



Canada The Prairies

The southern half of the Prairie provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta constitutes the most uniform geographic region in Canada. Its continuous flat plain extends 1 300 kilometres from the western edge of the Canadian Shield in Manitoba to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains in Alberta.

Once the bed of an immense inland sea (Champlain Sea), the sedimentary soil of the Prairies is exceptionally fertile and makes this one of the major grain-growing areas in the world. Most of this territory, comprising nearly 500 000 square kilometres of the three provinces' total of some two million, enjoys a growing season lasting from July 3 to beyond October 15.

A series of French and British explorers criss-crossed the Prairies in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but settlement did not begin in earnest until after 1800, when a French community was estab-

lished at St. Boniface, now a city adjacent to Manitoba's capital, Winnipeg. By 1870, Manitoba had obtained provincial status, joining the Confederation of eastern provinces that had created Canada three years earlier.

The opening of virgin lands with the offer of free homesteads encouraged a wave of immigration after the turn of the century. Thousands of settlers from Eastern Europe, especially the Ukraine, began turning the barren plains into seas of wheat. In 1905, with half a million settlers between them, the new provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta were created: only six years later, their population had more than doubled to 1 300 000. Today, the combined population of the three provinces is some four million.

While grain-growing for both domestic and major export markets remains a mainstay of the Prairie economy, the three provinces have also exploited other natural resources. Saskatchewan is a major producer and gold mines, as well as forest industries. Saskatchewan has developed its large deposits of potash, in addition to oil and gas. And Alberta, now the most populous of the three provinces, has developed its own substantial agricultural economy by becoming Canada's leading producer of petroleum products. Manufacturing has also become increasingly important in the Prairie provinces. Cities of Winnipeg (Manitoba) and Calgary and Edmonton (Alberta). The railways, the Trans-Canada Highway and various pipelines are the backbones of Prairie commerce, moving products and people east and west to Canada and overseas.

The mixed origins of Prairie settlers and the relative youth of Prairie cities give this region a unique "frontier" spirit and vitality. The pioneer virtues

of perseverance, hardiness and self-reliance are kept very much alive in annual festivals such as the Calgary Stampede and Edmonton's Klondike Days.

Prairie dwellers are also earning respected places on the national cultural scene through such notable institutions as the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, the Manitoba Theatre Centre, Saskatchewan's Regina Museum of Natural History, and Alberta's Banff Centre School of Fine Arts and Edmonton Symphony.



Geography



Canada



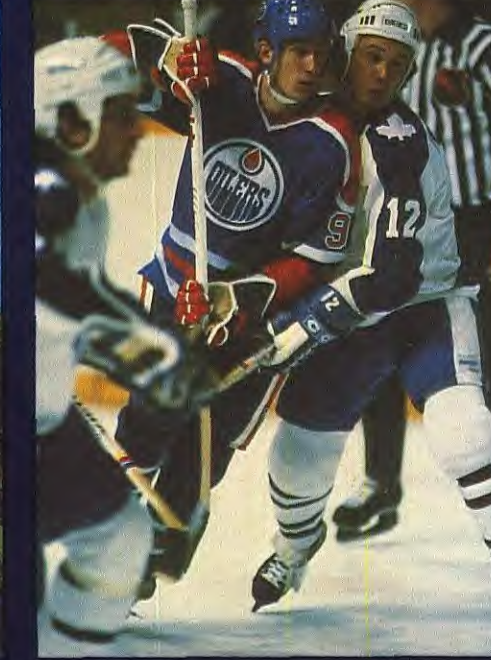
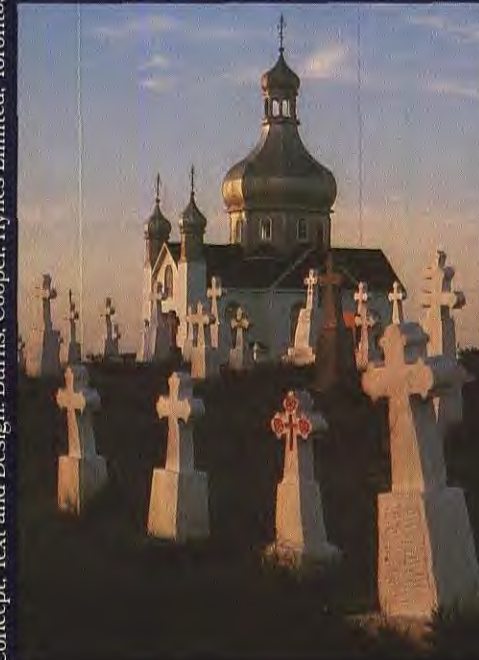
1. **Headland** is located in a provincial park in the southern part of Lake Winnipeg, the largest lake in the Prairie provinces.
2. Stretching as far as the eye can see, the dark, rich and fertile soil of Manitoba is only the beginning of an arable plain that extends westward to the foothills of the Rockies.
3. The Red Appelle Valley in south-central Saskatchewan interrupts the Prairies' flat expanse with rolling hills and lakes.
4. Wind-eroded formations called 'hoo-doo's' are a feature of the Alberta Badlands, located in the province's southeastern region.
5. Rivers that nourish the Prairies begin in the mountains to the north where the melting snows of the Rocky Mountains feed Athabasca Falls in Jasper National Park (Alberta).

Economy



1. The Prairie provinces produce 30 million tonnes a year of wheat, barley, oats, rapeseed and other grains.
2. Alberta is Canada's leading producer of oil and gas, which is piped to eastern Canada.
3. Prairie winds are harnessed to pump water for irrigation in Manitoba farms.
4. The Royal Canadian Mint adds architectural distinction to the city of Winnipeg (Manitoba).
5. Railways haul Prairie grain over the Rocky Mountains to west coast ports.
6. Beef cattle, a major part of Prairie agriculture, graze on ranchlands once roamed by wild buffalo herds.
7. A petrochemical complex beside the Saskatchewan River feeds energy on nearby oil and gas wells.
8. Massive machinery scoops up ta-sands to be converted into synthetic crude oil near Fort McMurray (Alberta).
9. Office towers in downtown Calgary (Alberta) house headquarters of some of Canada's leading energy companies.

Culture



1. The national training centre for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police is located in Regina (Saskatchewan). Here, 'Mounties' perform their famous Musical Ride.
2. Skiers enjoy the incomparably high views of the Alberta Rockies.
3. A 'Stoney Indian' in full regalia participates in the annual Banff Indian Days festival (Alberta).
4. The romance of the cowboy lives on in rodeo contests at the Calgary (Alberta) Stampede.
5. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation provides national coverage of the event at Edmonton's 60 000-seat Commonwealth Stadium (Alberta).
6. A church near Sheho (Saskatchewan) reflects the Ukrainian heritage of many Prairie residents.
7. Fort Prince of Wales, near Churchill (Manitoba), stands on a bleak plain in this sub-arctic outposts of early exploration.
8. The dome of the Manitoba legislature in Winnipeg is topped by a statue of 'Golden Boy'.
9. Wayne Gretzky, one of Canada's most outstanding hockey players, plays for the Edmonton (Alberta) Oilers.