

# Title: Canada

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## Canada

**Official name:** Canada

**Area:** 9,976,185 square kilometers (3,851,809 square miles)

**Highest point on mainland:** Mount Logan (5,959 meters/19,551 feet)

**Lowest point on land:** Sea level

**Hemispheres:** Northern and Western

**Time zone:** Newfoundland: 8:30 A.M. = noon GMT; New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and eastern Quebec: 8 A.M. = noon GMT; Ontario east of 90° and western Quebec: 7 A.M. = noon GMT; western Ontario and Manitoba: 6 A.M. = noon GMT; Alberta and Saskatchewan: 5 A.M. = noon GMT; British Columbia and Yukon Territory: 4 A.M. = noon GMT

**Longest distances:** 5,187 kilometers (3,223 miles) from east to west; 4,627 kilometers (2,875 miles) from north to south

**Land boundaries:** 8,893 kilometers (5,526 miles) total boundary length; United States (mainland), 6,416 kilometers (3,987 miles); the state of Alaska, 2,477 kilometers (1,539 miles)

**Coastline:** 243,791 kilometers (151,485 miles)

**Territorial sea limits:** 22 kilometers (12 nautical miles)

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## 1 LOCATION AND SIZE

Canada is located on the northern portion of the North American continent, north of the mainland of the United States. Waters bordering the country include the North Atlantic Ocean to the east,

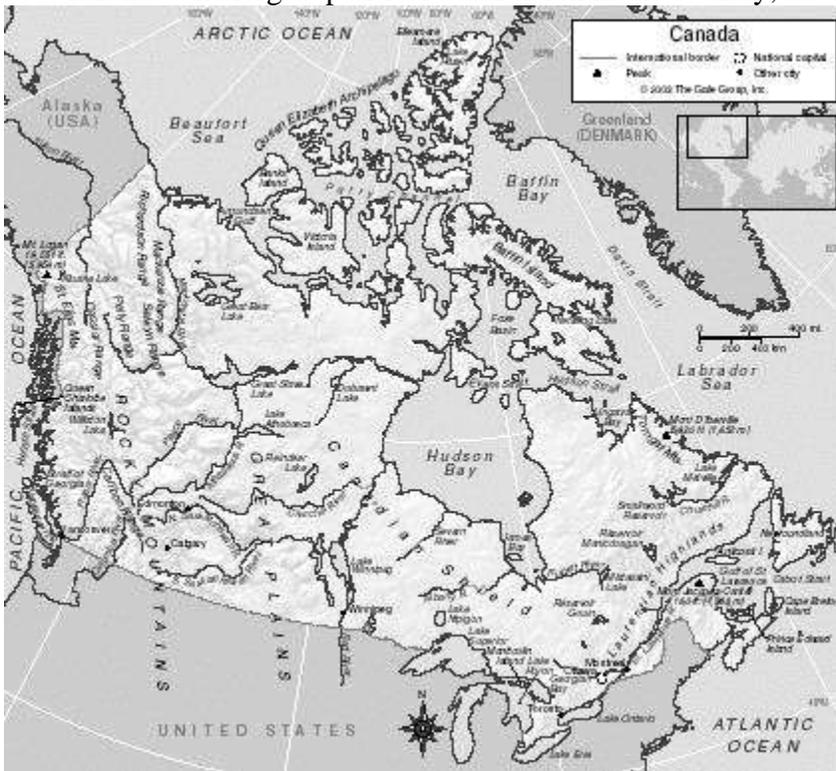
the North Pacific Ocean to the west, and the Arctic Ocean to the north. With a total area of about 9,976,185 square kilometers (3,851,809 square miles), it is the largest country in the Western Hemisphere and the second-largest in the world, exceeded only by Russia. Canada's size is about the same as that of the continent of Europe. Canada is divided into ten provinces and three territories.

## 2 TERRITORIES AND DEPENDENCIES

Canada has three territories: Yukon Territory, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut Territory. These lands are all located in the northwestern, tundra regions of Canada, and each of them has a relatively small population in comparison to the other provinces. The territories are primarily settled by native tribes; these indigenous peoples have obtained a certain level of self-government for each particular territory.

