

America possesses but a small extent of coast line, its length being only 43,000 miles, or, in comparison with its size, only equal to half of that of Europe. It is more broken in North than in South America. The latter presents one unbroken mass of land, with no deep indentations, and but few islands along its whole coast.

As the continent of America extends through all the zones, its climate and soil vary greatly. These will be found treated fully under the head of its separate countries. It is, however, in general, more humid in the Tropics than the Eastern Hemisphere, and subject to greater extremes of heat and cold in the higher latitudes. In the north, the frozen mass of the Arctic Ocean renders it much colder than in the same latitude in Europe, and along the whole of the Western coast the high mountain ranges attract the moisture, so that rain generally prevails there to a greater extent than on the Eastern coast.

When the Spaniards first discovered the Western Continent under Columbus and other commanders, they called the native inhabitants Indians, under the impression that they had reached the East Indies. The inhabitants of Mexico and Peru were comparatively civilized, had large towns, and fixed forms of government. They welcomed the new-comers, but soon had reason to repent of their hospitality, for the lust of conquest, and the rapacity of the Spaniards and Portuguese, soon enslaved them and destroyed their cities. These peoples have almost disappeared, or are represented by debased races rapidly becoming extinct. Many interesting relics remain to prove the great progress in civilization achieved by the native races of Mexico and Peru.

The Eskimos, a short, stunted race, occupy the extreme north, and subsist by hunting and fishing. The remaining native races are scattered over the whole continent, living by the chase, and consisting of a great number of different tribes, speaking different languages.

NORTH AMERICA.

Area, 7,900,000 square miles; greatest length from north to south, including Central America, 4,700 miles; greatest breadth from east to west, 3,000 miles; persons to a square mile, 9; population, 73,000,000.

North America comprises the Northern part of the Continent of America, and is joined to South America by the Isthmus of Panama. It is bounded on the north by the Arctic Ocean; on the west by the Pacific Ocean; on the south by the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico; and on the east by the Atlantic Ocean.

Its surface is divided into four great regions by the grand chain of the Rocky Mountains, and the lesser chain of the Alleghanies; consisting of the Northern slope towards the Arctic Ocean, the Pacific slope, the great central plain extending from the sources of the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico, and the Eastern slope towards the Atlantic Ocean.

The **Rocky Mountains** form the great backbone, as it may be termed, of North America, extending from the Arctic Ocean southward, through the whole length of the continent. The **Cordilleras** of Mexico and Guatemala may be considered as a continuation of the chain, although it is somewhat interrupted by the high plateaus of Mexico. The Rocky Mountains rise mostly from a high table-land, which is sometimes 5,000 feet above the sea. They occupy a region from 40 to 200 miles in breadth, and consist in some parts of two or three parallel ranges. Their highest elevation is attained in the Dominion of Canada and in Colorado—Mounts Brown and Hooker (in British Columbia) rising about 16,000 feet high—although the Cordilleras contain the celebrated volcanoes of Popocatepetl, Agua, and Orizaba, the first nearly 18,000 feet high.

Parallel with the Rocky Mountains along the Pacific coast are several successive ranges of mountains, which have been called the Alps of the Pacific, extending from Mexico to Alaska, and terminated by the lofty volcano, Mount St. Elias, 19,500 feet high. These chains are known by different names, as the **Sierra Madre**, in Mexico; the **Coast Range**, and the parallel range of the **Sierra Nevada**, in California; and the **Cascade Mountains**, in Oregon, Washington Territory, and British Columbia.

The **Alleghany Mountains**, or Appalachian chain, extend from the north of the State of Alabama to the Gulf of St. Lawrence, about 1,500 miles in length. Different portions of the same range are known by the names of the **Cumberland Mountains** in Tennessee, the **Blue Mountains** in Virginia, the **Catskill Mountains** in New York, the **Green Mountains** in Vermont, the **White Mountains** in New Hampshire, and the **Notre Dame Mountains** in Quebec. The name Alleghany belongs properly to the eastern and principal range in Virginia and Pennsylvania. Their highest summits are in New Hampshire, where they rise to the height of 6,000 feet, but elsewhere they seldom rise over 4,000 feet.

Owing to the vast plains of North America, and the gentle slope of the land, the rivers are large and numerous, and navigable far into the interior of the country. The **St. Lawrence** with the great lakes, is navigable for upwards of 2,000 miles, the **Mississippi**, with the **Missouri**, for upwards of 4,000, and many of the other great rivers almost to their sources. In the Great Central Plain there is scarcely a watershed 1,500 feet above the level of the sea, and many of the large rivers take their rise so near each other that it is difficult to tell in which direction the land slopes.

The Principal Rivers of North America are:

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| In the north, the <i>Yukon, Mackenzie, Back or Great Fish, Churchill, Saskatchewan, and St. Lawrence.</i> | In the centre and south, the <i>Alabama, the Mississippi, with its affluents, the Illinois, Ohio, Missouri, Arkansas, and Red Rivers, and the Rio Grande del Norte.</i> |
| In the east, the <i>St. John, Connecticut, Hudson, Susquehanna, Delaware, Potomac, and Savannah.</i> | In the west, the <i>Colorado, Columbia, and Fraser.</i> |