



# School Under the Sky

**T**UAREG ARE TRADERS. THEIR ANCESTORS FOLLOWED five major trade routes across the Sahara, a vast desert that covers most of North Africa. Some Tuareg travel by camel, just as their forefathers did. Many others, however, now use four-wheel-drive trucks. In Niger, a country on the southern edge of the Sahara, the Tuareg cross the Ténéré Desert to Bilma. In Bilma, they collect salt, which they form into pillars. From Bilma, the Tuareg move south into the Sahel, the land near the Sahara that is a mix of grassland and wooded areas. There, they trade salt and dates for grain.

Boys and young men need to learn the business of their fathers. They need to know how to navigate across the desert from one oasis to the next. These are skills boys learn from their fathers in the open-air school.

*Opposite:* The Tuareg live in desert and savanna regions of northern and western Africa. The largest numbers of Tuareg live in Niger and Mali.

### Nigeriens and Nigerians

The people of Niger are called Nigeriens. People from the neighboring country of Nigeria are called Nigerians.

Many Tuareg people pack all their belongings onto donkeys or camels when they move camp.

A Tuareg group moves into the Air Mountains of Niger. The women set up tents and start cooking fires. The men tend camels, and the children go to school. This is not an ordinary school. A teacher sets up his classroom. There are no walls, and the ceiling is the blue sky. For a blackboard, the teacher uses a large rock.

Students sit in a circle and listen to the lessons. Most of the lesson this day is teaching children how to read Tamasheq, the



language of the Tuareg. The students practice reading short passages from the Qur'an, the holy book of Islam. The teacher also reviews basic mathematics. This will help boys and young men when they travel and trade their goods. Navigation, caring for livestock, collecting salt, and bargaining are subjects young men learn in their open-air school. They learn these skills by working with their fathers.



**A group of Tuareg women cook in the evening. A grain called millet is their staple food.**

Within the circle of tents, Tuareg women teach their daughters Tamasheq. The women own the family tent, the date palms on their land, and the livestock. They are responsible for passing on Tuareg customs, as well as their language, to their children. Girls attend a different open-air school from the boys. They, too, learn to read and write, but they also learn to cook, to collect and dry dates, and to maintain the family's holdings. They learn to make indigo dye from the bodies of sea urchins and to repair clothing pounded by the ever-shifting sands.

Sometimes, there is no time for schooling. The Tuareg begin moving at dawn and walk at least 30 miles (50 kilometers) a day across deep sand dunes and along the face of desert cliffs. At dusk, the people halt for a well-earned rest. While



### The Language of Niger

Although Niger is in Africa, one of its national languages is French. A century ago, Niger was a colony of France. When Niger became an independent country, the government chose to keep French as its official language and the language used in dealing with foreign countries.

girls learn how to make millet porridge and strong, sweet tea, a young man sits at the feet of an experienced rope weaver. This, too, is a lesson. The people need rope for holding loads on camels and for tethering camels together. In the Tuareg open-air school, there are many lessons to be learned.

**A Tuareg girl relaxes in her tent. An estimated nine hundred thousand Tuareg live in northern and western Africa.**



# Sand and Sahel



**I**T IS NOVEMBER, AND THE TRADE WINDS BLOW COLD and dry across Niger. The wind is called the harmattan, and it comes every year. It blows throughout the dry season until March and carries grains of sand with each gust. The harmattan blows from the northeast or east, across all of western Africa. Day after day, the wind creates a dusty haze on the horizon. On occasion, the gusts develop into full-fledged sandstorms. When that happens, airplane flights are grounded, cars and trucks pull off the road, and even closed windows cannot keep the sand out of homes. The harmattan affects all Nigeriens. It is as much a part of the land as the mountains and the rivers.

Niger is a landlocked country of 489,678 square miles (1,267,000 sq km), about twice the size of France. The northern portion of the country is the Sahara Desert. The southern section is Sahel, a region with savannas (grasslands), wetlands, tropical forests, and dry zones.

*Opposite: A group of women make their way through a sandstorm in central Niger. Sandstorms can be dangerous, making it difficult to breathe.*

# Timeline

## NIGER HISTORY

- The Kiffians move into what is now Niger. **8000 BCE**
- The Tenerians move into the region. **5000 BCE**
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- Hausa people establish city-states in what is now Niger. **900s CE**
- The Tuareg migrate into desert regions of Niger. **1000s**
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- The Tuareg establish Agadez. **ca. 1300**
- The kingdom of Mali gains control of western Niger. **1300s**
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- The Songhai Empire takes over western Niger. **1400s**
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- The Bornu Empire gains control of parts of Niger. **1500s**
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- Scottish explorer Mungo Park travels the Niger River through Niger. **1805–1806**

## WORLD HISTORY

- ca. 2500 BCE** The Egyptians build the pyramids and the Sphinx in Giza.
- ca. 563 BCE** The Buddha is born in India.
- 313 CE** The Roman emperor Constantine legalizes Christianity.
- 610** The Prophet Muhammad begins preaching a new religion called Islam.
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- 1054** The Eastern (Orthodox) and Western (Roman Catholic) Churches break apart.
- 1095** The Crusades begin.
- 1215** King John seals the Magna Carta.
- 1300s** The Renaissance begins in Italy.
- 1347** The plague sweeps through Europe.
- 1453** Ottoman Turks capture Constantinople, conquering the Byzantine Empire.
- 1492** Columbus arrives in North America.
- 1500s** Reformers break away from the Catholic Church, and Protestantism is born.
- 1776** The U.S. Declaration of Independence is signed.
- 1789** The French Revolution begins.
- 1865** The American Civil War ends.
- 1879** The first practical lightbulb is invented.

## NIGER HISTORY

- French officers Paul Voulet and Julien Chanoine lead a violent expedition across Niger, killing thousands. **1898–1899**
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- Niger becomes part of French West Africa; Zinder is made capital of the Niger territory. **1922**
- Niamey becomes the capital of Niger. **1926**
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- The First Republic of Niger is founded; Hamani Diori becomes the first president. **1960**
- Mining uranium becomes a moneymaker for Niger. **1968**
- Seyni Kountché takes power in a military coup. **1974**
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- Mahamane Ousmane is elected president. **1993**
- Ousmane is ousted in a coup. **1996**
- Mamadou Tandja is elected president. **1999**
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- Mahamadou Issoufou becomes president; Brigi Rafini becomes prime minister. **2011**
- The radical Islamic group Boko Haram raids Nigerien villages. **2015**

## WORLD HISTORY

- 1914** World War I begins.
- 1917** The Bolshevik Revolution brings communism to Russia.
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- 1929** A worldwide economic depression begins.
- 1939** World War II begins.
- 1945** World War II ends.
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- 1969** Humans land on the Moon.
- 1975** The Vietnam War ends.
- 1989** The Berlin Wall is torn down as communism crumbles in Eastern Europe.
- 1991** The Soviet Union breaks into separate states.
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- 2001** Terrorists attack the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon near Washington, D.C.
- 2004** A tsunami in the Indian Ocean destroys coastlines in Africa, India, and Southeast Asia.
- 2008** The United States elects its first African American president.