The Yukon Territory (pop. 31,070 as of 1999) was originally occupied by the Athapaskan tribe, which still has six distinct groups of peoples residing in the territory. In the Northwest Territories (pop. 39,672 as of 1996), about 28 percent of the population is descended from the Dene tribe. Other native groups include the Inuvialuit and the Métis.

The Nunavut Territory (pop. 27,700 as of 2000) was separated from the Northwest Territories in 1999. It is now the largest political subdivision in the country, covering Page 136



Canada, map of

18 percent of the total land area—also the largest native land-claim settlement in the history of the country. About 84 percent of the residents claim ancestry from native tribes; the largest of these Nunavut tribes is the Inuit (83 percent), formerly known as the Eskimos (a derogatory term

meaning "eaters of raw meat"). The remainder of the native population in Nunavut Territory is descended from the Dene and Métis tribes.

Each territory has only one senator and one representative in the national parliament, many fewer legislators than those representing the other provinces.

### **3 CLIMATE**

Canada's continental climate is sub-arctic to arctic in the north, while near the U.S. border a narrow strip has a temperate climate with cold winters. The east and west coasts are maritime and more temperate. The north Canadian coast is permanently icebound, except for Hudson Bay, which is frozen for only nine months of the year. Canada's greatest temperature variation is found in the Northwest Territories, where at Fort Good Hope temperatures range from  $-31^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-24^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) in January to  $16^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $61^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) in July.

Temperatures on the west coast of Canada range from about  $4^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $39^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) in January to  $16^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $61^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) in July. On the Atlantic coast, the winter temperatures are warmer than those of the interior, but the summer temperatures are lower. Much of the southern interior of Canada has high summer temperatures and long, cold winters. Average temperature ranges in Ottawa are  $-15^{\circ}$  to  $-6^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $5^{\circ}$  to  $21^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) in January and  $15^{\circ}$  to  $26^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $59^{\circ}$  to  $79^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) in July.

The west coast of the country and some inland valleys have mild winters and mild summers with rainfall occurring throughout the year. The west coast receives between 150 centimeters and 300 centimeters (60 and 120 inches) of rain annually while the maritime provinces receive 115 to 150 centimeters (45 to 60 inches) annually. The driest area is the central prairie, where fewer than 50 centimeters (20 inches) of rain fall each year. The region to the east of Winnipeg is considerably wetter than the western prairie, receiving 50 to 100 centimeters (20 to 40 inches) of rainfall yearly.

### **4 TOPOGRAPHIC REGIONS**

Topographically, Canada is divided into the Atlantic provinces, the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Lowlands, the Canadian Shield, the Interior Plains, the Western Cordillera, and the Northwest Territories (including the political division of the Nunavut Territory). The Territories cover the region east of the Western Cordillera and north of the Interior Plains and the Canadian Shield. Within this large area, there are two distinct sub-regions: the sub-arctic Mackenzie River Valley to the west, and the arctic area of the islands and north-central mainland.

The Canadian Shield is surrounded by a series of lowlands: the Atlantic region and the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Lowlands to the east, the Interior Plains to the west, and the Arctic Lowlands to the north. The Atlantic provinces have rugged, indented coasts. The Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Lowlands constitute the heartland of the country's population. This region has the largest area of level land easily accessible by water from the east.

Canada is located on the North American Tectonic Plate.

Because much of Canada has low population density (averaging just three people per square kilometer, or eight people per square mile), many species of wildlife thrive in large expanses of native habitat. The habitat of the northern Arctic region supports populations of Arctic fox, wolf, Arctic hare, ptarmigan, ookpik (a species of owl), musk ox, polar bear, seal, and caribou. The Rocky Mountain region supports species of bear (brown, black, and grizzly), cougar, elk, deer, moose, bighorn sheep, mountain goat, and coyote. The vast plains region supports coyote, deer, and hawk, among others. The ocean waters surrounding Canada support species of whale, and the country's many lakes support trout, salmon, and pike.

## 5 OCEANS AND SEAS

### Seacoast and Undersea Features

Canada borders three oceans: the Pacific on the west, the Arctic to the north, and the Atlantic on the east. The Beaufort Sea in the Arctic Ocean lies off the northwest border of the country, near the border shared with Alaska.

