

The Rocky Mountains form the eastern frontier of the Cordillera. They present a continuous range of high wall-like ridges, cut up by glaciation into sharp peaks, knife-like edges and deep hollows, a range averaging 50 miles in width in the south and 25 miles in the north. Some of the highest peaks and most beautiful scenery on the Continent are to be found in the Canadian Rockies—dazzlingly white crests topping iron-grey or yellow-red reaches of bare rock, huge scree below them with salients of dark-green forest pushing up between, narrow forested benches and deep gorges or blue-green lakes at the bottom. Many of the peaks rise to 10,000 feet or more, the highest in British Columbia being Mount Robson with an elevation of 12,972 feet. The Rockies are traversed by few passes, the most noted being Yellowhead (3,700 feet), Kicking Horse (5,388 feet) and Crowsnest (4,459 feet).

The central section is marked off from the eastern for most of its length by a sharp topographical break known as the Rocky Mountain Trench which contains the headwaters of the Kootenay, Columbia, Fraser, Peace and Liard Rivers and is one of the most remarkable of its kind. It is about 2,500 feet above sea level and averages from two to 10 miles in width for a distance of over 1,000 miles. Westward the character of the land changes considerably. On the whole, relief is lower and broader and the effects of glaciation are not as spectacular. This section consists of several ranges. Between the Cassiar Mountains in the far north and the Skeena Mountains lies the small Stikine plateau and south of the Skeena-Hazelton Ranges there opens out a wide plateau-like upland which sinks in the central part of the province to the lowlands of the Upper Fraser basin. Southward the upland is squeezed out between the Columbia and Cascade Mountains. The Columbias are a series of rather blocky massive ranges—the Cariboo, Purcell, Selkirk and Monashee Mountains—with deep troughs between in which lie the Kootenay and Arrow Lakes.

The western section consists of a triple structure made up of the Coast Range, the Inner Passage and an outer island arc. The Coast Range begins in the St. Elias Mountains of Yukon Territory. Here the loftiest peaks on the Continent, with elevations of from 18,000 to 20,000 feet, thrust up out of glistening icefields. The highest peak in British Columbia is Mount Waddington, 13,260 feet. Southward, the steep slopes of the coastal mountains are clothed with dense green forests contrasting with the steely blue of the deep fiords that pierce the shoreline. The waterways adjacent to the coast—the Georgia, Queen Charlotte and Hecate Straits—comprise the Inner Passage. This is one of the finest natural waterways in the world and provides a relatively sheltered and safe sea route from Vancouver to Alaska. The outer island arc is made up of outlying ridges that have become partially submerged under the sea, forming hilly or mountainous islands of which the Vancouver and the Queen Charlotte group are the most important. Vancouver Island has an area of 12,408 sq. miles, its surface rising steeply from a rocky coastline to heights of 7,200 feet. The Queen Charlotte mountains are lower, with individual ranges separated by deep, narrow valleys.

The climate of British Columbia is as varied as its topography, ranging from near-Mediterranean in the southwestern corner to tundra on the mountain tops. As a result of the prevailing westerly winds and the warm waters of the Pacific, the main climatic characteristics of the coastal area are mild winters, warm but not hot summers and a small range of temperature. The longest average frost-free season in Canada occurs in these areas. Inland, continentality of weather increases toward the east, with much greater ranges of temperatures and much less rainfall. In fact, in some of the plateau areas of the interior almost arid conditions occur. In the northern half of the province, the whole area is characterized by long cold winters and short cool summers with only moderate precipitation.

British Columbia's economy is based primarily on its great forest resources. The mild climate and heavy rainfall of the coastal area encourage luxuriant growth, giving this province by far the greatest amount of accessible standing timber in Canada—estimated at over 320,000,000,000 cu. feet. Thus it holds the dominant position among the provinces in the production of wood products; indeed, four of its five leading manufacturing industries