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Reading Practice

I. Read about this disappearing lake in central Africa, then answer the questions putting either T for true, F for false or NG for "Not Given".

Rikki Mbaza has a very English name but his part of central Africa is suffering from a problem that few in England would have to put up with: a lack of rain so acute that Rikki's livelihood is literally evaporating away. "I would love to have the English weather here in Chad. Then the lake would not go away."

Rikki Mbaza lives in the town of Bol near the shores of Lake Chad, a lake that has shrunk by 90% in the last 40 years. A lack of rain is only one of many culprits being blamed for this emerging disaster.

"I am a fisherman. For me, it is like watching my life draining away every day. The fishing is getting worse and worse in the lake. They are getting smaller and I think the fish breeding has been disrupted by the reduction in area and in depth." Lake Chad is only a metre deep in most places.

Rikki struggles now to provide enough food and income for his wife Achta and their four children. Achta has had to take up pottery in her spare time in order to try and boost the amount of money coming into the household every month.

"Our rent doesn't go down with the level of the lake unfortunately," Mbaza complains. "We still have six mouths to feed but I need assistance from the government. They have left me to fend for myself in a desperate situation."

While one can understand Rikki Mbaza's frustration with his government, his accusatory tone is perhaps a little unfair. The Chad government has often seemed like a powerless, rudderless boat caught in the storm of international politics.

Angela Muscovite at the Center For African Politics at UCLA sees little reason for optimism in the case of the shrinking lake in the African heartland. "The story of Chad Lake is a modern day environmental tragedy. This is a body of water that, in 1960 was over 25,000 km2 in size - now it's less than 10% of that."

"It has been so over-exploited and it is an issue the whole international community, obviously more so those governments in Africa, need to co-operate on to find a resolution. And that isn't going to happen any time soon. By the time it does, they'll be arguing over a puddle in the middle of the desert. It's sad but that's how I see things panning out."

The guilty parties, as so often in these cases, blame each other for the problems that now beset the lake. Charlie Vaughan, who teaches Environmental Science at Cambridge University in Britain, explains why the lake is going the way of the Dodo. "The main culprit is geography funnily enough. Chad, Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon all lay claim to the waters of this lake and

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you only need a five metre shoreline to be able to extract water from it. The whole area has been a target for massive irrigation schemes over the last couple of decades with each country's agricultural ministry blaming the other three for the problems. In an area with plentiful rainfall, it wouldn't be so much of a problem. This is a dry area."

None of this gesturing and buck-passing will help Rikki, Achta and their four children in the near future. "I am learning how to fix cars. I don't think cars will be disappearing soon and will certainly last longer than this lake will," muses the glum-looking fisherman. "There won't be any more fishermen in this area in ten years." And with that, he says he has to go and study how to remove and repair brake pads.

1. Rikki has spent some time travelling in England. ☐
2. The lack of rain is not the only cause of the lake's reduction in size. ☐
3. Rikki's town, Bol, is further from the lake than it used to be. ☐
4. Lake Chad's disappearance is causing financial pressures for Rikki's family. ☐
5. Rikki feels the government should help him more. ☐
6. Angela Muscovite wants the Chad government to save the lake. ☐
7. She thinks action will come too late to save the lake. ☐
8. Charlie Vaughan says permission to extract water is given too easily. ☐
9. The demands of agriculture have been largely responsible for the lake's problems. ☐
10. Rikki will work in a garage when the fishing becomes too bad. ☐

II. Read the text and look at the questions that follow it. In this reading comprehension, the questions are multiple choice.

RAF Upper Heyford - once the heart of allied defence against nuclear attack by the USSR - could become a Cold War 'museum'.
Historians want parts of the base to be preserved as a heritage centre that could show future generations the struggle with Soviet communism 'in a way no document can'.
Details of the latest recommendations for Heyford - now being called Heyford Park - have been put forward by English Heritage which has called for measures to prevent demolition of the 'irreplaceable' military remains.

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Current thinking comes from a detailed assessment of Cold War infrastructure across England by English Heritage experts. Keith Watson, the chief executive of the North Oxfordshire Consortium who are to develop part of the site for housing, said they were in full agreement with English Heritage's proposals.

He said: "We are quite content with what English Heritage is proposing. It has always been part of our scheme to retain these structures in any event. "We are working with English Heritage to agree a consistent plan for the buildings."

David Went, English Heritage inspector of ancient monuments, said many Upper Heyford features exemplify historical aspects of national importance about the Cold War.

"The sheer scale and bare functionality of the structures on the base can illustrate for present and future generations, in a way no document can, the reality of the struggle with Soviet Communism," he said.

"In our view much of this character would be lost by future ill-thought-out change and there stands an opportunity to ensure this does not happen.

"We recognize that preservation of the whole base exactly as it stands today may not be a realistic option but a sustainable future could be found which balances the need for preservation against other needs."

Mr Went said the English Heritage view was that the future appearance of the base should include the most significant monuments and should:

•keep the open character of the runway area without planting schemes planned by developers

•keep a section of the main runway and the remainder as a grassed avenue

•provide all-weather access to the monuments, preferably by keeping existing base taxiways and perimeter tracks, for visitors or other practical use

•preserve the present landscape balance around the bomb bunkers and quick reaction area.

The English Heritage study, submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in advance of the public inquiry into planning wrangles over the base which started at Bodicote House yesterday, has revealed that much of the Heyford landscape prior to becoming an airbase was open common or heathland - a feature Cherwell District Council planners would like re-established as a local country park.

The council aims to defend the accepted 1,000-home plan which the North Oxfordshire Consortium of developers wishes to extend to over 5,000 homes.

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1. Why does English Heritage want to preserve the air base?

- They believe it is still of military importance.
- They think it can show young people something about history.
- There hasn't been proper planning by developers.

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2. What do the North Oxfordshire Consortium think?

- They want to build more houses than originally planned
- They say there is some possibility of keeping the base's original buildings.
- They want to call the base "Heyford Park".

3. Which of these proposal does English Heritage oppose?

- Planting trees where the runway is currently.
- Making it easy for people to see the important military buildings.
- Not destroying all of the runway.

4. Which would be the best sub-title to the article?

- Fight Against Communism Not Over Yet.
- Historians and Developers Clash Bitterly.
- Fight To Preserve Historical 'Document'.

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