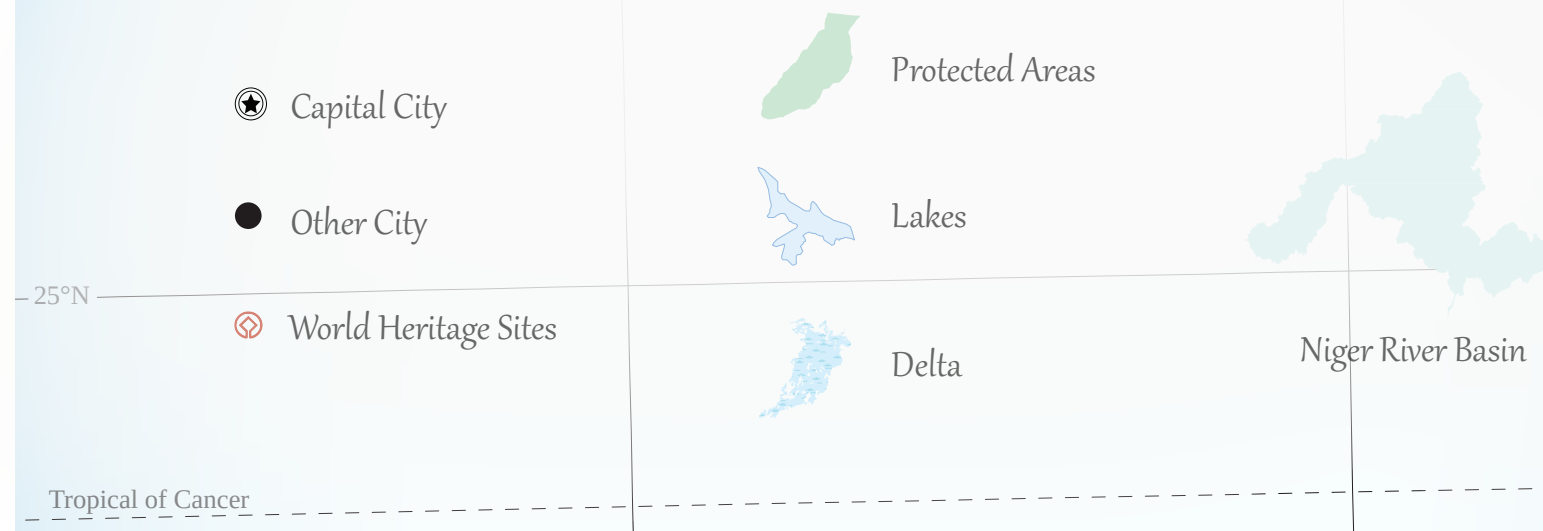


Niger River

The Mother River of West Africa



Niger River is the third largest River in Africa, only after the Nile and Congo River. It extends about 4,180 km, with a drainage basin of about 2,117,700 km² in area. The river originates in the Guinean Highland in Guinea. Although the source is merely 240km inland from the Atlantic Ocean, it travels instead northward into Mali and the Sahara Desert, before taking a sharp right turn in the city of Timbuktu, flowing south, travelling through southern Niger, and finally flows into the Guinea Bay in Nigeria.

African civilization, empires, and vital crossroads for trade. Djenné-Djénno, located 1.5km from the current city of Djenné, was one of the oldest urbanized centers in West Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. Large urban riverside centers such as Timbuktu were established later on in the Middle Ages when large empires such as the Mali Empire and Songhai Empire dominated the region and became some of the largest Islamic cultural and trans-Saharan trade centers in sub-Saharan Africa.

Niger River is the mother river of West Africa. Like the Nile River in East Africa, the annual flooding of the river provides nutrient-rich lands for agriculture, transportation, and settlement along its banks and has since ancient times been the center of West

