

In average altitude these mountains are not greatly inferior to the Rockies; their lofty summits rise from 8,000 to 9,000 feet above the sea. The average width of the Rocky Mountain range is about 60 miles, while that of the Selkirks is about 80 miles. From the southern boundary line to the western base of the Rocky Mountains as far as the northern limits of the Selkirks, there is a valley of great length and regularity, extending a distance of over 700 miles, and dividing the two ranges. To the west of these great ranges British Columbia extends into a wide plateau of table land which has been originally elevated some 3,500 feet above the sea level. This plateau has been deeply intersected and eroded by lake and river systems, so that in many places it presents an aspect hardly differing from that of the mountainous regions; in others, however, it opens out into wide plains and rolling ground with comparatively low eminences, affording fine areas of agricultural and grazing land. The entire district has been subject to vast overflows of lava, the disintegrated remains of which the soil is mainly composed. There is a general but very gradual slope of the land from the mountainous country on the southern boundary of the province to the north; notwithstanding this general slope the principal flow of water can find its way southwards through deep fissures penetrating the mountain boundaries on the western and southern sides. This plateau forms the chief agricultural area of the province. The whole of British Columbia south of 52° and east of the Coast Range is a grazing country up to about 3,500 feet, and a farming country up to 2,500 feet where irrigation is possible. The interior plateau is terminated on the west by the Coast Range, a series of massive crystalline rocks of some 6,000 or 7,000 feet in height. This range has a mean width of 100 miles descending to the shores of the Pacific, which is in turn flanked by the submerged Island Range, the tops of which form Vancouver and her adjacent islands, the Queen Charlotte Islands and those of the Alaskan peninsula. One of the most remarkable features of the coast are the fiords and passages, which are analagous to those of Scotland and Norway, and probably surpass those of any part of the world in dimensions and complexity, with perhaps the exception of those in Greenland. The great height of the rugged mountain walls which border them also gives them a grandeur quite their own.* The unique position of British Columbia as a watershed on the Pacific coast of America will be at once recognized when it is understood that all the rivers of great importance on that coast, with the exception of one, the Colorado, rise from within its boundaries. The drainage from its extensive area of mountains and highlands is received into the numerous lakes, thence the surplus is discharged into the few large rivers or their tributaries which finally reach the sea. The principal of these rivers are the Columbia on the south which flows through American territory into the Pacific Ocean, the Fraser River 750 miles long, the Skeena 300 miles long, and the Stikine on the west, the Liard over 300 miles in British Columbia on the north, and the Peace River over 300 miles in British Columbia on the east. These rivers are of great size and volume, and the first four are sufficiently navigable to steamers to form water ways of no small value in the development of the Province.

* Dawson, Geol. Sur. 1884.