

In the Desert

Learning Objective:

To find out about desert formations.

NEXT

We are going to look at some photos of deserts around the world to see what features we can see.



For each photo, talk about what you can see and how you think each feature came to be there.

BACK

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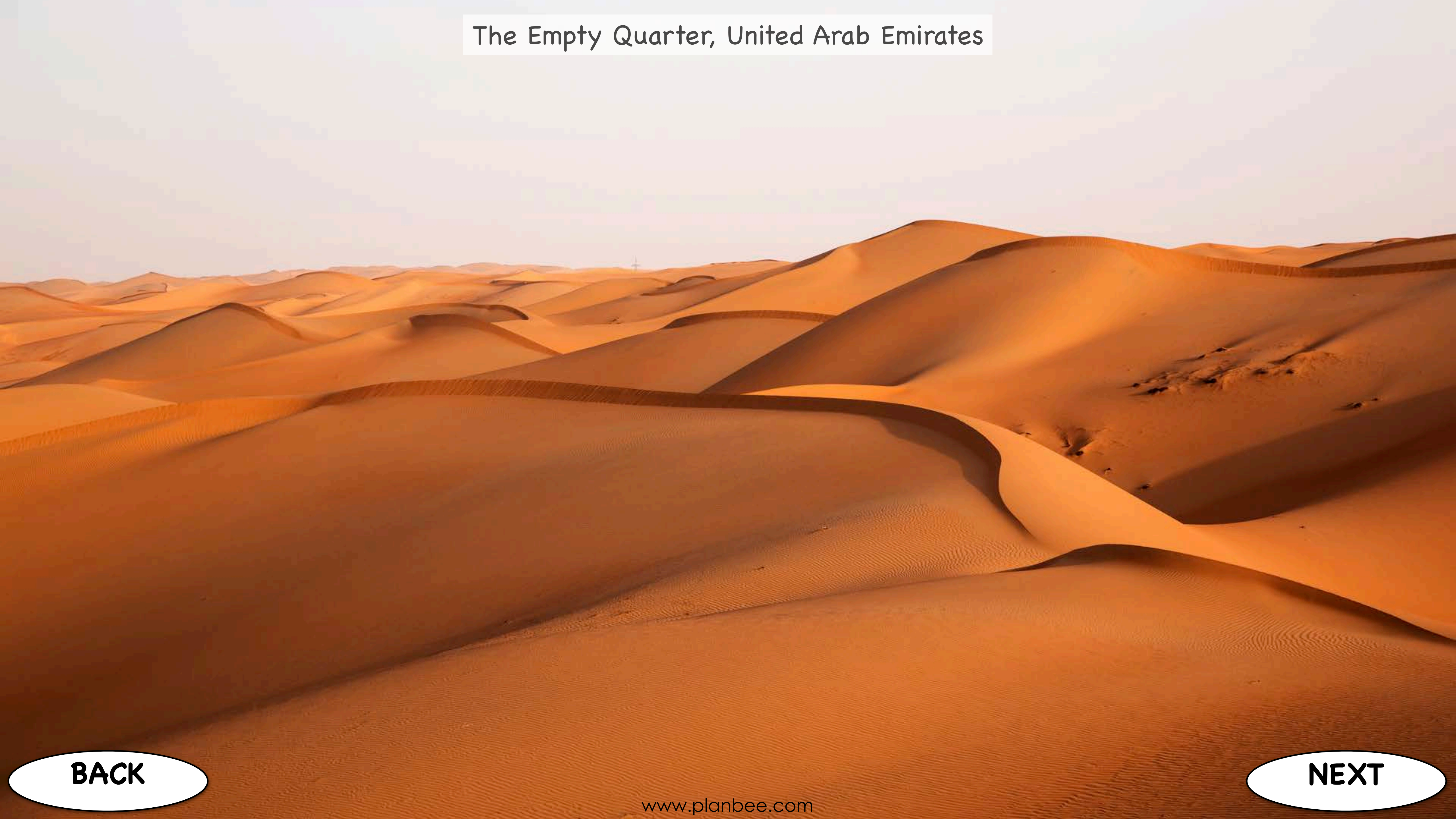
Taklamakan Desert, China



