



1.2 Geology

Canada is composed of some 17 geological provinces that may be grouped under four main categories — continental shelf, platform, orogen and shield. The geologically youngest provinces, the Atlantic, Pacific and Arctic Continental Shelves are made up of little-deformed sediments and volcanics, mainly of Mesozoic and Cenozoic age, which have accumulated and are still accumulating along the margins of the present continental mass. The St. Lawrence, Interior, Arctic and Hudson Platforms are formed of thick flat-lying Phanerozoic strata which cover large parts of the crystalline basement rocks of the continental interior, the extension of the Canadian Shield. The Appalachian, Cordilleran and Inuitian Orogens are mountain belts of deformed and metamorphosed sedimentary and volcanic rocks mainly Phanerozoic and Proterozoic age, intruded by granitic plutons. They were produced during the various Phanerozoic orogenies 50 to 500 million years ago. Of the seven provinces comprising the Precambrian Canadian Shield, the Grenville, Churchill, Southern and Bear embrace the orogenic belts that were produced during the Proterozoic orogenies, 900 to 1,800 million years ago. The remaining three, the Superior, Slave and Nutak Provinces, were deformed during the Archean Eon, and include the oldest continental crust known in Canada, 2,500 to 3,000 million years old. The Precambrian orogenic belts have many features in common with those of Phanerozoic age but are so deeply eroded that the mountainous parts have been reduced to plains or lowlands and in many places the basement crystalline rocks upon which the sediments and volcanics initially accumulated are now exposed.

The land and freshwater area of Canada is 3,852,000 sq miles, but unique among the nations of the world, Canada also includes within this area some 858,000 sq miles of marine waters. The rocks beneath have geological features akin to the adjacent regions on-shore. In addition, the submarine area of the bordering continental shelves is about 523,000 sq miles and of the continental slopes, 563,000 sq miles. In common with other maritime nations, Canada exercises sovereign rights over all these adjacent regions under the sea for the purpose