

Saskatchewan's landscape — its great open spaces — has been an important factor in its development as a province. The province is the middle of Canada's three prairie provinces. It is bounded by Manitoba on the east, Alberta to the west, the Northwest Territories to the north, and to the south by the states of Montana and North Dakota across the International Boundary with the United States. Roughly the shape of a rectangle, it extends from north to south for 1,225 km (761 miles) and has an average width of 540 km (335 miles). Its total area is 650,090 km² (251,700 square miles) of which 81,631 km² (31,518 square miles) is fresh water.

Precambrian rock formation underlies most of the northern third of the province. This is typical of the Canadian Shield, of which it forms a part. In the north, Saskatchewan encompasses lakes and rivers which cover almost 15 per cent of the province, wide areas of muskeg and swamp, forests and scattered outcroppings of rock. The north holds large supplies of uranium.

The southern two-thirds of the province is a level plain broken by occasional ridges and valleys, resulting from glacial erosion. This area contains the rich mineral deposits of coal and potash and most of the settled land, as well as a flourishing oil industry. Here

also is the vast and productive agricultural land to which Saskatchewan owes its position as a major world producer of cereal crops. The soil in the area is particularly conducive to cultivation of wheat, barley, oats, rye and rapeseed — the principal crops — under optimum conditions of dryland farming. The growing season varies from 90 to 120 frost-free days a year.

The three major river systems crossing the province — the Assiniboine, the North and South Saskatchewan and the Churchill — all empty into Hudson Bay. Saskatchewan is noted for its exceptional sunsets. Temperatures may vary from 38°C (100°F) in summer to -45°C (-50°F) in winter.

History

The first men in Saskatchewan are believed to have been Paleo Indians who crossed from Asia to North America 20 to 30 thousand years ago. Recorded history began in 1690, when the explorer Henry Kelsey reached Saskatchewan by land. French and English fur traders and explorers turned their canoes along the wide river the Cree Indians called *Kis-is-ska-tches-wan* (fast-flowing). By 1774, men in search of beaver pelts for the Hudson's Bay Company had built the first settlement, Cumberland House, at the crossroads of two major river highways, making it a key post close to the northern supply of the finest fur-bearing animals. From 1763 until 1869, present-day Saskat-