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NEXT

The Empty Quarter, United Arab Emirates



BACK

NEXT

The Painted Desert, USA



BACK

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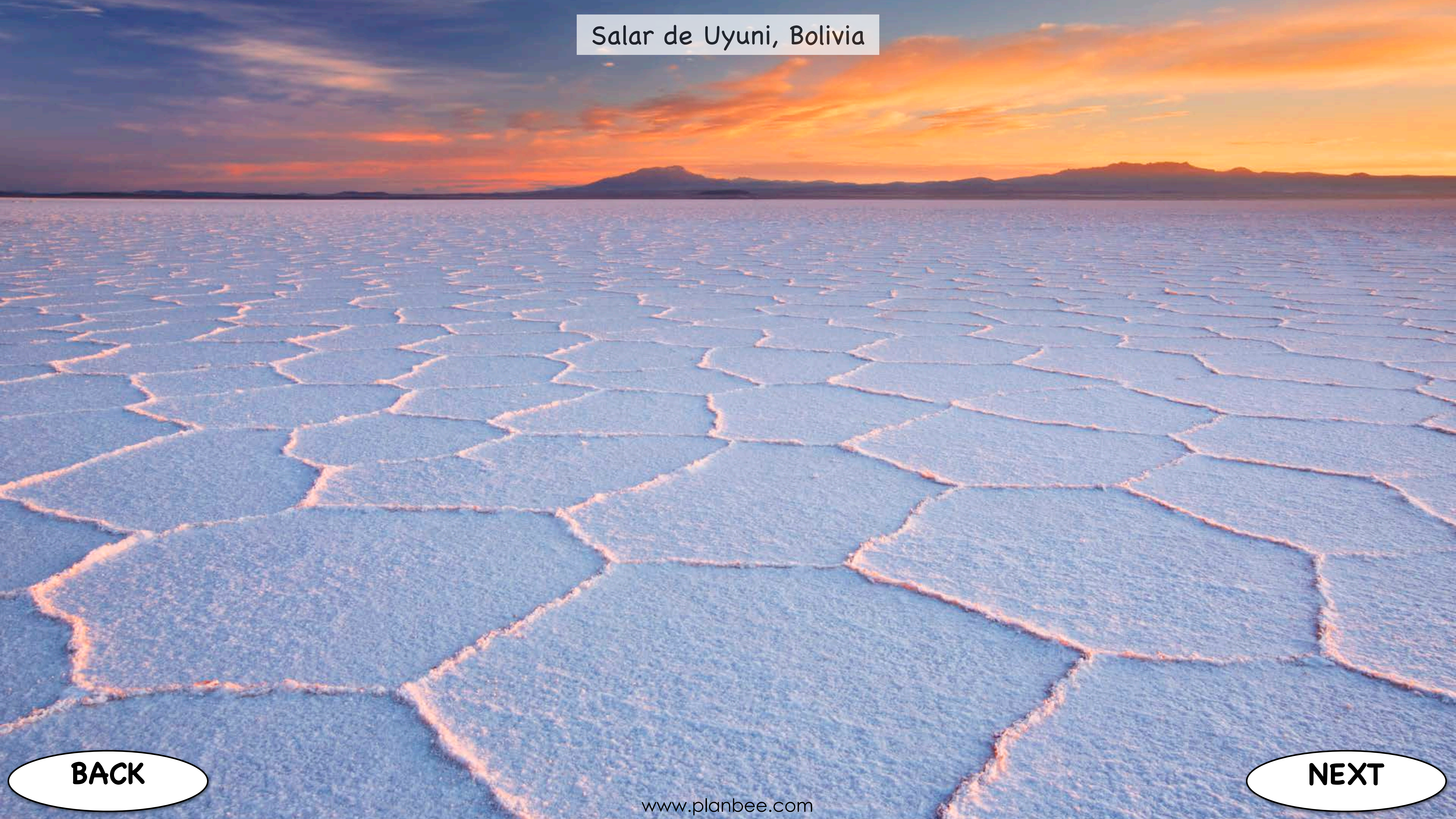
Monument Valley, USA



