

# 7 wonderful peoples

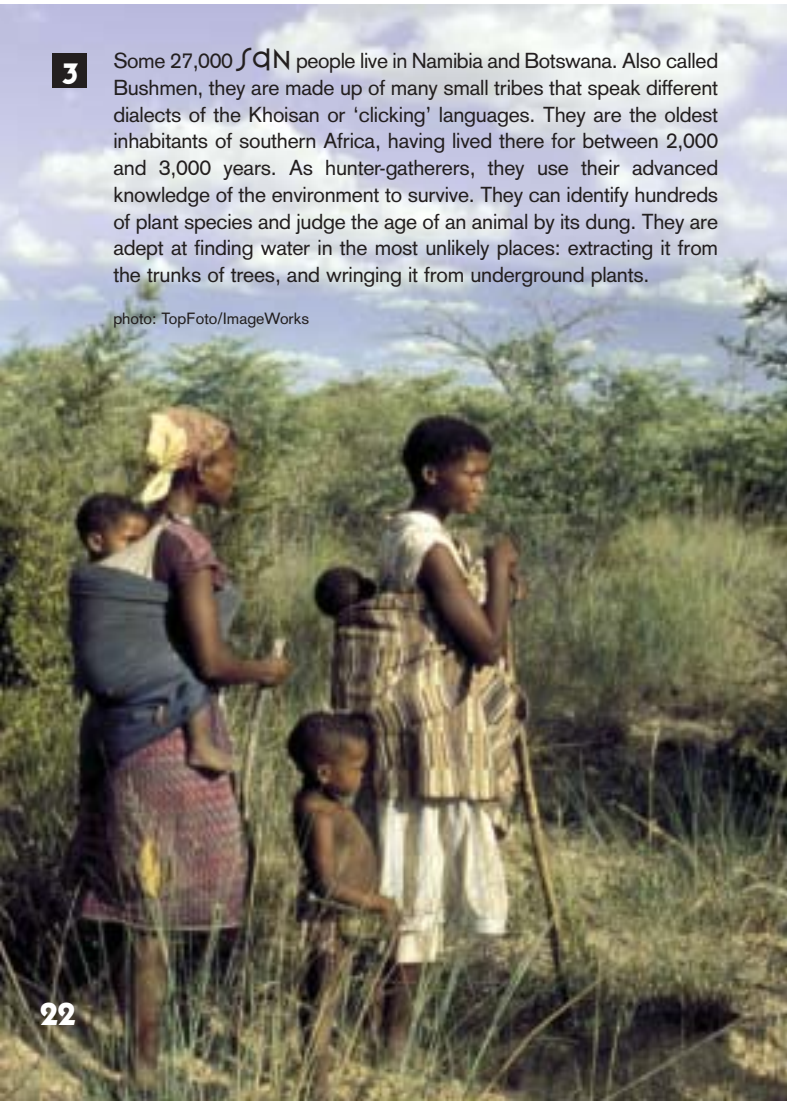


**2** The **dogon**, whose villages lie primarily along the cliffs of Bandigara in southeastern Mali, have adjusted their agricultural practices to suit their rocky, arid surroundings; they carry soil to where it is most needed, and build stone walls and dirt mounds to prevent seedlings from being blown away. According to their mythology, their people received advanced astronomical knowledge from spiritual guardians from outer space known as Nommos. From these amphibian beings, the Dogon learned of the star Sirius B and its size, density and movement; of the existence of Venus and the rings around Saturn; and of the way that planets orbit the sun – pre-empting later discoveries by astronomers using telescopes and other highly technical modern equipment.

photo: Topham Picturepoint

**3** Some 27,000 **ǀQN** people live in Namibia and Botswana. Also called Bushmen, they are made up of many small tribes that speak different dialects of the Khoisan or 'clicking' languages. They are the oldest inhabitants of southern Africa, having lived there for between 2,000 and 3,000 years. As hunter-gatherers, they use their advanced knowledge of the environment to survive. They can identify hundreds of plant species and judge the age of an animal by its dung. They are adept at finding water in the most unlikely places: extracting it from the trunks of trees, and wringing it from underground plants.

photo: TopFoto/ImageWorks



**4** The **penan** people live in the tropical rainforests of Borneo, which are among the oldest and most biologically diverse in the world. They use the forest's wild resources for food and medicine, as well as material for shelters, poison for hunting, glue to trap birds and wood to make boats, tools and musical instruments. The Penan value the forest and consider themselves its stewards or protectors. While hunting and gathering, they operate under a code of 'molong', requiring them to conserve the resources of the forest, which they consider sacred. Once they have gathered fruit from a certain tree, they mark the bark and allow the plant to restore itself before harvesting its fruit again. For example, the wild sago palm tree (their main source of carbohydrates) has several trunks; the Penan generally cut one of them down for sago flour, but leave the others untouched to grow for later use.

photo: Fukazawa/UNEP/Topham

**1** **Aborigines** have lived in Australia for around 4,000 years. While they are greatly attached to the land, which provides their home and sustenance, they do not consider themselves its owners; there is no history of territorial wars between different tribes. As hunter-gatherers, aborigines have cultivated an expert knowledge of the world around them and developed remarkable skills in finding food and water. They often drain water from trees and roots, and even squeeze it out from frogs that store it in their bodies. They can track animals using the smallest signs, like patterns in the grass and broken twigs, as clues, and lure their prey by imitating the calls of birds or emulating the movement of emu with sticks and feathers.

photo: Topham Picturepoint



**5** The **Yanomami** live along the Brazilian-Venezuelan border in village communities of between 25 and 300, located under the shelter of a great jungle canopy made from forest trees and palm leaves. Like many other rainforest tribes, they gather fruits and hunt animals and fish for food. However, unlike their neighbours, the Yanomami also clear small areas of forest to cultivate family-owned gardens. They grow food crops such as bananas, plantains, cassavas and sweet potatoes, and also raise plants for medicinal and ritual purposes. As rainforest soil is characteristically quite thin, they move their gardens to a new spot every five to ten years to allow the soil to replenish itself.

photo: UNEP/Topham

**6** The 80,000 **Sami** people, an indigenous group of European origin, live in the far north of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. As hunters and fishers, they live off the frozen land, relying heavily on their long-established companions, the reindeer. The Sami have herded reindeer throughout history: grazing them over huge areas; employing them for transport; eating their meat and drinking their milk; and using their skins to create clothing and shelter. Although the Sami are more integrated into Scandinavian society than indigenous groups in other areas, around 40 per cent of them still live off the land in traditional ways.

photo: Farnsworth/Topham/Imageworks



**7** The **bedouin** – whose name means “inhabitant of the desert” – survive off the dry, barren lands stretching from the Arabian Gulf to the Atlantic. As nomads who are continually on the move, searching for new grazing pastures for their camels, goats, sheep and cattle, the Bedouin possess an intimate knowledge of the weather and their natural surroundings. They pay close attention to weather patterns in the skies, so that they can travel to where new rain has fallen. They wander only across their own lands, as established by tradition. Though strongly territorial, they are generous and hospitable to travellers, in keeping with the etiquette of desert life: a stranger approaching a Bedouin tent will be looked after for three days.

photo: Lang/UNEP/Topham