The Arctic Archipelago lies on a submerged plateau of the Arctic Ocean, with a floor that varies from flat to gently undulating. From the Alaskan border eastward to the mouth of the Mackenzie River, the continental shelf is shallow and continuous, with its outer edge Page 138



*Iceberg in the waters of Nunavut territory.*EPD/Cynthia Bassett

at a depth of 64 meters (210 feet) at about 74 kilometers (46 miles) from the shore. The underwater Mackenzie Trough (formerly known as the Herschel Sea Canyon) is located near the western edge of the Mackenzie River Delta. The submerged portion of the Mackenzie Delta forms a pock-marked undersea plain, most of it less than 55 meters (180 feet) deep. A deeply submerged continental shelf runs along the entire western coast of the Arctic Archipelago, from Banks Island to Greenland.

Along the Atlantic coast, the submerged continental shelf has great width and diversity. From the coast of Nova Scotia, its width varies from 111 to 185 kilometers (69 to 115 miles), from Newfoundland 185 to 518 kilometers (115 to 322 miles) at the entrance of Hudson Strait, and

northward from there it merges with the submerged shelf of the Arctic Ocean. The outer edge varies in depth from 189 to 3,110 meters (620 to 10,201 feet). The overall gradient is slight, but the shelf is studded with shoals, ridges, and banks.

The Pacific coast is strikingly different and is characterized by bold, abrupt relief—a repetition of the mountainous landscape. From the islet-strewn coast, the continental shelf extends from 93 to 185 kilometers (58 to 115 miles), except on the western slopes of Vancouver Island and the Queen Charlotte Islands, where the seafloor drops rapidly.

## **Sea Inlets and Straits**

Amundsen Gulf lies just east of the Beaufort Sea and separates Banks Islands from the mainland. A series of gulfs, straits, and channels surround the islands of the Arctic Archipelago. Page 139 These include the Viscount Melville Sound, M'Clintock Channel, Queen Maud Gulf, the Gulf of Boothia, Lancaster Sound, Parry Channel, M'Clure Strait, Norwegian Bay, Jones Sound, and Smith Sound. These waters of the Arctic are locked in ice most of the year.

Baffin Bay, in the north, separates Baffin Island from Greenland, opening to the Davis Strait and then to the Labrador Sea, which lies off the southeastern tip of Greenland. Turning south around Newfoundland, the easternmost point of the North American continent, the Cabot Strait separates Newfoundland and Nova Scotia and provides a channel to the Atlantic for the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The Hudson Bay is a shallow inland sea which is 822,325 square kilometers (317,417 square miles) in area, having an average depth of 128 meters (422 feet). Hudson Bay, along with its southern arm James Bay and its northern arm Foxe Basin, connects to the Labrador Sea and the Atlantic Ocean through the Evans Strait and the Hudson Strait. The Hudson Strait, which also separates Baffin Island from the continental coast, is 796 kilometers (495 miles) long and from 69 to 222 kilometers (43 to 138 miles) wide.

On the west coast of Canada, fronting the North Pacific, is a labyrinth of straits and sounds extending from Vancouver Island in the south and winding through the Alexander Archipelago in the north. These waters include the relatively shallow Queen Charlotte Sound as well as two straits: Hecate Strait and the Strait of Georgia.

## **Islands and Archipelagos**

Canada has more than fifty-two thousand islands, with all but a few hundred of them considered "minor" in size, defined as less than 129 square kilometers (49.81 square miles) in area. The largest islands are those in the Arctic Archipelago, extending from James Bay to Ellesmere Island. Within the Arctic Archipelago, Baffin Island is larger than 500,000 square kilometers (193,050 square miles), Victoria Island contains 217,000 square kilometers (83,783 square miles), and Banks Island covers some 70,000 square kilometers (27,027 square miles).

The Queen Elizabeth Archipelago surrounding the north magnetic pole has thirty-five islands, each one larger than 129 square kilometers (49.81 square miles) in size. Elles-mere, the northernmost of Canada's islands, is the largest of the Elizabeth group, covering more than 196,000 square kilometers (75,675 square miles).

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## DID YOU KNOW?

Visitors to Gros Morne National Park in Newfoundland can see plate tectonics in action. Geologists believe that, at least six hundred million years ago, North America and Europe were a single landmass. As the two continents pulled apart, magma from deep inside Earth oozed up between them. This solidified magma, as well as fossils preserved in the sedimentary rock, is on display at Gros Morne, which also contains some of eastern Canada's most dramatic scenery.

