



Kenya: A Natural Outlook: Chapter 4. Quaternary Evolution (Developments in Earth Surface Processes)

Daniel O. Olago

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The Quaternary evolution of Kenya is set in a dynamic climatic, environmental, volcanic and tectonic context. Climate has been controlled by orbital forcing with a dominant precessional cycle of 23,000 years driving hydrological changes that have had dramatic impacts on lake levels. Climate has interacted with tectonism and volcanism to continually modify the landscapes and environments, partly influencing hominin, animal and plant evolution. The most prominent feature is the Rift Valley, whose evolution was associated with flood volcanism, rift deformation and migration, formation of caldera volcanoes and the rise and establishment of many lakes, up to about 0.3 Ma. In the western part of the country, Lake Victoria arose in the Middle Pleistocene as a consequence of rift margin uplift and resulting river reversal and ponding. In the eastern part of the country, the landscape is dominated by the Plio-Pleistocene evolution of Mount Kenya and the Nyambeni Volcanic Series which comprises of a large field of basaltic cones and vents that extend to the arid to semi-arid northern part of the country. Several factors such as the tectonic evolution, climate, wave and tidal regime, marine transgressions and regressions, sedimentation and river discharge control the geomorphology of the Kenyan coast. Geomorphological features include dune sands, coral reefs and terraces which indicate that sea level was above present levels at least four times during the Pleistocene.

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