A SALT CARAVAN REACHES TIMBUKTU

About 1350, after about two months crossing the Sahara, a caravan from the north reaches the market of Timbuktu, near the bend of the Niger River. Camels kneel to be unloaded, traders bargain on mats, and the town's mud-brick buildings rise behind them. Look closely at what the camels carried, what is being weighed, and what else is for sale.



◆ WHAT THE LABELS SHOW ◆

Camels Dromedary camels can go many days without water. They made the long trip across the Sahara possible, in caravans of hundreds or thousands.

Salt slabs Rock salt was cut in big slabs at the desert mine of Taghaza, and one camel carried two. Salt sold for far more here than in the desert.

Gold dust Gold from the fields of the south was traded as dust and carried in small leather pouches. Gold dust was used as money.

Scales Small hand scales with two pans weighed gold dust, so buyer and seller could agree how much gold was paid for the salt.

Cloth Bolts of cloth, some made in West Africa and some brought across the desert, were traded and also used as money.

Books Handwritten books in Arabic came across the desert to sell, and Timbuktu's scholars copied, studied and kept them.

Djinguereber Mosque Timbuktu's great mud-brick mosque, built about 1327 after Mansa Musa's pilgrimage, where people prayed and scholars taught.

Mud-brick houses Flat-roofed houses of sun-dried mud brick, plastered with mud. Thick mud walls keep the inside cool in the Sahel's heat.