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**Pre – Colonial Canada**

It is believed that Aboriginal peoples arrived from Asia thousands of years ago by way of a land bridge between Siberia and Alaska. Some of them settled in Canada while others chose to continue to the south. When the European explorers arrived, Caanada was populated by a diverse range of Aboriginal peoples who, depending on the environment, lived nomadic or settled lifestyles, were hunters, fishermen or farmers.

First contacts between the native peoples and Europeans probably occurred about 1000 years ago when the Icelandic Norsemen settled for a brief time on the island of Newfoundland. But it would be another 600 years before European exploration began in earnest.

The name “Canada” is believed to have originated with its first inhabitants, since the natives used the world “kanata” to describe a settlement. The term is thought to have been picked up by European discoverers, who changed it to its present spelling.

**GEOGRAPHY**

**From Sea to Sea and Farther to the North**

Canadians, of whom there are more tnan 30 million, become accustomed to the disproportional size of the country by the time they have studied its geography at school. Newcomers to Canada – if they know nothing else about it – know that it is capacious. But most cannot help but be impressed with even the most basik statistics on our planet`s second biggest nation, which is exceeded in area only by Russia. Occupying over 9,976,000 square kilometres, Canada extends from the Northwest Territories` Cape Columbia on Ellesmere Island – a relative hop and skip from the North Pole – to Pelee Island in Ontario`s portion of Lake Erie – and with the same latitude as central Spain. Canada`s neighbour across the Arctic Ocean is Russia. That is a north-south distance of 2,850 miles. The east to west span is 5,780 miles – from Cape Spear, Newfoundland, to Mount St. Elias, the Yukon Territory – six distinct time zones. Canada`s border with the United States is one of the longest: it extends 8,892 km and is broken by scores of entry-exit points between the two nations. It is near this frontier that some 85 per cent of the Canada`s populace is clustered.

In between these points there are thirteen principal subdivisions – ten provinces and three territiries that embrace most of the vast north, accounting for 38 per cent of Canada`s area and an infinitesimal fraction of its population (about 0,3 per cent).

**Water Expanse and Water Ways**

Three great oceans – the Atlantic, the Pacific and the Arctic, wash Canada`s shores. It has estimated that Canada has 1/7 of the world fresh water. All but one of the Great Lakes (Michigan) are partially Canadian. Enormous Hudson Bay is exlusively Canadian, as there are rich massive but relatively little known inland seas as the Great Bear Lake (31,326 sq km), the Great Slave Lake – just a bit smaller – and Lake Winni peg, which is bigger than Lake Ontario.

It is through Canada that the St. Lawrence Seaway flows some 3,058 km – making possible big-scale shipping from Atlantic ports all the way to harbours on the Great Lakes, in the heart of the continent.

Canada`s longest river, the Mackenzie, which flows 4,241 kilometres, drains into the Arctic Ocean; the Columbia and the Fraser rivers flow into the Pacific; the Nelson and the Churchill connect with Hudson Bay; The Yukon drains into the Bering Sea; and the Saskatchewan empties into Lake Winni peg.

**Geographical Regions**

Geographically there are seven principal Canadian regions. The Appalachians, in the east, takes in relatively small Atlantic provinces and a portion of south-eastern Quebek; this is a land of lovely hills and gentle plains, much of it is devoted to farming and forestry.

The St. Lawrence Lowlands, between the St. Lawrence River and the Great Lakes, is a fertile area of dairy farms, fruit orchards, and tobacco plantations, rich in industry, which is made possible by extensive and inexpensive hydroelectric power.

The Canadian Shield is the country`s largest geographic unit – covering almost half of Canada. This horseshoe shaped area of ancient terrain is a mass of rocks, of many lakes and of endless swamplands. It is sparsely populated but exceedingly rich not only in timber but in nickel, gold, platinum, cobalt, uranium, silver, copper, and iron ore.

Still other riches come from the Interior Plains, which sweep across Prairie provinces north through the Mackenzie River Valley, to the Arctic Coast. The southern part of the Plains is as flat as a pancake, but fertile and constitutes Canada`s magnificent wheat lands. In recent decades they have yielded, besides the golden wheat, liquid gold – oil from beneath the surface, and natural gas as well.They are bordered on the north by thick forest lands.

