



Fun fact!

Many plants in swamps have evolved to be carnivorous – they eat meat. Specifically, insects.

And humans.

Only joking – just insects.

Phrases with “swamp”

Swamped with work

You think you’ve finished everything you need to do?

Think again!

There’s the Bueller report.

And you need to update the database.

But first, you need to respond to the three emails from head office about the giraffe chairs.

And the other four emails from Nigel about Barry’s bad behavior in the office.

And where’s that Bueller report?!

Yep – sounds like you’re **swamped with work**.

But there’s a way out!

The intern! You know – the kid from university who’s just here for work experience.

You can **swamp** her with all this work!

Coral reef



Too hard to draw!

What is it?

It's beautiful. That's what it is!

Coral is difficult to explain. Mostly because the more I read about it, the less I understand.

I mean, apparently it's a skeleton! But without a body?

I'm confused.

But for now, let's just say that it's living stuff that looks like rock. And it exists in the water near land.

When a lot of it exists together, then that's a coral reef.

Coral reefs are awesome because once they're there, they act as massive cities for all sorts of marine life (fish, crabs, octopuses, those weird tree-like things ...).

Fun fact!

Ok. I didn't believe this when I read it just now ... but coral reefs eat microplastics! And enjoy it!

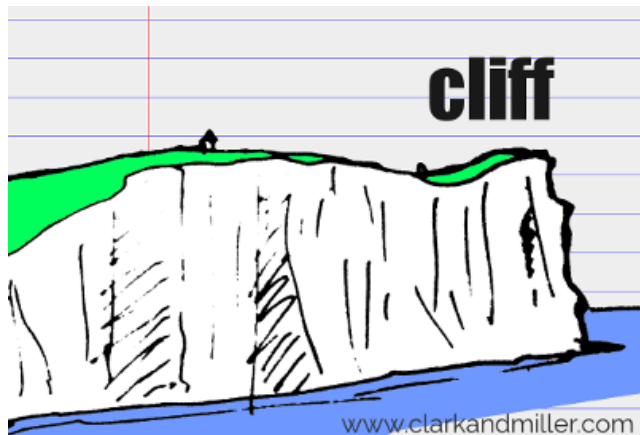
So they don't just create massive ecosystems.

They also destroy the enemies of these ecosystems.

I really like coral reefs now.

So we should stop killing them.

Cliff



What is it?

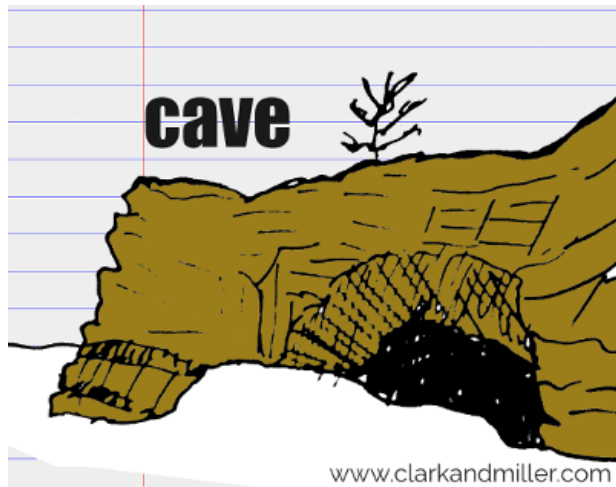
Big rocky walls between the land and the sea!

Here's a joke:

Q: What do you call a man with a seagull on his head?

A: Cliff.

Cave



What is it?

A hole in a mountain, hill or cliff.

Maybe there's gold in there!

Maybe there's a family of bears sleeping off the winter.

Or maybe there's just some dust and a few spiders and some empty cans of cider. There usually is.

Fun fact!

If you discover a cave, then you can name it.

Good luck!

Phrases with "cave"

To cave in

This means to collapse under pressure.

Perhaps it's physical:

“The roof **caved in** after the huge storm of 1987. No one’s fixed it since then.”

Or perhaps it’s metaphorical:

“She finally **caved in** to pressure from her parents and married the giraffe farmer they really liked – even though she was still in love with Kevin.”

