

West of the Coteau extends the third and highest prairie step with an altitude of between 3,000 and 4,300 feet. In the south it is quite hilly, where the Cypress Hills rise above it to shed waters into the Saskatchewan or Missouri basins. Covered with till, it has generally a slightly rolling surface suited particularly to ranching. Old glacial lakes along the Bow and Oldman Rivers provide excellent agricultural areas, as do outwash plains in front of the moraines that occur between Calgary and Edmonton.

The three prairie steps are united by the great arms of the Saskatchewan River flowing from the Rockies to Lake Winnipeg, and also by the soil zones which form broad west-east arcs. Railways, roads and crop belts accentuate these natural ties. So do the coal, oil and gas fields. The prairies are underlain by Canada's chief fuel-bearing rocks. From Estevan through Drumheller to Macleod are a succession of coal fields. Southwest Manitoba and south Saskatchewan lie on the edge of the Williston oil basin. Western Alberta is the site of another large oil field. Gas is important in southern Alberta and in the Peace River district of the northwest.

A low divide of moraine-capped hills separates the prairies from the Mackenzie Lowland. This huge area, 1,100 miles long and up to 300 miles wide, consists of an asymmetrical plain, tilted from plateau-like levels in the west, at 4,000 feet, to basin-like stretches in the east, at 500 feet. The main channel follows the eastern depression. Long, rapid, deeply entrenched tributaries, such as the Athabasca, Peace, Liard, Arctic Red and Peel Rivers, come in from the west. Where the Lowland meets the Shield, a few pronounced hollows occur filled with great lakes. These were much larger during glacial times and consequently glacial-lake beds are exposed all around Lesser Slave, Athabasca, Great Slave and Great Bear Lakes; the more southerly of these areas provide reasonably good agricultural or forest lands. The Athabasca and Peace Rivers, emptying into glacial Lake Athabasca, formed extensive sand deltas; an even larger delta of this type is the one formed by the Slave River at Great Slave Lake. The Mackenzie delta is one of the largest on the continent.

Though the southern part of the Lowland, particularly in the Peace River district, forms good agricultural land, the northern part is climatically unsuited to commercial farming. The lead and zinc deposits at Pine Point and the oil field at Norman Wells, together with oil potential in the middle Mackenzie and Peel basins, are valuable northern assets.

The Northern Interior (Hudson Bay and Inner Arctic) Lowlands.—Palæozoic sedimentaries, they dip gently north from the main height of land between the Hudson Bay and Great Lakes drainage basins. They are thus a parallel structure to that of the St. Lawrence Lowlands, but there the likeness ends. In the past, marine transgression buried the northern Palæozoics, masking the effects of the underlying rocks. Much of the land, then, consists of great stretches of old marine beds sloping down from one raised beach to the other. Through these thrust occasional masses of drumlins and periodic outcrops of rock. Moreover, the climate is arctic and therefore vegetation is limited to grass, moss and lichen, and soil development is inhibited. Thus these northern plains are of little economic value except for some hunting and trapping.

The plains may be divided into four sub-regions: the coast plain of Hudson Bay, between Churchill and Moosonee; the southern part of Southampton Island, and Coats and Mansel Islands; most of the islands and parts of the coast of Foxe Basin; and parts of the southern Arctic Archipelago, including northwest Baffin, Somerset, Prince of Wales, eastern Victoria and eastern Banks Islands.

The Canadian Appalachians.—The Canadian Appalachians are a part of the great range of fold mountains extending from Newfoundland through the Maritimes and south-east Quebec to Tennessee and beyond the Mississippi to Arkansas. They were thrown up chiefly in Silurian, Devonian and Carboniferous times, thus involving Palæozoic strata. In those times, two long geosynclines ran through the region—the Laurentian and the Acadian. The former extended from northwest Newfoundland through the Gaspé Peninsula and southeast Quebec, and gave birth to the Long Range of Newfoundland and the Shickshock