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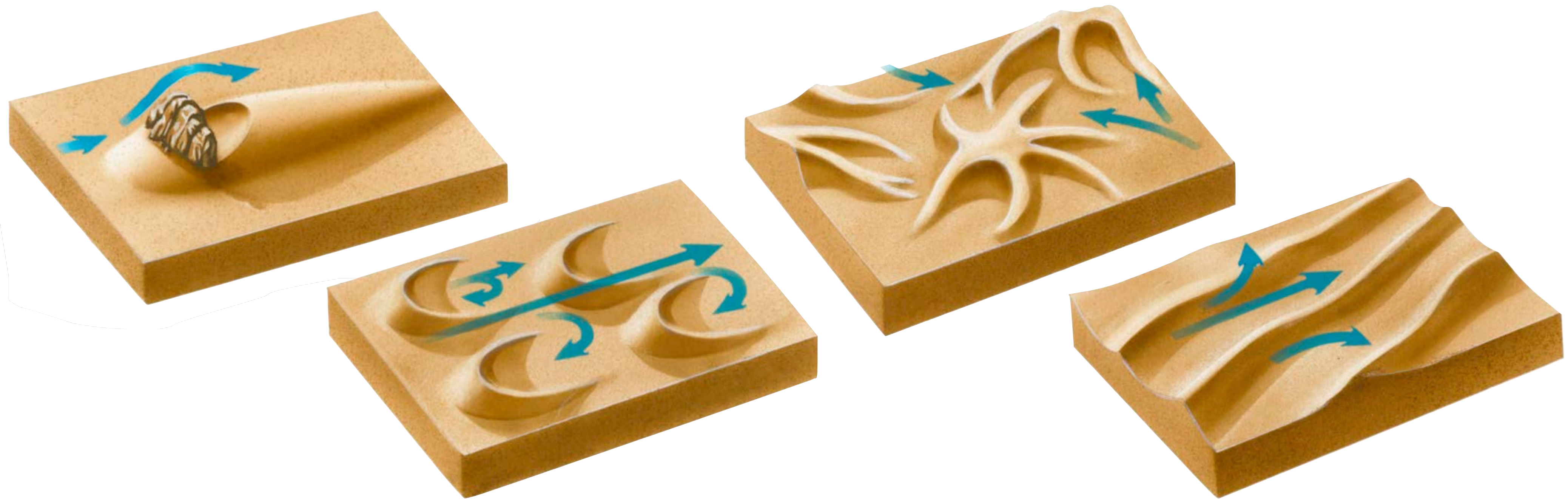
Salar de Uyuni, Bolivia



BACK

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One of the most recognisable features of sandy deserts are sand dunes. Dunes are formed when the wind moves sand particles to form mounds. There are several different types of sand dune which create patterns, depending on the speed and direction of the wind.



These diagrams show some of the ways in which sand dunes can form.

BACK

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Only around 20% of all the deserts in the world are made up of sand. The rest are rocky or gravelly. In rocky deserts, there are often amazing rock formations like these.



