Major Landform Regions

The topography or landforms of Australia can be divided into four major regions: The Coastal Plains, the Eastern Highlands, the Central Lowlands and the Western Plateau.

1. Western Plateau: This largest landform region covers about 70% of Australia. It consists of a massive block of very ancient and stable rock, over 600 million years old. The average height of this region is less than 500 metres and the highest mountain, Mt Zeil, is only 1511 metres. About 70% of the Western Plateau contains Australia’s largest deserts – the Great Victoria, Little Sandy, Gibson and Tanami. In the South is the Limestone Nullarbor Plain, which was a sea floor 15 – 20 million years ago.
2. The Central Lowlands: Covering 25% of the continent, this region is characterised by extremely flat, low-lying plains of sedimentary rock. It stretches from Australia’s largest river basin, the Murray Darling through the Great Artesian Basin to the Gulf of Carpentaria. Rivers flow north and south and internally to Lake Eyre. Lake Eyre is a huge flat salt lake extending over almost 10, 000 square km’s. The average height of the central lowlands is less than 200 mtrs. It receives the lowest amount of rainfall in Australia. The Sturt, Stony and Simpson deserts are in this region.
3. The Eastern Highlands: This region, which is 200 km’s wide, covers only 10% of the continent and extends along the east coast from Cape York to Tasmania. Despite its impressive name the Great Dividing Range is really a series of discontinuous plateaus and ranges. These include the Snowy Mountains, Blue Mountains, New England Ranges and Atherton Tablelands. These Ranges have a length of 3800km’s, averaging heights between 1000 and 2000 metres above sea level. By Australian standards this region is geologically young and comprises faulted and folded igneous rocks. The rugged topography of this region has a profound influence on climate, vegetation, flora and fauna as well as human activities.
4. The Coastal Plains and Offshore Topography. The Coastal plains around Australia’s edge are narrow and discontinuous. The plains often take the form of river valleys, such as those of the Fitzroy River near Rockhampton and the Hunter Valley near Newcastle. The continental shelf around Australia is generally very broad, falling away to a very steep slope. In NSW, however the continental shelf is very narrow. In Qld, the Great Barrier Reef has grown over the past two million years on the broad continental shelf plateau.