To the West of the Plains lies the Canadian Cordillera. This is the region of Western Alberta, British Columbia and the Yukon, which comprise the glorious Canadian Rockies as well as the Mackenzie and the Stikine Mountains and the peaks of St. Elias and the Coast Ranges. It is in this area that one finds Mount Logan, in the Yukon – Canada`s highest peak climbing some 19,850 feet skywards. Not the entire region is mountainous, though. The interior of British Columbia is a land of plateaus and valleys prosperous with orchards and cattle ranches.

The Pacific Coast bathed by warm, moist Pacific air currents, the British Columbia coast, indented by deep fjords and shielded from Pacific storms by Vancouver Island, has the most moderate climate of Canada`s regions. Vancouver Island`s West Coast receives an exceptional amount of rain, giving it a temperate rain forest climate. Although it does not contain the diversity of species of a tropical rain forest, the island`s west coast does have the oldest and tallest trees in Canada: western red cedars 1.300 years old and Douglas firs 90 metres high.

The Arctic North of the tree-line is a land of harsh beauty. During the short summer, when daylight is nearly continuous and a profusion of flowers blooms in the tundra, the temperature can reach 30 C. Yet the winters are long, bitterly cold and dark. North of the mainland is a maze of islands separated by convoluted straits and sounds, the most famous of which link together to form the fabled Northwest Passage, the route to the Orient sought by so many early explorers.

**Climate and Weather**

There are many climatic variations in this huge country, ranging from the permanently frozen icecaps north of the 70th parallel to the luxuriant vegetation of the British Columbia`s West Coast. Canada`s most populous regions, which lie in the country`s south along the U.S. border, enjoy four distinct seasons. Here daytime summer temperatures can rise to 35C and higher, while lows of – 25 C are not uncommon in winter. More moderate temperatures are norm in spring and fall.

The seasons dictate the look of the land: according to whether the natural environment is in a state of dormancy or growth, Canadians may go alpine skiing or water skiing. While seasonal change signals fluctuations in temperature and the number of hours of sunshine, the shifting position of air masses also plays a part. The usual air flow from west to east is disrupted in winter when cold, dry air moves down from the Arctic and in summer when warm, tropical air moves up from the south-east. Added to these factors are the effect of mountain ranges, plains and large bodies of water.

**Forests**

Stretching over nearly half of Canada`s land area are dense forests of spruce and hemlock, pine, cedar, birch, maple, ash, elm and fir. Once an obstacle to settlement, now the forests are a chief source of Canada`s wealth. The industries based on forest products employ hundreds of thousands of men and women. Thousands of sawmills are in use. The production of pulp and its conversion to newsprint is the leading single industry. Forests provide lumber for a growing country`s homes and schools and factories, railway ties, poles and fence posts for its spreading settlement. They supply the furniture factories and publishing houses. A resource both valuable and beautiful, the forests are protected and cherished by people and the state.

**Wildlife**

In the Arctic zone the polar bear, the musk-ox, the caribou, the Arctic fox, the lemming are still in abundance.

To the South in the area stretching from Alaska to the Gulf of St. Lawrence is the home of the woodland caribou and a few distinctive species of birds.

In the Canadian zone, corresponding in the main with the coniferous-forest belt, are found nearly all the species of mammals and birds that are recognized as distinctively Canadian. These include the moose, the Canada lynx, the beaver and the Canada jay.

In the agricultural areas of the Prairie Provinces and most of the southern Ontario varieties of birds overlap. Typical summer birds are the bluebird, the Baltimore oriole and the catbird, the prairie chicken and the sharp-tailed grouse. Typical mammals are the grey and red squirrels, the mink and the skunk. Certain mammals are peculiar to the prairies: the pronghorn antelope, the jack rabbit and the ground squirrels or gophers. In a small area along the north side of Lake Erie are found the opossum, birds – the mocking-bird and the cardinal.

**Central Provinces Quebec**

Quebec is the largest Canadian province. It occupies one-sixth of the total area of Canada and is greater that the combined areas of France, Germany and Spain.

