

Subsection 2.—Inland Waters

Drainage Basins.—The inland waters of Canada (not including saltwater areas that are a part of Canada) are extensive, constituting about 7.6 p.c. of the total area of the country. They are best studied by segregating the main drainage basins, described in detail in the following special article.

THE DRAINAGE BASINS OF CANADA

The rivers of Canada drain four great basins—the Hudson Bay, the Arctic, the Atlantic and the Pacific, mentioned in order of size. The northern basins are the largest, 75 p.c. of Canada's land area being drained by northerly-flowing rivers.

The rivers have played an important role in the development of the country. In the early days of exploration they provided access to the interior and were the highways of travel and commerce as new areas opened up. Today, with the exception of the mighty St. Lawrence whose function as a transport facility has been greatly enhanced by the construction of the new Seaway, the rivers of Canada carry little commerce but the drainage basins have taken on a new importance as the bases of vast developed and potential water power resources. Locally, particularly in some drier areas of the Prairie Provinces, they are the bases of important irrigation projects.

HUDSON BAY DRAINAGE BASIN

The Hudson Bay drainage basin is the largest in area and is the least important economically. Many of the rivers have been used locally for transportation, especially in earlier days by fur traders and explorers, but only the Nelson and Churchill Rivers, which have water power potential within economical distance of settled areas, are of any great significance. Island Falls on the Churchill and Grand Rapids on the Nelson are the sites of hydro-electric developments.

Several tributaries of the Nelson River are of importance to the economy of the Prairie Provinces, particularly the Saskatchewan River with its two main branches—the North Saskatchewan and the South Saskatchewan—which drain one of Canada's great agricultural regions. In the early days they were the pathways to settlement but recently their importance has settled around a number of major irrigation projects, bringing new life to a dry region.

ARCTIC DRAINAGE BASIN

The Arctic drainage basin is dominated by the Mackenzie, one of the world's longest rivers, which flows 2,635 miles from the head of the Finlay River to the Arctic Ocean. Although only the part of the river north from Great Slave Lake bears the name, the Mackenzie drainage basin is the largest river basin in Canada and drains an area in the three most westerly provinces of approximately 700,000 sq. miles. The Mackenzie includes among its many important tributaries such great rivers as the Peace and the Athabasca. Much of the river has been used as a highway by fur-trade canoes since the eighteenth century. Except for a 16-mile portage in Alberta, it is possible for steamboats to navigate from the end of steel at Waterways on the Athabasca River to the mouth of the Mackenzie, a distance of 1,700 miles. The navigation season begins about mid-June and ends in mid-October.

ATLANTIC DRAINAGE BASIN

The Atlantic drainage basin is the most important in Canada. It is dominated by the St. Lawrence-Great Lakes system, which covers an area of approximately 678,000 sq. miles and drains the industrial heart and thus the most densely populated region of the country.

The St. Lawrence is one of the great rivers of the world; the estimated flow volume of more than 400,000 cu. feet per second at its mouth is exceeded only by the Mississippi on the North American Continent. It became an important highway of transportation soon after its discovery by Jacques Cartier in 1535 and as the Canadian West opened up the St.