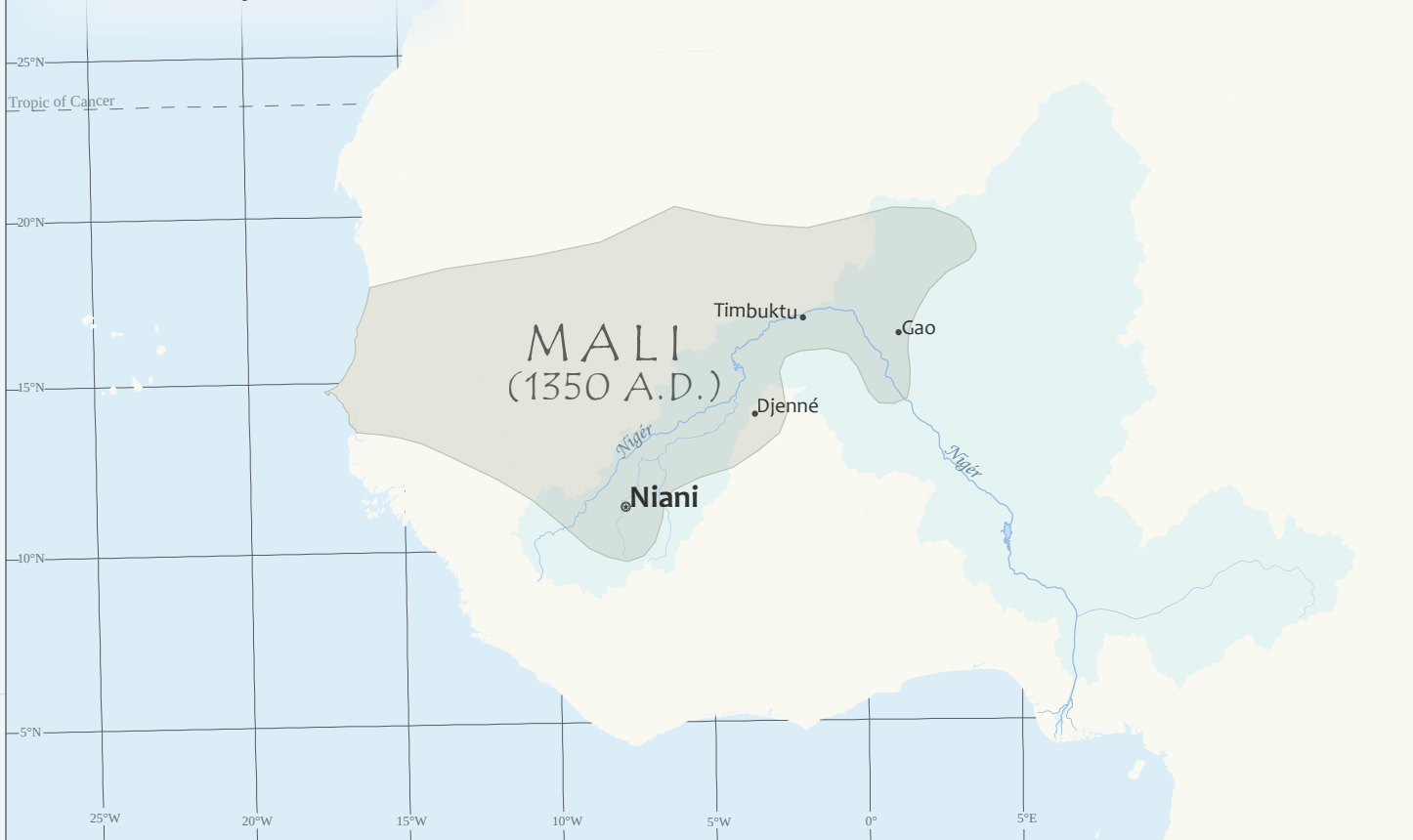
Now, Niger River still plays a very important role in West Africa. There are new urban centers such as Bamako, Mali and Niamey, Niger, alongside historical ones, areas under conservation such as the W National Park, and regions with economic importance, such as the oil-rich Niger River Delta which brings significant revenue to Nigeria.



