

SOIL

As no comprehensive soil survey of Central British Columbia has yet been attempted the information available is of necessity of a more or less general character. Considerable information regarding the soils in various scattered localities is, however, given in the reports of surveyors or others especially interested in the agricultural possibilities of the region.

Much of Central British Columbia is mountainous, but large areas occur where the land is well adapted for agriculture. West of the Rocky mountains the arable soils may be divided into two groups, the one including the valley bottom and terrace soils, the other including the upland soils of the great central plateaus. East of the Rocky mountains the soil belongs to the Great Plains division of Western Canada.

The soils of the valley bottoms and lower terraces are mainly alluvial, or, as they are often called, river-made soils. These valley flats have been gradually built up by deposition of sediment from the flood waters of the present streams. The lower terraces or benches, which in many places border the sides of the valleys and rise one above the other, are also mainly alluvial in character and represent the flood plains of the rivers when they flowed at higher levels. Through these extensive alluvial flats the rivers cut ever-changing channels, and on the portions built up above water level vegetation quickly acquires a foothold. The heaviest forests of British Columbia are found growing on these flats and wherever soil of this nature occurs most luxuriant vegetation in greater or lesser form is found.

A marked feature of the alluvial soils is that they contain large quantities of vegetable or organic matter included during the gradual process of formation of the soil. The presence of this organic matter, often to a depth of several feet, furnishes the soil with a vast store of humus and renders such soils highly fertile.

This soil is for the most part fine and silty, free from stones and exceedingly easy to till. It lends itself readily to irrigation and does not bake when drying out. It is usually black or chocolate coloured. In places where the soil is more sandy and contains little organic matter the colour is whitish or some light shade of brown or yellow. In some cases the presence of mineral matter produces more marked colouring, such as dull-red hues.

This class of soil is especially adapted to the growing of small fruits, garden truck of all kinds, flowers and generally such varieties as are associated with the most intensive methods of land cultivation.

The soils of the higher terraces bordering the river valleys somewhat resemble the alluvial soils of the lower terraces and valley bottoms. The higher terraces rise to a height of several hundred feet above the valley bottoms and in places extend for several miles from the streams. It is believed that a series of glacially dammed lakes occupied these valleys in prehistoric times. On disappearing they left a great deposit known as the white silts. This silt is found in places to a depth of 40 to 50 feet. Many of the higher terraces are formed from the erosion of these silts and are in places overlain by alluvium, hence the soils resemble those of the lower terraces and river bottom. Much of the soil in the Nechako and Fraser valleys is of this nature.