An Aladdin’s cave of ...

There are some seriously weird museums out there.

Like [the one that consists almost entirely of noodle packaging](#)

It’s an Aladdin’s cave of noodle packaging!

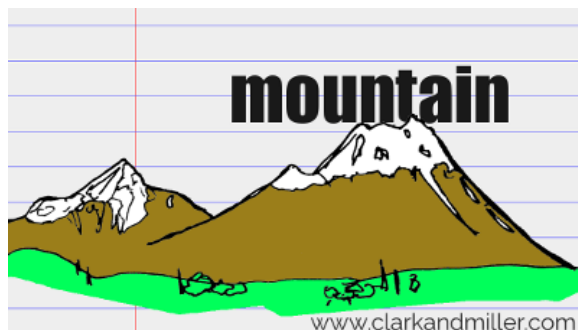
Or [the one in India dedicated to toilets](#).

It’s an Aladdin’s cave of toilets!

Or, terrifyingly, [the one with over 800 ventriloquist dummies](#).

It’s an Aladdin’s cave of ... OK – you get the idea.

Mountain



What is it?

Everest, Kilimanjaro, Etna ...

You know this!

It's a massive rock!

Often with snow on it.

Fun fact!

The tops of the mountains on the planet Venus, like on Earth, are covered in snow.

But, unlike on Earth, [the snow is made out of metal!](#)

Are you thinking what I'm thinking?

Why do they call it snow?

But they do!

Phrases with "mountain"

To make a mountain out of a molehill

Sometimes we get ill, right?

I mean, once or twice a year we might get a cold.

It's a normal part of life, right? Inconvenient, but not the end of the world. Just a bit of a cough and a sore throat.

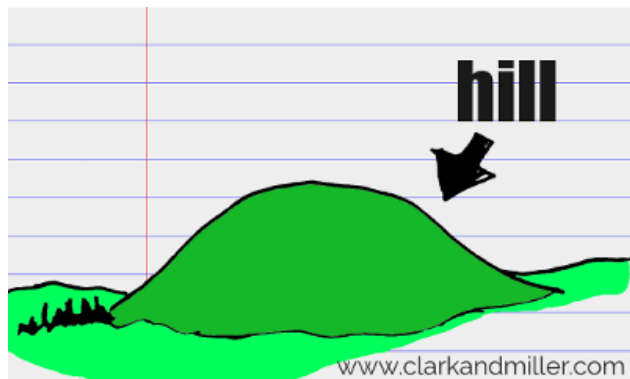
But some people, when they get a cold, behave as if they are going to die.

The world has to stop for them, and they certainly can't do any work in case they explode.

Those people are totally **making a mountain out of a molehill**.

They're making a small thing (like a molehill) into a big thing (like a ... yep! You guessed it! Like a mountain).

Hill



What is it?

It's basically a small mountain.

Apparently, there's no official difference between a hill and a mountain, but generally speaking, hills are easier to climb and not as big.

Fun fact!

Ok. Ready for this? Here it comes:

Taumatawhakatangihangakoauauotamateaturipukakapikimaungahoronukupokaiwhenuakitanatahu!

No. My cat didn't just discover my laptop keyboard.

That's the name of a hill in New Zealand.

The word is Maori, and it translates as "the summit where Tamatea, the man with the big knees, the slider, climber of mountains, the land swallower who travelled about, played his kōauau (flute) to his loved one."

So there.

Phrases with "hill"

It's all uphill from here.

Ok. This one confuses everyone.

Is going uphill good because you're going higher?

Or is it bad because it's difficult?

The answer is ... both.

If someone says, "It's all uphill from here," then they could be saying "Things are going to get better" or "Things are going to get worse."

You need to figure it out from the context or the way that someone says it. Words will not help you here!

It's all downhill from here.

Again, this is either very good (going downhill is easier) or very bad (down is worse than up). I know – it's ridiculous.

An uphill struggle

However, when we add the word “struggle,” we know we’re talking about something difficult.

“What? We have to wait five months and then write a 40-page statement before we can open this café? The bureaucracy in this country is such **an uphill struggle**.”