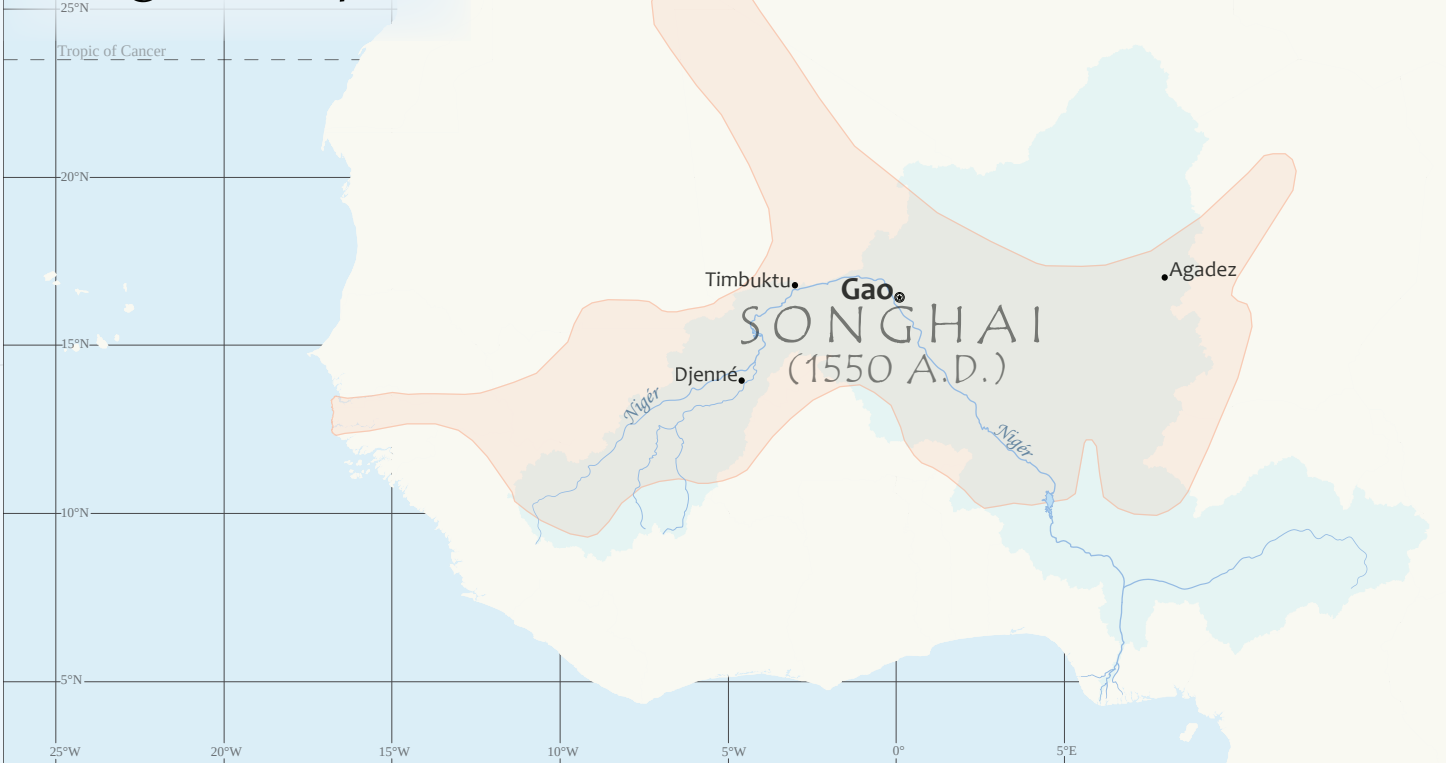
Historic Empires and Niger River

Mali Empire (c. 1230–1670) and Songhai Empire (c. 1464–1591) were two most important and powerful empires in feudal West Africa. Large urban centers such as Timbuktu, Gao and Djenné were established and became important Islamic cultural centers and trade centers.

Mali Empire



Songhai Empire



Niger River Inner Delta

Niger River Inner Delta is an inland delta of Niger River. It is an area of wetlands, lakes and floodplains in the semi-arid zone of Sahel in central Mali. During the wet season, the annual flood irrigates the land which can be used for agricultural production. The fertile land has become the locations of historic centers and river ports such as Mopti, the fourth largest city of Mali, and Djenné, a historic trade center with its famous landmark: Great Mosque of Djenné.

Timbuktu

Timbuktu is an ancient city in Mali. It has a population of 54,453. It became a permanent settlement starting from the 12th century and soon became the center of trans-Saharan trade and academic learning when it became a part of Mali Empire. It was later a major trade center of Songhai Empire. Although it was declared capital after the Moroccan defeated the Songhai Empire, it had entered a long period of decline.

Gao

Gao is a city in Northwestern Mali. Although a small city with only around 86,000 residents, Gao was the capital of the Songhai Empire. However, after the Moroccan invasion in 1591, the Songhai Empire collapsed and Gao went into decline when the new ruler chose Timbuktu as the new capital.

Djenné

Djenné is a historic town that lies in the inner delta region of central Mali. It has a population of 32,944. Just 2.5 km from the center of Djenné is the archaeological site of Djenné-Jéno. First settled in 200 B.C., Djenné-Jéno was one of the earliest urban centers in West Africa. The new town of Djenné was later developed after 1000 A.D., when it had a close relationship with Timbuktu and became a center of trans-Saharan trade in goods such as gold, slaves, and salt. It continued to thrive as an Islamic cultural center until the French colonized the region and chose Mopti, rather than Djenné, as the regional center in late 19th century.

W National Park

The W National Park is a major national park in West Africa. It got its name because of a meander of Niger River that shaped like a "w". The National Park includes areas of three countries: Burkina Faso, Benin and Niger. The National Park covers some more than 10,000 km² of uninhabited land and its home to diverse plant and animal species.

Niger Delta

Niger Delta is the delta of Niger River sitting directly on the Gulf of Guinea. The area declared by the government extends around 70,000 km². It is a heavily populated area with a population about 31 million. The delta is extremely oil rich and is a major center of petroleum production in Nigeria. The oil production has brought revenues to the region, but also conflicts and environmental issues.