The largest islands on the western coast are Vancouver Island (31,285 square kilometers/ 12,079 square miles) and the Queen Charlotte Islands. Large islands on the eastern coast include: Newfoundland (108,860 square kilometers/42,030 square miles), Prince Edward Page 140

CANADA'S TEN LARGEST LAKES (LISTED IN DESCENDING ORDER OF SIZE)		
NAME	AREA	PROVINCE
Lake Superior	82,367 square kilometers (31,802 square miles)	Ontario (shared with U.S.)
Lake Huron	59,565 square kilometers (23,000 square miles)	Ontario (shared with U.S.)
Great Bear Lake	31,328 square kilometers (12,095 square miles)	Northwest Territories
Great Slave Lake	28,568 square kilometers (11,030 square miles)	Northwest Territories
Lake Erie	25,655 square kilometers (9,910 square miles)	Ontario (shared with U.S.)
Lake Winnipeg	23,760 square kilometers (9,174 square miles)	Manitoba
Lake Ontario	19,009 square kilometers (7,340 square miles)	Ontario (shared with U.S.)
Lake Athabasca	7,850 square kilometers (3,030 square miles)	Saskatchewan
Reindeer Lake	5,660 square kilometers (2,185 square miles)	Saskatchewan
Nettiling Lake	5,066 square kilometers (1,956 square miles)	Nunavut Territory

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Island (5,620 square kilometers/2,170 square miles), Cape Breton Island (10,311 square kilometers/3,981 square miles), Grand Manan and Campobello Islands in New Brunswick, and Anticosti Island and the Ile de la Madeleine of Quebec. Manitoulin Island in Lake Huron is the

world's largest island located within a freshwater lake; its land mass covers some 2,765 square kilometers (1,068 square miles).

## **Coastal Features**

Canada's coastlines of nearly 244,000 kilometers (151,647 miles), including its mainland and offshore islands, are among the largest of any country in the world.

## **6 INLAND LAKES**

Canada has 31,752 lakes; more than a third of these are situated in the northern half of the country, in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut Territory. Lakes and rivers cover 7.6 percent of Canada's total area; consequently, surface water is the source of 90 percent of the fresh water used by residents. Indeed, Canada's lakes play a critical role in the country's ecosystem as natural regulators of river flow, smoothing out excess runoff during flooding and sustaining the waterways during dry seasons.

Thirty-six percent of the Great Lakes, the largest freshwater lakes in the world, are situated in Canada. Of the five Great Lakes, only Lake Michigan is completely outside of Canadian borders. Lake Superior, Canada's largest lake in terms of volume (and shared with the United States), has a surface area of 82,367 square kilometers (31,802 square miles) and is the world's largest freshwater lake. Lake Nipigon, in eastern Canada near Lake Superior, is famous for its towering cliffs and its greenish-black sand beaches.

In Canada's northern provinces lie two significant lakes. The Great Slave Lake, in the Northwest Territories, is the deepest and fourth-largest of Canada's lakes, reaching a depth of 614 meters (2,014 feet). Also in this region is the Great Bear Lake, located in a largely uninhabited part of northwestern Canada. It is third in size, but it is the largest lake wholly within Canada.

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In the northeast, the Nunavut Territory contains two more notable lakes. Nettiling Lake, the country's tenth-largest, receives runoff from the slightly smaller Amadjuak Lake, which in turn helps to drain Baffin Island into Foxe Basin. Nettiling Lake is frozen most of the year. Far to the north, on Ellesmere Island, is Lake Hazen (540 square kilometers/210 square miles), the largest lake in the world to lie completely north of the Arctic Circle. This lake helps function as a "thermal oasis," catching the sun's energy and heating the surrounding land to moderate temperatures that are unusual at such an altitude. The lake itself, however, almost never thaws.

In the eastern coastal regions, the important lakes are Smallwood Reservoir (an artificial lake which covers 6,460 square kilometers/2,500 square miles) and Lake Melville (3,000 square kilometers/1,160 square miles). Churchill River connects Lake Melville to Smallwood Reservoir. Lake Melville is a large coastal lake that is linked to the Atlantic Ocean by Hamilton Inlet.