BACK

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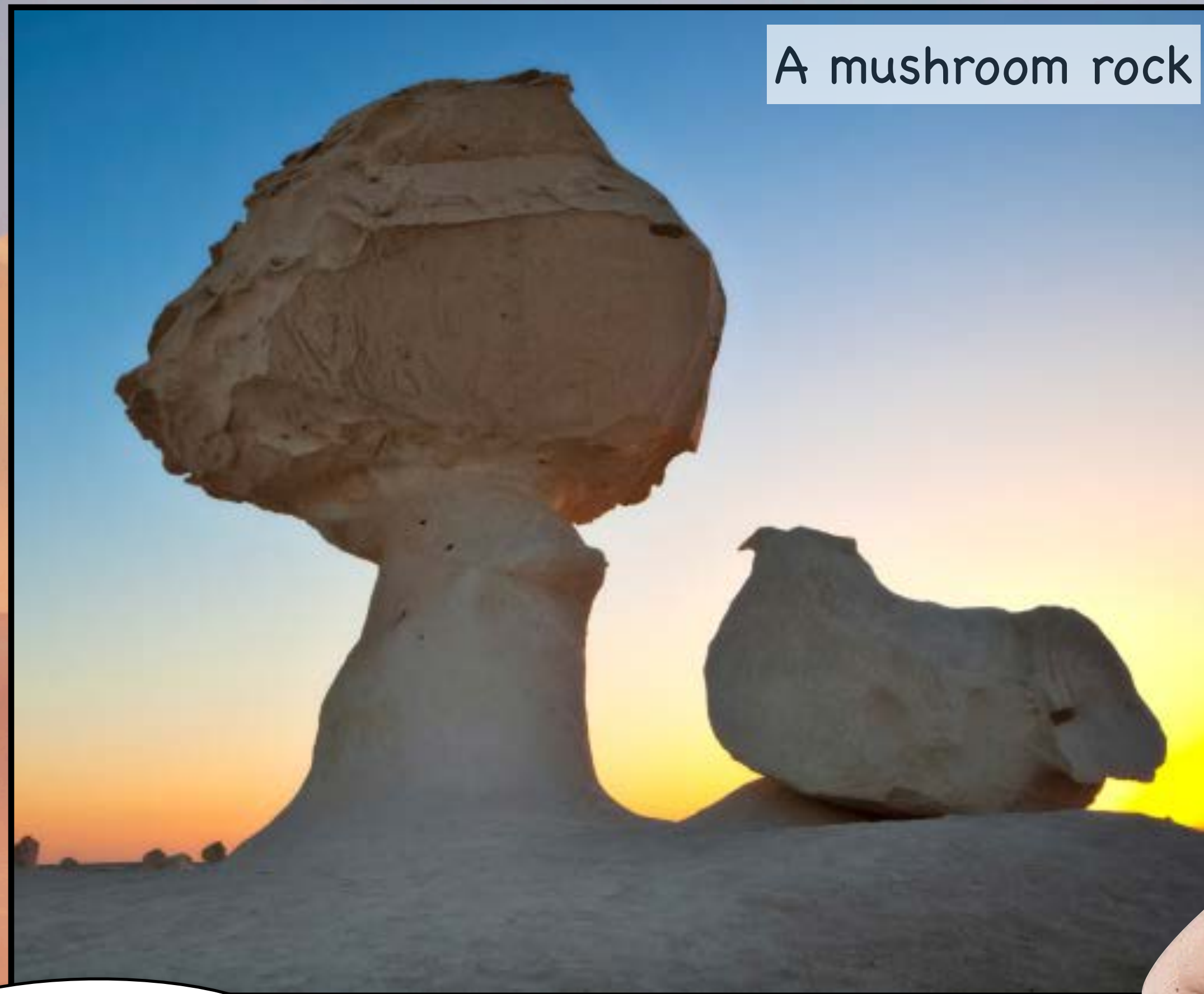
A natural arch

These rock formations are caused by the effects of temperature, wind and flash floods. Rain does not happen often in deserts but when it does it often causes flash floods. These cause rocks and boulders to be carried along by the water, scraping at the rocks as it travels. This causes the rock to wear away through a process called **erosion**.

BACK

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Desert winds also cause erosion. The wind picks up dust and sand which rubs against the rocks as it passes. Over millions of years, this wears away the rock to create interesting shapes and formations.



A mushroom rock

This is a picture of a mushroom rock in Egypt. The bottom part of the rock has been eroded, leaving it top heavy.