From north to south, Quebec takes in three main geographical regions; the Canadian Shield, the St Lawrence Lowlands and the Appalachian Mountains. The Canadian Shield covers about 60 per cent of the land mass and is the world`s oldest mountain range. Permafrost reigns is the northern part of the Shield: only dwarf birches and lichen are able to grow there. The St. Lawrence River, the province`s dominant geographical feature, links the Atlantic Ocean with the Great Lakes. The St. Lawrence Lowlands are dotted with more than a million lakes and rivers. Quebec`s forests are equal in area to those of Sweden and Norway combined. To the south, the foothills of the Appalachians separate Quebec from the United States. Almost 80 per cent of Quebeckers live in urban centres located along the St. Lawrence. Montreal and its suburbs have a population of over thee million; Quebec City is the province`s capital.

The European history of Quebec began with the arrival of the French explorer Jacques Cartier in 1534. The succeeding years saw the establishment of a thriving fur trade, relatively friendly relations with the Aboriginal people and a continuous rivalry between French and British colonists which culminated in the Seven Year`s War. With the Treaty of Paris in 1763 New France became a colony of Britain. But Britain granted official recognition to French Civil Law, guaranteed religious freedom and authorized the use of the French language. In 1867 Quebec became a founding member of the new Dominion of Canada. In this province, where four-fifth of the population speak French as their first language and which maintains its own cultural identity, the question of political self-determination has always been a sensitive issue.

The province has abundant natural resources and energy, along with well-developed agriculture , manufacturing and service sectors.

Montreal is the province`s commercial capital.

Quebec exports 40 per cent of its total production, mainly from the forest industry (printing, lumber and paper) , mining (aluminium and iron ore) and transportation equipment.

**Central Provinces Ontario**

Three main geological regions make up Ontario: the Great Lakes – the St. Lawrence Lowlands, the Canadian Shield and the Hudson Bay Lowlands. Although the soil is poor and not well suited to large-scale farming, there is a wealth of minerals, forests and waterpower. The Canadian Shield and the Hudson Bay Lowlands cover 90 per cent of the province`s territory, but are home to only 10 per cent of the population. The extremes of the northern climate are a fact of life there. Mean daily temperatures reach only from 12 to 15 C in July, dropping to – 25 C in January. Ontario`s biggest Lake Superior is the world`s largest body of fresh water.

The Great Lakes – the St. Lawrence Lowlands make up the rest of southern Ontario and contain most of the population, industry, commerce and agricultural land.

Toronto is Ontario`s capital and Canada`s largest city with a regional population of more than four million. Ottawa, the bilingual, bicultural national capital, sits at the junction of the three rivers.

The first European, Henry Hudson, touched the shores of the present-day Ontario in 1610. It was part of the British colony of Quebec in the 18th century. When the Dominion of Canada was created in 1867, Ontario and Quebec became two separate provinces.

With approximately 11 million people, Ontario is the country`s most heavily populated province. While English is the official language Ontario`s Francophones play an essential part in the province`s cultural life and are the largest language minority.

Ontario is Canada`s most productive province, generating some 40 per cent of the county`s gross domestic product. Its manufacturing industries lead the way. Automobiles are Ontario`s major manufacturing industry and most important export, providing 26 per cent of Canada`s total exports.

Mining has always played an important role in the development of Ontario`s economy. Extraction of gold, nickel, copper, uranium and zinc represents a multibillion-dollar business. The forest industry accounts for 5.8 per cent of Ontario`s exports. Tourism, the province`s third-largest industry, is also important to Ontario`s economy.

**Prairie Provinces Manitoba**

Manitoba is one of the three Prairie Provinces located in the centre of Canada. Its landscape offers few extremes. Elevations rise slowly to the south and west from sea level at Hudson Bay. Manitoba is known as the land of 100,000 lakes. The major rivers of western Canada flow into the lowland region of Manitoba, giving Manitoba 90 per cent of the hydroelectric potential of the Prairie region. The northern topography is heavily covered in forest, dominated by pine, hemlock and birch. Manitoba is one of the sunniest provinces in Canada. It has a continental climate, with great temperature extremes.

Early European interest in Manitoba centred on the fur trade. Scottish settlers established the first agricultural settlement in the area in the early 19th century. Manitoba was made a province of the Dominion of Canada in 1870. Its boundaries were expanded to the north several times. Manitoba grew quickly due to its central location as the entry point to western Canada. With the help of the railway, thousands of settlers from eastern Canada and from countries all over the world made Manitoba their home.

