

Dimensions

1.1

Canada is the largest country in the Western Hemisphere and second largest in the world. Its territory of 9 922 330 square kilometres varies from the almost semi-tropical Great Lakes peninsula and southwest Pacific Coast to wide fertile prairies and great areas of mountains, rocks and lakes to northern wilderness and Arctic tundra. The farthest point south is Middle Island in Lake Erie, at 41°41'N; 4 627 km away in the Arctic is Cape Columbia on Ellesmere Island, the farthest point north, at 83°07'N. From east to west the greatest distance is 5 187 km — from Cape Spear, Nfld., at 52°37'W, to Mount St. Elias, YT, at 141°W.

Politically, Canada is divided into 10 provinces and two territories. Each province administers its own natural resources. The resources (except for game) of the Yukon Territory and Northwest Territories are administered by the federal government, because of the extent and remoteness of the territories and their sparse population. Land and freshwater areas of the provinces and territories are given in Table 1.1.

There is no permanent settlement in approximately 89% of Canada. Only the smallest province, Prince Edward Island, is completely occupied. Large parts of the interior of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and the Gaspé Peninsula are vacant. Around the Newfoundland coast and on the shores of the St. Lawrence River below Quebec City there are only narrow bands of settlement.

About 58% of Canada's population lives between the American border and a 1 046 km east-west line from Quebec City to Sault Ste Marie. In this area, Montreal, Toronto, Hamilton, Ottawa, London, Windsor, Quebec City and Kitchener account for more than one-third of the Canadian population.

The largest tract of continuous settlement is in the Prairie provinces, running 1 448 km along the US border, north 161 km in Manitoba and west to the 55th parallel in Alberta, about 644 km north of the international border. This block occupies about 6.2% of Canada's area and contains four cities, Edmonton, Calgary, Winnipeg and Regina. North of this block, astride the Alberta-British Columbia border, the Peace River district is an agricultural area which reaches the 57th parallel.

Settlement is continuous through the southern half of British Columbia in interconnecting strips following mountain valleys and coastal plains. BC's population is most dense, however, in the Lower Fraser Valley, principally in the Vancouver area.

North of the areas already described are a number of unconnected settlements, the largest located in Ontario and Quebec between the 47th and 50th parallels. From east to west these are: the Lac St-Jean Lowland, some 161 km north of Quebec City, the Clay Belts astride the Ontario-Quebec border, the Lakehead, and the Dryden and Fort Frances areas near the Manitoba boundary. Outside these urban-rural blocks are numerous settlements related to mining, forest industries, transportation, administration, defence, hunting and fishing but with little or no agriculture.

Mountains and other heights

1.1.1

The great Cordilleran mountain system is Canada's most impressive physical feature. Many peaks in the various ranges of the Canadian Cordillera are over 4 500 metres high, and a total of approximately 1 502 square kilometres of territory lies above the 3 048 m mark. Mount Logan, 5 951 m above sea level, in the St. Elias Mountains of the Yukon Territory is the highest point in Canada.

The highest points in each province are: Newfoundland, 1 652 m; Prince Edward Island, 142 m; Nova Scotia, 532 m; New Brunswick, 820 m; Quebec, 1 652 m; Ontario, 693 m; Manitoba, 832 m; Saskatchewan, 1 392 m; Alberta, 3 747 m; British Columbia, 4 663 m; Yukon Territory, 5 951 m; and the Northwest Territories, 2 762 m.

Rosslund, BC, is the highest city in Canada (1 056 m), and Banff, Alta., is the highest hamlet (1 396 m). Chilco Lake in British Columbia, with an area of 194 km², is