

## **The Ocean Floor**

The oceans of the world cover about 70% of the earth's surface; this is over 140 million square miles! The oceans vary in depth from the shallow waters of the continental shelf to the deep, dark waters of ocean trenches. If you went on a field trip across the ocean floor, what do you think you would see? You would see the same landforms that you see on land – mountains, valleys, hills, and plains! Some important features of the ocean floor include **the continental shelf, the continental slope, the continental rise, the abyssal plain, and ocean trenches.**

The **continental shelf** is that part of the ocean floor that begins at the shoreline and gently slopes underwater to an average depth of about 430 feet. It is covered with thick layers of sand, mud, and rocks. When you play in the water at the beach, you are on the continental shelf.

The **continental slope** begins at the edge of the continental shelf and plunges down to depths of over two miles. This area is also covered with thick layers of sand, mud, and rocks.

The **continental rise** is a gently sloping area that connects the steep walls of the continental slope to the bottom of the ocean floor. It, too, is covered with thick layers of sand, mud, and rocks.

The **abyssal plain** is the flat area of the ocean floor. It is covered with sand, mud, and plant and animal remains. Located on this flat plain are undersea mountains called seamounts that are formed by erupting volcanoes.

**Ocean trenches** are very deep and similar to canyons on land. The deepest ocean trench on Earth is located in the Pacific Ocean. It is called the Marianas Trench and is 36,198 feet in depth. The Grand Canyon, which is the largest canyon on Earth, is only 5,300 feet deep. Wow!