

ONLY ONE NEIGHBOR

Africa contains over 50 different countries, but only two of them have the distinction of having only one neighbor state. Of those two one-border countries, one has a curious layout. The Gambia (sometimes just called Gambia), is entirely surrounded by Senegal in western-most Africa. The country basically consists of the banks of the Gambia River - it's not much more than 10 miles on either side of the river and about 200 miles long, as the crow flies. Though it starts at the mouth of the river on the Atlantic Ocean, the nation of Gambia doesn't include its entire course. The full length of the river leads upstream beyond the eastern end of the country, into Senegal, and then south into Guin-

ea where its headwaters are in the Fouta Djallon Mountains. However, The Gambia's eastern border pretty much marks the farthest navigable point on the river. The country is all rather flat land - there is tidal influence all the way up to Barrakunda Falls just east of The Gambia's easternmost point, and salt water itself is known to infiltrate some 95 miles inland, as the fish swims.

People have lived along the Gambia River for many thousands of years. After European arrival, the river played a large role in the slave trade; Gambia was the birthplace of Kunta Kinte, one of America's best-known slaves. The Portuguese, Germans, French and British all tussled over trade in the area, but the British eventually held the greatest sway, building a settlement named Bathurst at the mouth of the river that eventually became the capital city, now called Banjul. The country achieved independence in 1965 and became a republic in 1970.

Fun fact - Peanuts, originally from South America but now a key crop in Africa, were first grown on that continent in the Gambia/Senegal

area, where they are still the number one crop. However, the Gambians call them groundnuts.

And the other African country with only one neighbor? It's quite distant from the first, at the southern end of the continent. And unlike The Gambia, which has a bit of coastline, this country is entirely surrounded by another's land. The tiny country of Lesotho (pronounced Le-soo-too) is right in the middle of the Republic of South Africa. South Africa has another small nation that it mostly surrounds - Swaziland - but Swaziland also has a short border with Mozambique.

Less than 12,000 square miles and smaller than the state of Maryland, Lesotho is a mountainous area to which the Basotho people retreated as the Boers (Dutch Africans) pressed into their lands in the 19th century. Its high and rough country afforded a defensible space from which their nation grew. Even today, much of the population can only be accessed by foot, horseback or small plane. A scenic but poor country, many of its citizens emigrate to South Africa to work the mines there. Lesotho is also beset by one of the world's worst rates of HIV/AIDS, which of course weighs upon its productivity.

Little known fact - Lesotho has the highest lowest point of any nation on Earth. You can't get much below 4,600 feet anywhere in the country, and 80% of the land surface is higher than 6,000 feet.

So there you have it - two African nations with almost nothing in common except the singleness of their over-the-border neighbors. What significance does having only one neighbor have? It does simplify immediate diplomatic relations, but can make for an uncomfortable situation if your governments aren't good friends and you have no access to the sea. In geography, as in real estate, location is everything.

Brought to you by Geography News Network. June 2, 2014. #100.

A 'Singular' Distinction



QUESTIONS:

1. How many nations does the Gambia River flow through? Where does it start?
2. How is Lesotho's landscape different from The Gambia's?
3. What advantages are there to only having one cross-border neighbor? What sort of difficulties can result from the same situation?

SOURCES:

- <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1572402/Barra-Kunda-Falls>
- <http://www.accessgambia.com/information/gambia-river-info.html>
- <http://www.accessgambia.com/information/history.html>
- <http://africanhistory.about.com/od/gambi1/g/def-TheGambia.htm>
- <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/lesotho>
- <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/lt.html>

Maps.com Editors

With over 20 years of combined experience in cartographic and literary editing our Maps.com editors provide insightful and thought-provoking articles on a variety of topics, from scientific and natural events to cultural and geographic commentary. The Maps.com editorial team has written, edited and tested materials for many of the world's largest organizations, from government institutions to leading educational publishers.