

plains, very remarkable step-like rises occur. These escarpments form the eastern boundaries of the two higher prairie plateaus, and the most eastern of them overlooks the lowest prairie level or that of the Red River valley. The three prairie steppes thus outlined differ much in age and character, and have been impressed on the soft formations of the plains by the action of sub-aerial denudation of former great lakes and probably also of the sea. They may be considered as of primary importance among the features of the country and were first clearly described by Dr. Hector.

The actual increase of elevation accounted for in the two escarpments, however, is slight compared with that due to the uniform eastward slope of the plains. The direction of greatest inclination is toward the north-east, and a line drawn from the intersection of the 49th parallel and the mountains to a point on the first prairie-level north of Lake Winnipeg, will be found to cross the escarpments nearly at right angles, and to have an average slope of 5.38 feet to the mile. From the same initial point, in a due east line to the lowest part of the valley of the Red River—a distance of 750 miles—the plains have an average slope of 4.48 feet per mile.

The first or lowest prairie-level is that of which the southern part lies along Red River, and which northward embraces Lake Winnipeg and associated lakes and the flat land surrounding them. A great part of its eastern border is continuous with that of Lake Winnipeg, and formed by the rocky front of the Laurentian, while east of Red River it is bounded by the high-lying drift terraces surrounding the Lake of the Woods and forming a part of the drift plateau of northern Minnesota. To the west it is limited by the more or less abrupt edge of the second prairie level, forming an escarpment, which, though very irregular in some places, is scarcely perceptible where the broad valley of the Assiniboine breaks through it. The escarpment where it crosses the 49th parallel is known as Pembina Mountain, and is continued northward by the Riding, Duck, Porcupine and Basquia Hills. The average height above the sea of this lowest level of the interior continental region is about 800 feet, the lowest part being that including the Winnipeg group of lakes which have an elevation of about 700 feet. From this it slopes up southward, and attains its greatest elevation—960 feet—at its termination about 200 miles south of the international boundary. The edges of this plain are also, notwithstanding its apparent horizontality, considerably more elevated than its axis where this is occupied by the Red River. Its width on the 49th parallel is fifty-two miles only. Its area north of the same line may be estimated at 55,000 square miles, of which the great system of lakes in its northern part occupies about 13,900 square miles. A great part of