Over the hill

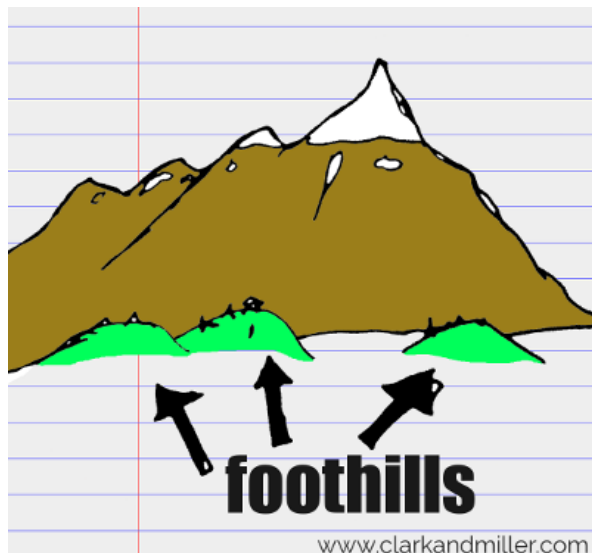
Youth does not last forever.

We all get old – it’s just part of life, right?

At one point, we might want to say that we’ve passed our prime – that we’re not going to be as active and sharp as we were.

That’s when we can say we’re **over the hill**.

Foothills

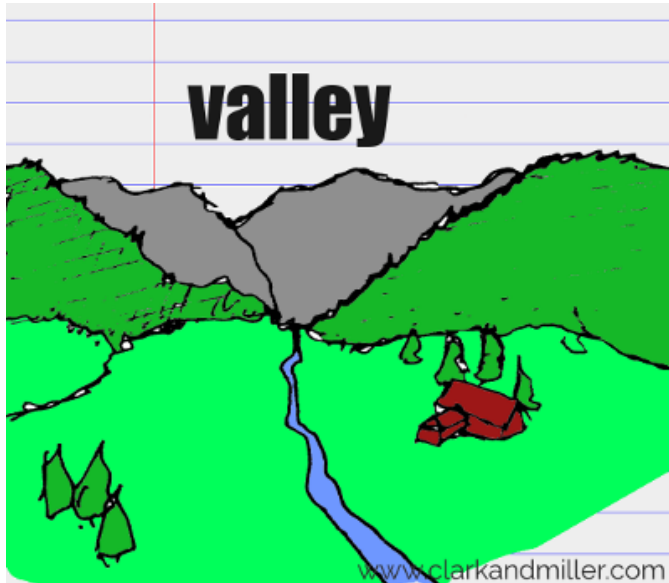


What are they?

Foothills are the hills you go through before you get to a mountain.

They're hills at the foot of the mountain.

Valley



What is it?

Go ahead! Put two mountains next to each other!

That gap in the middle? That's a valley.

They're usually created by rivers or glaciers cutting through the mountains.

There are different types of valley.

Generally speaking, a big, deep valley is a **canyon**.

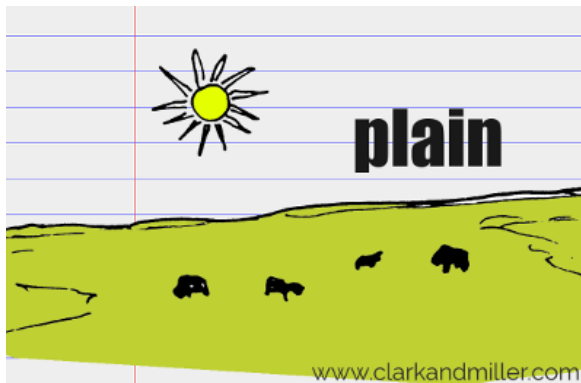
A narrow, deep valley is a **ravine** or **gorge**.

And a **gulley** is a small valley – possibly with a stream flowing through it.

Finally, when I think about valleys, I imagine less shape – it's just the space between the two mountains.

But I always imagine canyons, ravines, gorges and gulleys having a noticeable shape – with steeper sides and more interesting rock formations.

Plains



What is it?

