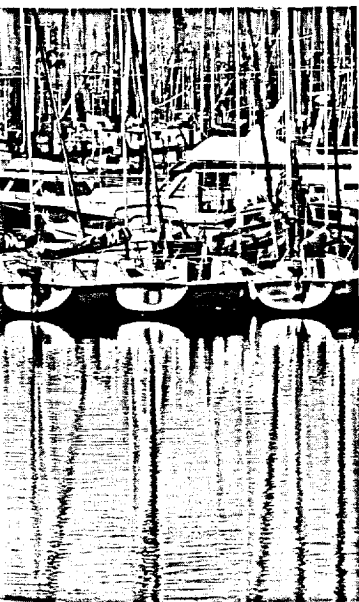


Covering 948 600 km², British Columbia, including Vancouver Island and the Queen Charlotte Islands, is the country's third-largest province with one of Canada's fastest-growing populations. Expanding by 15 per cent during the mid-1970s, British Columbia now has over three million people. Despite its vast territory, almost half its population lives clustered around the southwest tip in two cities: the provincial capital of Victoria (population 255 000); and the port city of Vancouver, Canada's third-largest centre, with more than 1.4 million inhabitants.

Much of British Columbia is mountainous, the rest dryland plateaus, narrow valleys, river deltas and offshore islands. More than 80 per cent of its people live in urban areas, with 55 per cent of the population in Vancouver and Victoria. Kamloops, Kelowna and Prince Rupert are other important urban centres.



The area's varied topography strongly influences its climate. The Rocky Mountains in the east block the entry of polar continental air from the prairies, while the Coastal Range creates a moist windward slope to the Pacific Ocean. The warm Japanese current gives the coastal region a very moderate climate. Vancouver Island and the heavily populated southwest corner of the mainland have long, warm and bright summers; the winters are damp but temperatures rarely fall below freezing.