

Ancient waters



Sometimes the best place to look for water is in the desert.

Consider the Nubian aquifer, buried undetected and untouched for centuries beneath the Sahara desert of all places.

It is now being tapped by Libya, Egypt, Chad and the Sudan.

The water being pulled up from the planet's largest desert is more than 20,000 years old. Formed at a time when the Sahara was not a desert, the aquifer may never be replenished once it is depleted.

The U.S. has its own version of this phenomenon —the Ogallala aquifer which ranges from Texas up through the Great Plains states.

Unlike its Nubian counterpart, it was discovered some time ago. In fact its discovery helped put an end to the “dust bowl” that destroyed family farms through out the West and exacerbated the misery of the Great Depression.

However, it may not last much longer. The Ogallala is now being so heavily tapped for the irrigation of farmland, some scientists estimate it is being drawn down 25 times faster than it can be replenished.

While it could be exhausted in as little as 30 years, some studies suggest it would take 6,000 years to refill.

— **Evan Brandt**