

Flooding

When a river breaks its banks and floods, it is usually a bad thing for the surrounding area. Floods have been estimated to cause around £740 million worth of damage each year in the UK alone. It might surprise you to know that Egyptians celebrate when the Nile River floods.

On the 15th of August each year, Egyptians begin a two-week celebration called Wafaa-El-Nil. This is in recognition of how important the Nile has been to Egypt for thousands of years.

The Nile itself is quite an interesting river. It is arguably the longest river in the world, but the amount of water that flows through it is comparatively low. In fact, it isn't even in the top 100 rivers when you look at how much water flows through them each year. In total, it passes through 11 different countries and is the main source of water for Egypt, Sudan and South Sudan.

The Ethiopian Mountains are far away from Egypt. Each winter, they are covered in thick snow. This melts in the summer. The meltwater flows down into the Nile. This time of year is also monsoon season. Heavy rain falls on the mountains for weeks. This adds even more water. This causes water levels in the Nile to rise between June and September each year. The water overflowed the river banks and flooded the dry Egyptian deserts on either side.

When water flows quickly, it is able to carry nutrients and soil with it. The Nile is no exception. When the water flowed onto the land, not only did it provide it with valuable water, but it also deposited lots of nourishing nutrients. Without them, Ancient Egyptian farmers wouldn't have been able to grow crops. The flooding of the Nile allowed Egypt to prosper.

Over thousands of years, the Nile turned what was once a desert into a lush green valley. The Egyptians used this to feed their growing population. Wafaa-El-Nil is a way for modern Egyptians to remember the role that the Nile played in the history of their nation.



Floods were predictable. The Ancient Egyptians knew that it would happen each year, although the exact dates always changed. They devised a way to monitor the river upstream so that they could be alerted when the flooding started. Their year was split into three sections. Akhet was the period of “inundation” when the river flooded. Peret was the period of growth that followed. Shemu was the time for harvest.

Modern Egypt doesn't have to worry about the Nile flooding as it used to. Various dams have been built over the past 150 years. These control the flow of water and make sure that it doesn't flood. These are controversial because they have a negative impact on wildlife. Many Egyptians also believe that they alter the natural cycle of the river that has served them for thousands of years.

RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. How much does flood damage cost the UK each year?
2. Through how many countries does the Nile pass?
3. What does the river bring with it that helps farmers?
4. What is the name of the celebration in honour of the Nile?
5. What were the names of the three parts of the Ancient Egyptian year?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

S

How is the Egyptian's response to the Nile flooding different to most other places?

S

Why is this?

V

Which word describes water that has come from melted snow and ice?

V

Find and copy a word that means “in comparison with” something else.

I

Why might Ancient Egyptian farmers have been worried if the Nile didn't flood?