About 60 per cent of Manitoba`s 1,138,934 people live in metropolitan Winnipeg, the provincial capital. The second-largest city is Brandon, in southwestern Manitoba.

Agriculture is the backbone of rural Manitoba where both crops and livestock are important sectors. Wheat is the most important crop, followed by barley and canola. The province is the leading Canadian producer of flaxseeds, sunflower seeds, buckwheat and field peas. About half of the province is forested, and nearly half of this area produces marketable timber.

Rich mineral deposits have been found in the Shield and the province is the world leader in nickel mining.

Camping grounds, parks, lakes and rivers as well as historic sites are the principal attractions for Manitoba`s visitors.

Although Manitoba is one of the smallest provinces in population, it is an important centre for number of ethnic groups. It is the largest centre of Ukrainian culture outside Ukreine.

**Prairie Provinces Saskatchewan**

Saskatchewan is located in the Prairie region of Canada. Half of it consists of forests, one-third of cultivated lands, and one-eighth is covered with water. In the north there are numerous (over 100,000) lakes, rivers, bogs and rocky outcroppings. The southern part of the province is relatively flat. Camel caravans might not seem out of place in certain parts of Saskatchewan. Athabasca Provincial Park has sand dunes 30 metres high and semiarid vegetation. Nowhere else in the world are dunes found this far north. The whole province enjoys a hot, dry summer but the town of Estevan is the undisputed “sunshine capital” of Canada with 2,540 hours of sunshine per year.

Land is the main resource. Today, Saskatchewan supplies 28 per cent of Canada`s grain production. Saskatchewan is also a major producer of cattle and hogs. Oil and natural gas are the leading mineral resources. Saskatchewan`s 14,000-oil wells produce about 12 per cent of Canada`s total oil output. In addition, with an estimated two-thirds of the world`s reserves, Saskatchewan is the leading exporter of potash. The foundation of many present-day settlements and towns were the trading posts of the first European trappers. For 200 years the Hudson`s Bay Company owned and administered this area. Realising its agricultural potential and the opportunities for colonisation, the Government of Canada purchased the land in 1870 and encouraged immigration. The new railway began bringing settlers in to farm these rich lands.

Saskatchewan entered Confederation in 1905. Regina became the provincial capital.

Today, Saskatchewan`s population stands at approximately 1.1 million. It is Canada`s only province where neither the majority of the population is of British or French background. It has a variety of ethnic inheritances – German, Ukrainian, Scandinavian, Dutch, Polish, Russian. Regina and Saskatoon are the two main cities and together have about one-third of the total population.

**Prairie Provinces Alberta**

Alberta is one of the picturesque provinces, with many rivers, lakes and forests and broad expanses of prairies in the north. The southern half contains fertile wheat land and rolling park-line terrain, as well as the mountainous region that forms part of the Rockies and their foothills.

Alberta has a continental climate where long cold winters are balanced by mild to hot summers and an unusually high number of sunny days, no matter what the season.

The province has little water-power, owing to the gentle slope of the land, but energy is available from important deposits of oil, gas and coal. It is here where the old dream of gold came doubly true on the great plains, where fields of golden wheat surround gushing wells of black gold, making the province Canada`s leading producer of crude petroleum. It also ranks first in the production of natural gas, coal and their chemical by-products.

Next in importance is agriculture. About 30 per cent of the province consist of the farmland that supports large crops of wheat and huge herds of livestock. Forests cover more than half of the province`s surface.

The region occupied by present-day Alberta in the 18th century was owned by the Hudson`s Bay Company, in 1870 was acquired by the Dominion of Canada, and administered from the newly formed province of Manitoba. Beginning with the arrival of the railway in 1883, the population started to grow quickly. In 1905, Alberta, named in honour of the fourth daughter of Queen Victoria, become a province of Canada with Edmonton as its capital city. Nowadays, more than half of Alberta`s 2.7 million people lives in the two main cities – Edmonton and Calgary. With two-thirds of the population under the age of 40, the province has one of the youngest people in the world.

Alberta`s national parks are world famous: Elk Island Park east of Edmonton, Jasper scenic resort with ice fields, hot springs and wildlife sanctuary; and the world`s largest national park of Wood Buffalo.