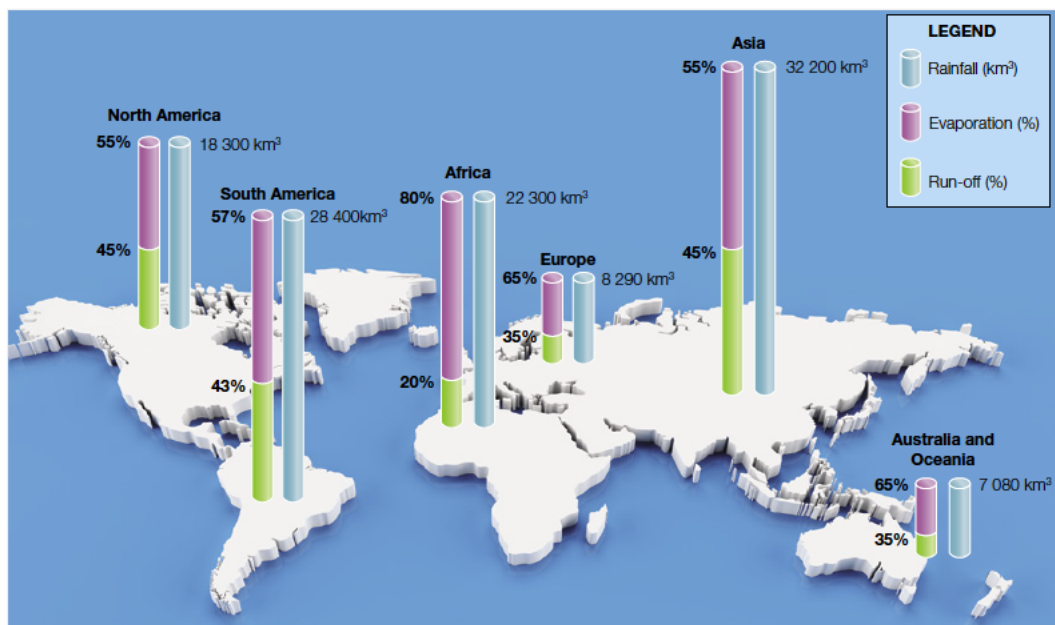


2.13 Water in the world

In an average year, 577 000 km³ of rain falls on Earth. Of this, 458 000 km³ falls, on the oceans and 119 000 km³ on land.

When water falls to earth as rain, most of it evaporates back into the atmosphere. Of the annual rainfall that falls on land, 74 000 km³ (or 62 per cent) evaporates. In Australia, around 65 per cent of our total rainfall each year evaporates. The remaining 35 per cent runs off the land, and of this, only about 12 per cent ends up in our rivers. Only Africa has a higher evaporation rate than Australia.

The amount of water in Australian rivers is the smallest of all inhabited continents, with South America experiencing the highest volumes of water in its rivers. For example, the Amazon River (the second-longest river in the world) carries more water than any other river on Earth with an average discharge (volume of water flowing through it) greater than the next seven largest rivers combined. Nearly 20 per cent of all the fresh water entering the oceans comes from the Amazon River.



Source 1 Average volume of yearly rainfall (km³), evaporation and run-off by world region

Source: FAO Aquastat

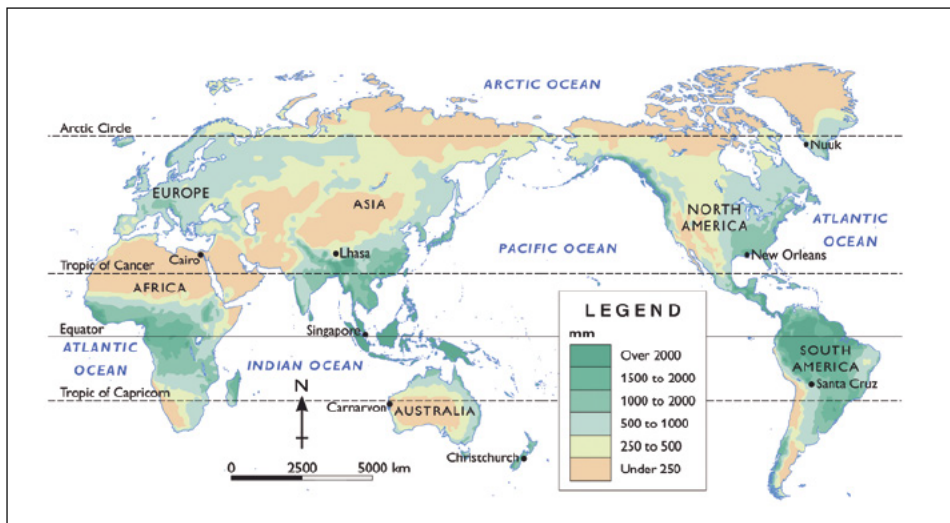


Source 2 Desert environments, such as Mungo National Park in NSW, receive limited, sporadic rainfall and have low soil moisture.



Source 3 Fresh water is found in ponds, lakes and rivers, such as this river in the Kimberley.

WORLD: ANNUAL RAINFALL



Source 4

Source: Oxford University Press



Source 5 South America's high rainfall has contributed to the creation of the Iguazu Falls, which is 80 metres high and 3 kilometres wide.

Check your learning 2.13

Remember and understand

- 1 Use Source 1 to rank the six inhabited continents from the continent with the most run-off to the continent with the least.
- 2 Which river carries the most water and how does it compare to other rivers?

Apply and analyse

- 3 Look carefully at Source 4.
 - a Which region of the world is the wettest? Why do you think this is the case?
 - b Which part of Africa experiences the lowest rainfall? What type of landscape would you expect to find here?
 - c Which part of Asia is the wettest? What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of high rainfall?
 - d Does the region north of the Arctic Circle have low or high rainfall? How might much of the water in this region be stored?