A flat, endless, boring, featureless landscape without many trees.

Ok– I'm being a little unfair on plains. Some of them are rather beautiful.

They're just so very ... flat.

The US has a lot of grassy plains, which they call **prairies**.

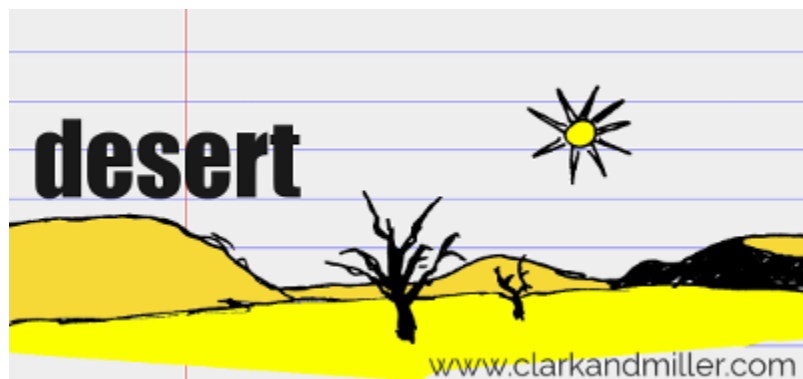
A tropical plain with grass on it is called a **savannah**.

Just picture lions and elephants and so on – they all live on the savannah.

Fun fact!

One-third of the Earth's land is made up of plains.

Desert



What is it?

Yep! Sand and camels and sun and snakes and lizards and the occasional palm tree.
It's the desert!

Fun fact!

You could power all of Europe with just a small portion of the Sahara Desert (an area the size of Wales).

Phrases with "desert"

To desert

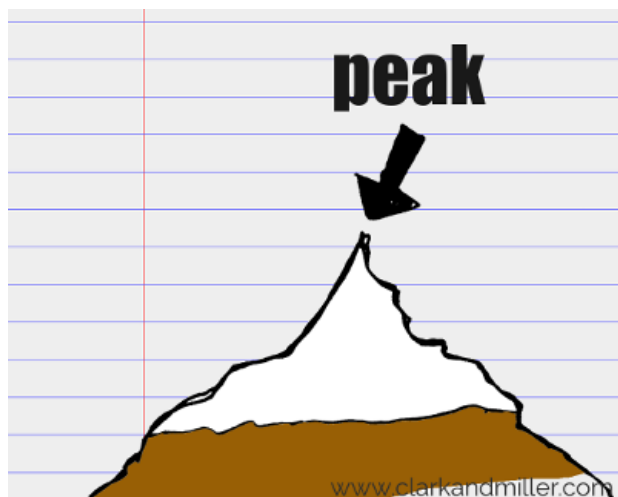
Ok – it's not a phrase. It's just a word.

When we use "desert" as a verb, it means "leave something empty" or "leave a group of people when they might need your help." The stress is on the second syllable (des-ERT).

"The whole village has been completely **deserted** since the explosion."

"Their relationship was difficult, but she never thought he would **desert** her and the kids."

Peak



What is it?

The top of a mountain – its highest point.

Phrases with “peak”

Peak physical condition

Why is she performing so well?

Well, she’s in peak physical condition, of course – the very best physical condition it’s possible for her to be in.

Sport looks hard.

Off-peak

Have you ever travelled by train in the UK?

Next time you do, try to get an off-peak ticket – it’s cheaper. That’s if you’re able to travel at off-peak times, of course.

When are the off-peak times?

Anytime outside rush hour. (Rush hour is weekday mornings and evenings, when people are travelling to or from work.)

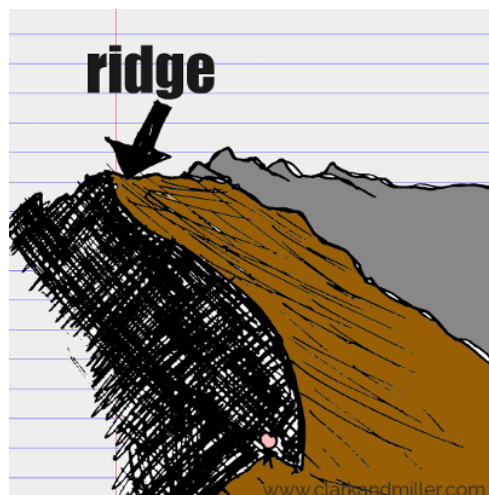
Twin Peaks

One of the best shows ever on TV!

