

The Physical Regions of Canada



The Western Cordillera

This is a vast region of mountain and plateau country extending from the Pacific Coast to the Interior Plains. The *Coast Mountains* rise out of the sea to form Victoria Island, the Queen Charlotte Islands, and the Pacific Coast. This high, rugged and heavily forested range runs the entire length of the coast forming many fjords. This area is of great economic value. The fishing industry is important because of the fine fishing grounds around the fjords and the Pacific Salmon which spawn in the mountain rivers. The lumber and pulp industries also prosper because of the dense forests. Other industries have settled here because of the great source of electrical power from the swift mountain rivers. The highest peak in Canada, Mount Logan in the Yukon Territory, is part of this range. It rises 5951 metres above sea level.

The *Intermountain Plateau* lies between the Coast Mountains and the Canadian Rockies. It is cut by deep river valleys and interrupted by a number of smaller mountains.

The great *Canadian Rockies* form the eastern border of this mountainous region. Some of these snow-capped, rugged peaks rise over 4000 metres. National parks and beautiful scenery make this a favourite vacation site.

The Interior Plains

The Interior Plains extend from the Canadian Rockies to the Canadian Shield. The northern half of this region is an evergreen forest. The southern half is a prairie, or natural grassland. This flat, treeless prairie has become a huge agricultural region of wheat fields, livestock, farms, and cattle ranches. Canada is one of the world's major producers of wheat because of the great supply coming from this prairie. This region also has large reserves of oil and natural gas, particularly in the province of Alberta. Today, it is common to see drilling rigs and wheat fields existing side by side.

The Canadian Shield

Almost half of Canada's surface is a rocky plateau known as the Canadian Shield. This rugged wilderness, created by ancient glaciers, forms a great arc through the eastern half of Canada. Its northern portion is Arctic tundra; its southern portion is evergreen forest. Though the soil is unsuitable for agriculture and few people live here, the Shield is one of Canada's most valuable regions. Its forests are Canada's main source of lumber and wood pulp. Its rivers, flowing over the southern edge, provide half of Canada's hydroelectric power. But most important, the Shield is the storehouse of Canada's mineral wealth. Rich mineral deposits mined in this area, such as gold, iron, uranium, and lead, are the backbone of Canada's industry.

The Hudson Bay-Arctic Lowlands

This region around Hudson Bay is a low, wet rocky plain covered with swamps and forests. This region has a layer of sedimentary rock that rests on top of the ancient rock of the Canadian Shield. The Arctic Lowlands are made up of a series of islands located in Canada's far north. The harsh climate does not permit farming since the ground remains frozen most of the year. Few people live here.

Innuitian Mountains

The Innuitian Mountains stand like icy watchtowers in Canada's far north. In some locations they measure over 2500 metres in height. They were formed in the middle of the Mesozoic era when the North American plate moved northwards. The Innuitian Mountains contain some igneous and metamorphic rock but for the most part are composed of sedimentary rock. Vast areas are covered by ice and permanent snow.

The Appalachian Highlands

This region is the northern extension of the Appalachian Mountain System. It is a rolling upland surface of dense forests, few lowlands, and a jagged coastline. Since most of this region is hilly, it is not generally suited to farming. Lumbering and fishing are profitable livelihoods because of the forests and good harbours found in this region.

The Great-Lakes St. Lawrence Lowlands

This region is a narrow belt of fertile plains through which the St. Lawrence River carries the waters of its tributaries and Great Lakes to the Atlantic Ocean. This area is both a rich farmland and wealthy industrial centre. Since the St. Lawrence River provides tremendous electrical power and a major waterway for ocean traffic, this region has attracted half of Canada's population and is the manufacturing centre of the continent.

Complete the following questions:

- [1a] Which section of the Western Cordillera is of the most economic value to Canada?
- [1b] Why?

- [2] What is the largest physical region in Canada?

- [3] In which physical region are the great prairies located?

- [4] How was the Canadian Shield formed?

- [5] Which regions you would expect to have the lowest populations?

- [6a] In which region is the industrial centre of the continent?
- [6b] Which provinces are part of this region?

- [7] What would you expect to be the major livelihoods of people in Newfoundland & Labrador?

- [8] The Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Lowlands are one of the smallest physical regions, yet they are the most densely populated. Why?

- [9] Why is the Canadian Shield so valuable to Canada's economy?