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Mountains

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What are mountains?

Mountains are areas of land that are much higher than the land surrounding them. They are higher and usually steeper than a **hill** and are generally over 600 metres high. They are often found together in a group called a **mountain range**.

Some well-known mountain ranges in the four countries that make up the UK include:

- the Cairngorms in Scotland
- the Pennines in England
- the Mourne Mountains in Northern Ireland
- Snowdonia in Wales

How are mountains formed?

The highest mountain ranges are created by **tectonic plates** pushing together and forcing the ground up where they meet. This is how the mountains of the Himalayas in Asia were formed.

Tectonic plates are also at work under the Atlantic Ocean, but instead of forcing the ground up, the two plates in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean are actually moving apart in opposite directions. This causes **lava** to **erupt** out of the gap that is left. As it cools down, the lava creates a long line of mountains - the longest mountain range on Earth.

Other mountains - usually those that stand on their own - are created by **ancient volcanoes**. Ben Nevis in Scotland was once a very large **active volcano**. It last erupted millions of years ago and the eruption was so violent that it caved in on itself.

The highest mountains in the UK are:

- Ben Nevis in Scotland (also the highest in the UK)
- Scafell Pike in England
- Slieve Donard in Northern Ireland
- Snowdon in Wales