Do you like dark, strange TV series that feature a lot of cups of coffee?

Then this is one for you!

Ridge



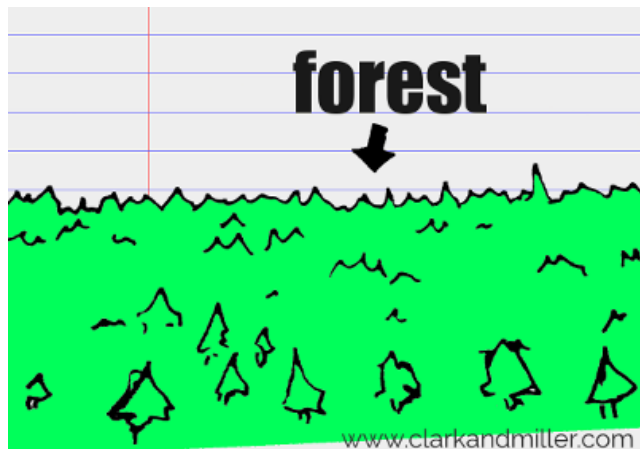
What is it?

Some mountains don't have a peak.

The highest point of the mountain is just a long line.

That's a ridge.

Forest



What is it?

A place full of trees!

Trees everywhere!

When they're tropical, we also call them **rainforests** or **jungles**.

Fun fact!

Twenty percent of Earth's oxygen comes from the Amazon rainforest.

Is that fun?

It's interesting ... that's for sure.

Phrases with "forest"

Can't see the forest for the trees

Have you ever worked on a problem for so long that you ended up getting stuck in the details of the problem so much that you weren't able to solve the main issue?

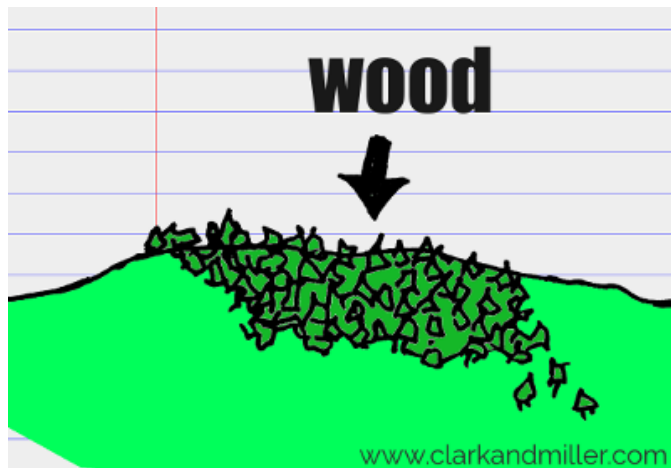
Like that time you were planning a holiday and focused too much on the type of hostel to get, and you forgot to take time off work and couldn't go at all?

Or when schools focus so much on test results that they forget about giving students a good general education.

Or when you were in a forest and you couldn't see it because all the trees were in the way ...

Ok. Maybe not that last example.

Woods



What is it?

There's no scientific difference between woods and forests, but most people agree that woods are like forests but smaller.

Phrases with "woods"

Not out of the woods yet

You're in the middle of something difficult, maybe even dangerous.

Perhaps you're a brain surgeon, and you're near the end of a difficult operation. Your team is starting to relax because they think it's all over, but you need to tell them to keep focused: "Stay with it guys! We're **not out of the woods** yet."

