

Foothills. This foothills area is part of the Western Cordilleran region. The Alberta Rockies have numerous high peaks close to or on the British Columbia boundary.

The south is subject in winter to cold dry air masses of continental polar air, occasionally moderated by Chinook winds. Summers are warm with abundant sunshine but rainfall is meagre and highly variable, particularly in the southwest, with periodic droughts. In some areas irrigation projects have been developed, taking water from the rivers rising in the mountains to the west.

The metropolitan areas of Edmonton, the capital (population 532,246), and Calgary (population 592,743) are in the oil and gas producing areas.

British Columbia (population 2,744,467) consists almost completely of Cordilleran mountains made up of three parallel ranges with a set of parallel linear valleys.

The Rocky Mountains on the east present a continuous range of wall-like ridges, cut up by glaciation into sharp peaks, knife-like edges and deep hollows. Some of the highest peaks in the Canadian Rockies rise to 3 500 m or more.

The central section is marked off by the Rocky Mountain Trench which contains the headwaters of the Kootenay, Columbia, Fraser, Peace and Liard rivers. Westward, relief is lower and broader and the effects of glaciation are not as spectacular. This section consists of several mountain ranges, with plateaus and lake basins between them.

In the western section the Coast Mountains extend southward from the St. Elias Mountains where the loftiest peaks on the continent thrust up out of glistening icefields.

The inner passage adjacent to the coast — the Strait of Georgia, Queen Charlotte Strait and Hecate Strait — is one of the finest natural waterways in the world. Vancouver Island rises steeply from a rocky coastline; in the Queen Charlotte Islands, individual mountain ranges are separated by deep, narrow valleys.

Prevailing westerly winds and the warm Pacific waters result in mild wet winters in the coastal area, warm summers and the longest average frost-free season in Canada. Inland, there are greater ranges of temperature and much less rainfall. Semi-arid conditions occur in some of the plateau areas of the interior. The north has long cold winters, short cool summers and moderate precipitation.

Vancouver (population 414,281) is the largest city, a rapidly growing industrial complex and seaport. Victoria, the capital (population 64,379), is on the southern tip of Vancouver Island.

Yukon (population 23,153), north and slightly west of British Columbia, is a triangular area of plateaus and mountain ranges bounded by Northwest Territories and Alaska. Its only seacoast extends along the Arctic Ocean west of the Mackenzie

River delta. Between the Coast Mountains on the west and the Mackenzie Mountains on the east lies a plateau of rough, irregularly rolling upland. Numerous river valleys cut through mountains and plateaus. In the southwest many peaks of the St. Elias Mountains reach heights of over 4 000 m.

The whole region is north of latitude 60° and part is beyond the Arctic Circle. In summer long hours of daylight promote rapid growth where there is suitable soil. In winter the days are short with little effective sunshine. Despite wide variations in temperature, winters are remarkably mild for the latitude and periods of intense cold are of short duration.

The Alaska Highway provides a transport link with British Columbia and Alberta. The capital and main urban centre is Whitehorse (population 14,814).

Northwest Territories (population 45,741) includes all Canadian territory north of the 60th parallel of latitude except Yukon, the northwestern tip of Quebec and Labrador, and all islands south of the 60th parallel in Hudson Bay and James Bay. This vast area, more than one-third of Canada, is one of extremes in topographical characteristics, flora and fauna, and climate with permafrost throughout. East of the mountain fringe along the Yukon boundary, the mainland plains slope east to Hudson Bay and northeast to the Arctic Archipelago. The interior plains of the central continent extend to the Arctic Ocean. Across the low-lying mainland area flows the Mackenzie River, draining Great Slave Lake and Great Bear Lake and emptying into the Arctic Ocean, a distance of about 4 240 km. The whole northeastern portion of the mainland is treeless tundra studded with countless lakes, swamps and muskeg. In southern areas summers last for about three months with temperatures above 10°C. North of the treeline, freezing temperatures may occur during any month and winters are long and bitterly cold. In the archipelago, high mountain ranges lie in a general north-south direction across Baffin, Devon and Ellesmere islands. Climates are moderated by the sea so that extremes are not as severe as in a continental area of the same latitude. Temperatures are generally below -18°C for six months or more. Occasional mild periods occur during the winter, particularly in the western Arctic. Summers are short and cool. Winter nights and summer days are long, reaching a maximum of 24 hours. Precipitation is extremely light and falls mostly in late summer.

The capital, Yellowknife (population 9,483) is situated on the north shore of Great Slave Lake. Road access to the rest of Canada is restricted to the Mackenzie Delta and Great Slave Lake areas. In the eastern Arctic, the focal point is Frobisher Bay.