

Open Forum 1

Web Site Transcript

Chapter 9

A = Lynne

B = Nathan

A: Welcome back to Round the World. It's been raining here on the East Coast all week, and I'd love to get away to somewhere warm and dry. And, well, my next guest happens to have just returned from the driest place on earth. Nathan Simms, welcome to Round the World.

B: Thanks, Lynne. It's good to be here. And believe me—I've been enjoying the rain this week!

A: I'm sure! So, tell me, Nathan—where is the driest place in the world? Africa? Siberia?

B: No and no. I'll give you another guess.

A: Well, it has to be a desert, right—a hot, dry place with very little rain. So, where is the driest desert?

B: Well, Lynne, the driest place in the world is in South America. The country of Chile, in fact.

A: Really? Is there a desert in Chile?

B: Yes, there is. It's called the Atacama Desert. It's in the north of Chile and stretches between the coast and the Andes Mountains.

A: The Atacama? That's probably new to most of our listeners. Could you spell it for us?

B: Certainly. It's A-T-A-C-A-M-A. Atacama.

A: So, how dry is the driest place on earth?

B: Well, Lynne, it almost never rains there. Officially, the driest place is the very center of the desert. At the center of the desert, there are a few millimeters of rain per decade—that is, a few drops of rain every 10 years!

A: How interesting! Is it possible for anyone to live there?

B: Oh no. In fact, almost nothing lives there—no plants, no animals, no people. Maybe there are some really tiny living creatures in the soil, but scientists haven't found any yet. In fact, I didn't actually go to the very center of the desert. It's very difficult to reach, and the temperatures make it very dangerous.

A: So where do people live in the Atacama Desert?

B: Well, remember that the Atacama Desert reaches to the sea. There are towns along the coast and about one million people live in them.

A: One million?!

B: That's right. It's an amazing place. I visited a few small towns and villages, and the people were very friendly.

A: How do they survive without water?

B: Well, they do have some water. There are some water sources, and water trucks bring in more water from outside the region. And, of course, the people in the Atacama have become really good at saving water, because there isn't much of it around. They've even learned a way to make water out of fog.

A: Water out of fog? How is that done?

B: Well, it's very clever! Think about a fishing net—you know, to catch fish? But a very fine net with very small holes between the threads. Well, they put up very large nets and when the fog touches the nets, water forms. The people then collect the water. They can do this every morning near the coast because there's almost always morning fog.

A: Is that a Chilean invention? A traditional skill?

B: No, actually, the idea came from Canada. The Canadian government gave money to set up the first fog catching project in the 1990s.

A: That's an amazing idea—simple, but effective.

B: Absolutely. They use the water for growing plants, for washing clothes, and even for taking showers.

A: They must have to collect a lot of water.

B: Well, in one village, the fog-catchers produce 10,000 liters of water a day.

A: How much?!

B: 10,000 liters.

A: Wow. That's a lot of water.

B: Not really. According to the United Nations, the minimum amount of water a person needs is 50 liters a day. That is, to live comfortably, you need access to about 50 liters of water. So, those 10,000 liters can only support 200 people.

A: Well, Nathan, thanks so much for joining us to share this fascinating story. Next week...