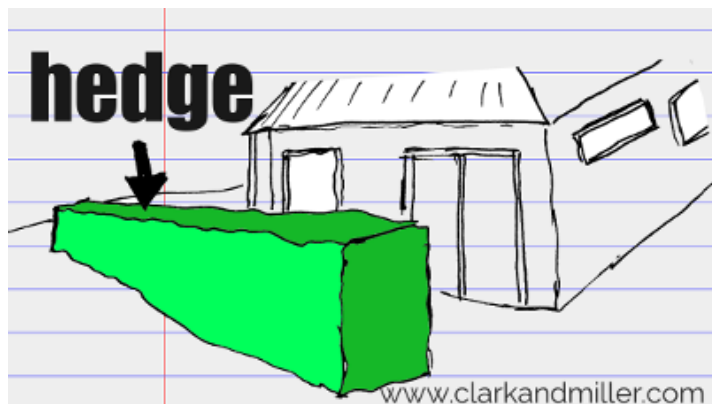
Your neck of the woods

It means “your part of town.”

“Wow! The bank robbery was on Carron Road. That’s **your neck of the woods**, isn’t it Cara?

Did you see anything?”

Hedge



What is it?

Some houses have a fence or a wall around them to separate the garden from the street.

Some houses, instead of a fence or a wall, have a hedge – a long, thick series of plants that works like a wall.

Phrases with “hedge”

To hedge your bets

Job hunting!

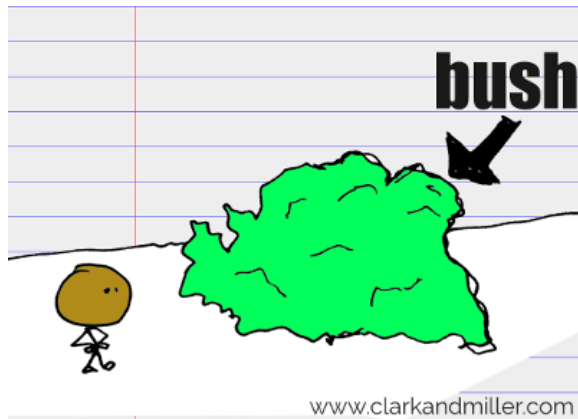
I hate it. You hate it. Everyone hates it.

Of course, with job hunting, you can’t just apply to one company, right? That would be mad.

You want to spread out your chances, don't you?

In other words, you want to **hedge your bets**.

Bush



What is it?

No! Not THAT Bush:



Imagine a hedge, which is long like a wall, and then imagine if it was just one object, not like a wall.

That's a bush.

Phrases with "bush"

To beat around the bush

To understand this one, just think about politicians being interviewed on TV.

They're asked a lot of questions, right?

But do they answer them?

NO! No, they don't.

They talk about topics related to the question.

They even sound like they might be about to answer that question.

But they don't. They just constantly **beat around the bush** – avoid answering the question.

Plant



What is it?

Basically, a plant is any sort of living thing that has leaves.

It could be grass, a bush, a tree or what we just call a ... plant.

Houses and flats are much, much cooler when you put a few plants in them.

It makes them look bigger, too.

Foliage



Foliage of Western Hemlock by Robin Stott | CC BY 2.0

What is it?

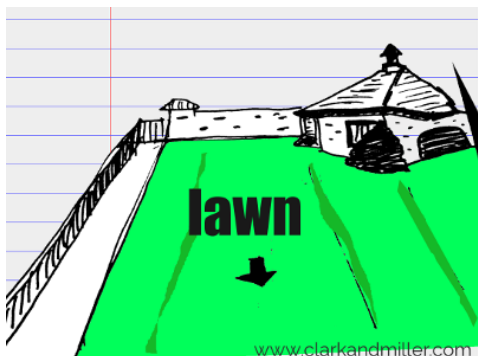
This is just the general word for green planty stuff in a general way.

If you look at the edge of a forest, you might see a mixture of tree leaves, bushes and plants growing from the ground.

This gives a general feeling of “greenness.”

That’s foliage!

Lawn



What is it?

Ok – so we know what grass is, right?

Well, some people (especially people who live in castles) like to have very, very tidy, neatly cut grass areas in front of their houses (or castles).

That's a lawn.

If you ask me, they're super boring and make no sense.

Don't have a lawn!

Reference:

Clark, G. (2020). Geographical Features in English. Clark and Miller. Retrieved from: <https://www.clarkandmiller.com/geographical-features-in-english/>