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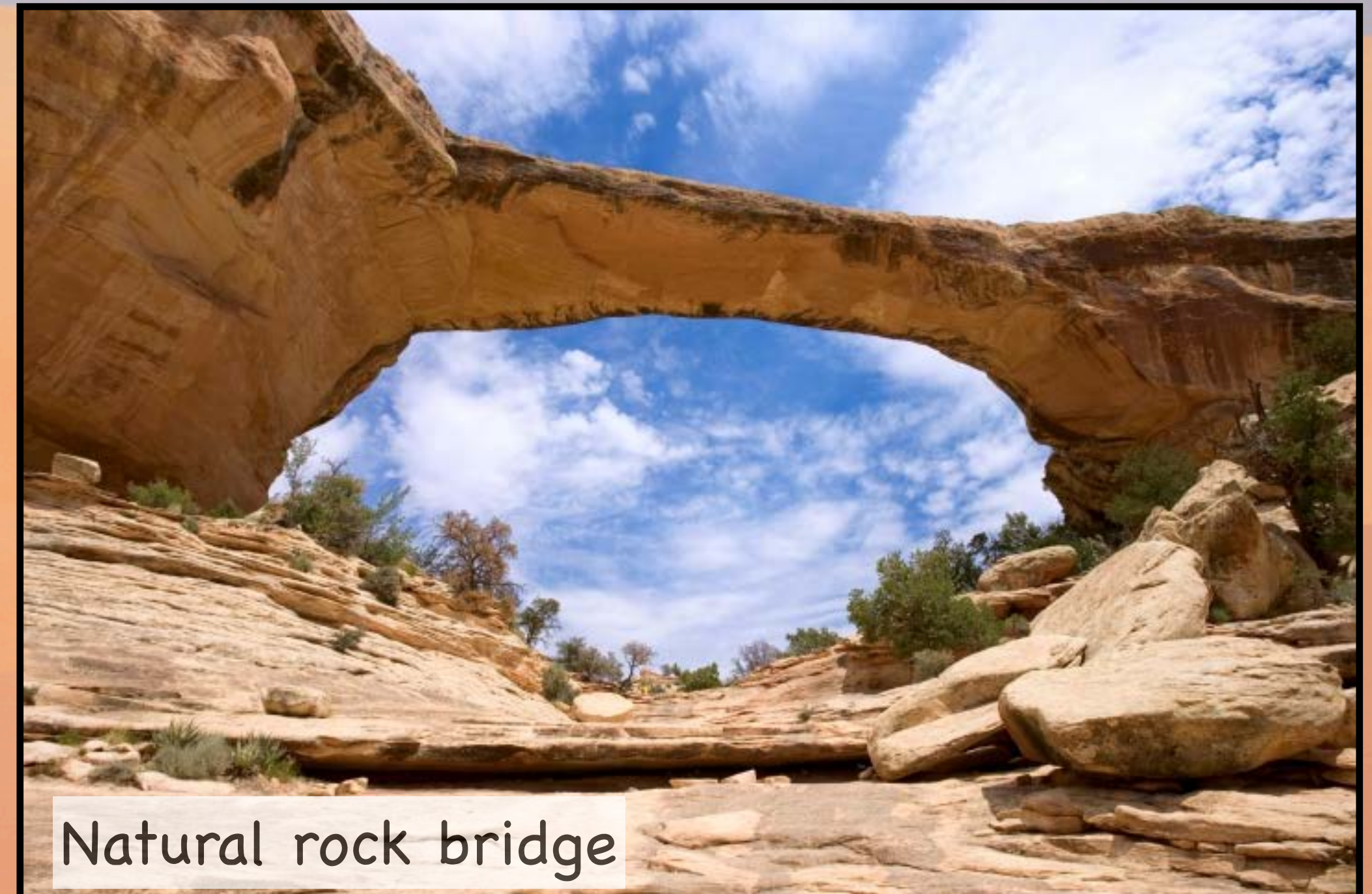
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Natural pillars

These natural pillars
have formed in the
Sahara desert.

This rock bridge was
formed millions of years
ago by a river that has
long since dried up.



Natural rock bridge

BACK

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These flat-topped mountains are called **mesas**. They are formed when the land around them is eroded away by wind and water.



Mesa means
table in
Spanish!



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This is the Painted Desert in Arizona, USA. Layers of sand, shale and ancient clay have been revealed through erosion, showing beautiful coloured rocks.

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Another interesting feature of deserts are salt basins. These are formed when water evaporates and leaves the salt that was in the water behind. Salt basins can also be called salt flats or salt plains.

This might look like snow but it is actually a salt basin in the Atacama desert!



BACK

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Have you ever
seen a salt basin?

Have you ever seen
rock formations like those
in the deserts we have
seen today?

BACK

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Plenary:

What do you think the most impressive desert formation is? Why?



BACK