

2.1 What forces shape mountain landscapes?

The world's mountains

Mountains are defined by most geographers as 'large natural elevations of the Earth's surface'. Although everyone generally agrees on this definition, there is some disagreement about exactly how elevated (high) the land must be in order for it to be classified as a mountain. In some countries, any land 1000 metres or more above sea level is classified as a mountain, while in other countries the minimum height is closer to 2500 metres. If we go by this second definition, Australia's highest mountain, Mount Kosciuszko, at 2228 metres, is not really a mountain at all.

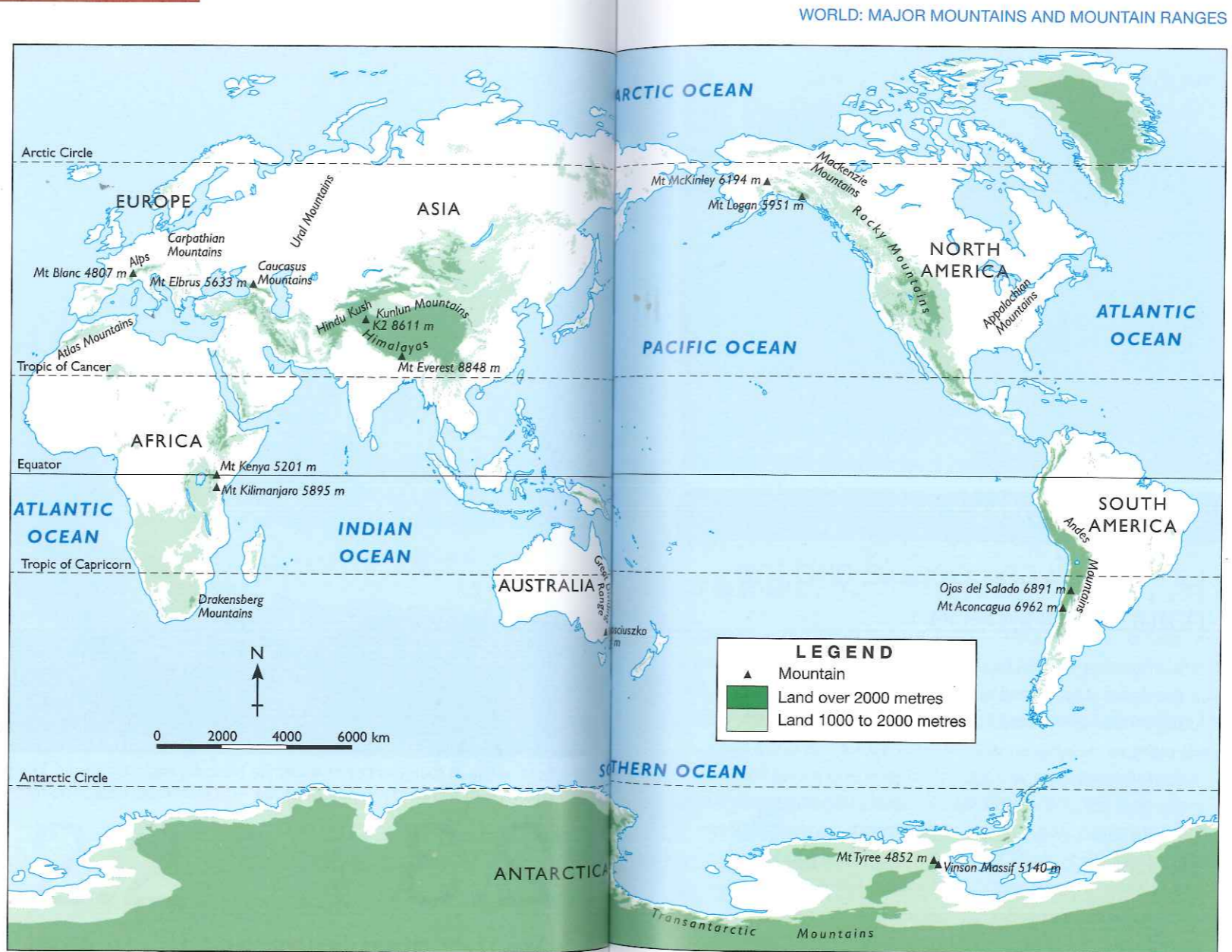
Some countries, such as Nepal and Lesotho, are very mountainous, while others, such as Australia and Egypt, are relatively flat. Lesotho (in southern Africa) is the only country in the world that is entirely more than 1 kilometre above sea level.

The Transantarctic Mountains (in Antarctica) make up one of the world's longest mountain ranges. Due to the huge volume of ice covering the land, Antarctica holds the record for the greatest average height above sea level of any continent (as shown in Source 2.3).



Source 2.2 The Himalayas contains nine of the world's ten highest mountains, including the highest, Mount Everest.

Source 2.4 The Sierra Nevada Mountains in the United States. Their sheer sides are a result of parts of the Earth's crust lifting and dropping away steeply.



Source 2.3

Source: Oxford University Press



Check your learning 2.1

Remember and understand

- 1 Study Source 2.3. There are seven continents. Can you find the highest mountain in each? Which continent has the highest mountain of all? Which has the lowest?
- 2 What is the highest mountain in the world that is not part of a mountain range (a long line of mountains)? Where is it?

Apply and analyse

- 3 Mountains are often part of a mountain range. Why do you think this is the case?
- 4 Why do you think some places are mountainous and others are not?
- 5 Study Source 2.3. Select a continent other than South America or Antarctica. Describe the distribution of mountains on this continent using this description of South America as an example: 'Most of South America is relatively flat. However, a long, high mountain range – the Andes Mountains – extends along the western edge of the continent, from the very north to the very south.'



Source 2.6 Mount Kilimanjaro is Africa's highest mountain. It is also the highest mountain in the world that stands alone, rather than being part of a mountain range.

Source 2.5 The Blue Mountains in New South Wales are the worn away remains of a much larger and higher plateau. This plateau was lifted up by forces within the Earth's crust.