Canada's southern central and western regions include the rest of the country's largest lakes. Lake Winnipeg, in the province of Manitoba, is the country's sixth-largest lake. Not far to the

northwest is Reindeer Lake. Farther northwest, on the way to the Great Slave Lake, is Lake Athabasca, famous for its plentiful trout. One lucky Canadian, fishing at this lake in 1961 with a gillnet, caught one of the world's largest lake trout: a 46-kilogram (102-pound) fish.

## **7 RIVERS AND WATERFALLS**

Canada's rivers drain into five major ocean outlets: the Pacific, Arctic, and Atlantic Oceans; Hudson Bay; and the Gulf of Mexico. The Yukon and Mackenzie Rivers in the west, the North Saskatchewan, South Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan, Peace, and Athabasca Rivers in central Canada, and the Ottawa and St. Lawrence Rivers in the east comprise Canada's main rivers.

The Central Canadian Shield is drained by the Nelson-Saskatchewan, Churchill, Severn, and Albany Rivers, all of which flow into Hudson Bay. The 4,290-kilometer-long (2,635-mile-long) Mackenzie River is the country's longest river. It is fed by several tributaries and by three large lakes (Great Bear Lake, Great Slave Lake, and Lake Athabasca), and it drains into the Arctic Ocean. The Columbia, Fraser, and Yukon Rivers are the principal drainage systems of western Canada. The Great Lakes drain into the broad St. Lawrence River, which flows into the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

In the prairies, groundwater is the principal source of water for streams during the frequent dry weather periods. In hot summer months, melting glaciers may contribute up to 25 percent of the flow of the Saskatchewan and Athabasca Rivers.

## **8 DESERTS**

There are no desert regions in Canada.

## **9 FLAT AND ROLLING TERRAIN**

Between the Western Cordillera and the Canadian Shield is the region broadly known as the West, including the Manitoba and Mackenzie Lowlands. The Manitoba Lowland (leading to the Saskatchewan and Alberta Plains) is one of only a few parts of Canada that is as flat as a tabletop. The Manitoba Escarpment forms the boundary between the Manitoba Lowland and the Saskatchewan Plain. In the south, the Missouri Couteau divides the Saskatchewan and Alberta Plains. The landscape of the two plains is similar to that of the U.S. Great Plains, with rolling prairie; deeply incised rivers; water-filled depressions (called sloughs); dry streambeds (called coulees); and, in the drier areas, mesas, buttes, and badlands. Page 142



*Polar bears live in Canada's Arctic region.*EPD/Cynthia Bassett

To the south and southeast of the Shield lies a triangular, flat, and fertile plain bounded by Georgian Bay in Lake Huron, the St. Lawrence River, and Lake Ontario. Grasslands made up of many different types of stunted bushes and grasses extend over much of the southern Canadian Great Plains.

The Tundra is situated on the northern Canadian Shield. This is an area of Precambrian rock with moss-covered, frozen subsoil. Low-growing grasses and small bushes thrive in this arctic region.

Between the northern tundra and the southern grassland is the boreal forest. Canada's great boreal forest is the largest of its woodlands, occupying 35 percent of the total Canadian land area and 77 percent of Canada's total forest land. Named for the Greek god of the north wind, Boreas, this forest constitutes a band 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) wide.

The boreal forest is characterized by the predominance of coniferous trees, which first sprung up during the Miocene Epoch, twelve to fifteen million years ago; today, this forest is an important source of paper products, jack-pine railway ties, and logs.

Canada possesses 24 percent of the world's wetlands, covering more than 127 million hect-ares (314 million acres). Most of the wetlands are located in the boreal peat bogs in arctic and sub-arctic regions, or in the Prairie pothole region across south-central Canada and the northern United States, which contains more than four million wetlands and ponds.

## **10 MOUNTAINS AND VOLCANOES**

The principal mountainous region is the Western Cordillera (or Cordilleran) Mountain system located in the westernmost portion of Canada. The Cordilleran range, commonly known as the Canadian Rockies, is composed of relatively young, folded, and faulted mountains and plateaus. These Canadian Rockies include several smaller ranges, including the Richardson, Mackenzie, Selwyn, Pelly, Cassiar, and Cariboo Ranges. The chain is much narrower than the Rocky Mountains in the United States, with less extensive interior plateaus.

The individual summits, however, are much higher in Canada, and they contain some of the most beautiful scenery in the world, with magnificent forests of alpine fir, Engelmann spruce, lodgepole pine, aspen, and mountain hemlock. Most peaks in the Canadian Rockies exceed

elevations of 4,500 meters (14,765 feet); twenty-four summits top 4,000 meters (13,123 feet). Canada's highest point is Mount Logan (5,959 meters/19,551 feet), located near the Alaskan border in the St. Elias Mountains of the Yukon Territory. The only other parts of Canada with comparable spectacular mountains are Baffin and Ellesmere Islands in the northeastern Arctic Ocean.

The Torngat Mountains stretch through Quebec, Newfoundland, and Labrador in eastern Canada. The highest point in Quebec is Mont D'Iberville, at 1,652 meters (5,420 feet), within the Torngat range. The Appalachian Chain crosses parts of eastern Canada. In the Appalachians, the highest peak is Mont Jacques-Cartier, at 1,268 meters (4,160 feet).

## 11 CANYONS AND CAVES

Canada has caves in nearly every region. Vancouver Island is commonly called the "Island of Caves" because of the large number of caves located there, many of which have not been explored.

The longest cave in the country is Castle-guard Cave in the Banff National Park of Alberta province. It runs about 20,122 meters (66,017 feet) long and about 390 meters (1,280 feet) deep. Banff National Park also contains the Cave and Basin, an area which boasts naturally occurring warm mineral springs. The discovery of the cave in 1883 prompted the government to choose the site as the center of its first national park, making the cave a national historic site as well as a protected area.

Arctomys Cave, in the Canadian Rockies of British Columbia, is the deepest cave in the country and one of the deepest in North America north of Mexico. It has a depth of 536 meters (1,759 feet).

There are a number of canyons throughout the Canadian Rockies, including Johnston, Marble, Cline River, Coral River, Thomson, and Fraser Canyons.

## 12 PLATEAUS AND MONOLITHS

The most prominent geographic feature in the country is the Canadian Shield (sometimes called the Precambrian Shield or the Laurentian Plateau), which takes up almost half of Canada's total area. It extends beyond the Canadian boundary into the United States in two limited areas: at the head of Lake Superior and in the Adirondack Mountains. Structurally, the shield may be thought of as a huge saucer, the center of which is occupied by Hudson Bay and James Bay, which have breached the northeastern rim to drain into the Atlantic Ocean through the Hudson Strait. Most of the shield is relatively level and less than 612 meters (2,000 feet) above sea level.

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## **DID YOU KNOW?**

The North Magnetic Pole is located at 78°N latitude and 104°W longitude, in the Queen Elizabeth Islands of northern Canada. The earth's magnetic poles represent the two nearly opposite ends of the planet where the earth's magnetic intensity is the greatest. These differ slightly in location from the geographic poles, which are designated as 90°N latitude/0° longitude (North Pole) and 90°S latitude/0° longitude (South Pole). The South Magnetic Pole is located at 66°S latitude and 139°E longitude, on the Adélie Coast of Antarctica.

Only along the dissected rim of the saucer are there major hills and mountains: the Torngat Mountains. Except for the plains, the rest of the shield is composed of undulating terrain with rocky, knoblike hills; lakes interconnected by rapidly flowing streams occupy the hollows between these hills. A second and far less extensive plateau supports the Western Cordillera.

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## **13 MAN-MADE FEATURES**

As of 2002, the Syncrude Tailings Dam in Alberta was the largest in the world, based on the total amount of building material used in its construction. It is a barrage dam, created from piled-up dirt and residue (or tailings) left over from mining operations at Syncrude Canada Ltd. The Gardiner Dam in Saskatchewan is the twelfth-largest water-retaining dam in the world. Hydroelectric power from this dam is used across the province. The WAC Bennett Dam, on the Peace River in British Columbia, is responsible for the creation of Williston Lake, the largest artificial lake in Canada (1,761 square kilometers/680 square miles). The Churchill Falls Dam and its underground power station (in Newfoundland) make up the sixth largest hydroelectric plant in the world.

Yoho National Park of British Columbia contains the Spiral Tunnels, carved through the Canadian Rockies by the Canadian Pacific Railroad. The Hector Tunnel is 992 meters (3,255 feet) long and the Field Tunnel is 891 meters (2,922 feet) long.

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