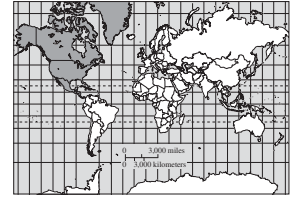


Physical Geography of North America

Location: North America is located in the northern hemisphere (above the equator) and the western hemisphere. It is north of the continent of South America and is bordered by the Pacific Ocean to the west, the Arctic Ocean to the north, and the Atlantic Ocean to the east. Traditionally, the southern and southeastern regions of North America are referred to as the Caribbean (island nations in the Caribbean Sea) and Central America (nations south of Mexico).



Area: North America is the third-largest continent with an area of 9,363,000 square miles (24,249,000 km²). From north to south the greatest distance across the continent is 5,400 miles (8,900 km), and from east to west the greatest distance is 4,000 miles (6,400 km). The highest point in North America is on Mount McKinley, 20,320 feet (6,194 m) above sea level, and the lowest point is in Death Valley, 282 feet (86 m) below sea level.

Climate: The climate of North America varies extremely. In fact, it has every kind of climate existing in the world. Greenland, the largest island in the world, has a permanent ice cap, the temperature remains very cold year round, and the only precipitation is snow. At the other extreme, in Central America there are tropical rain forests with heavy precipitation and hot temperatures all year. Between the northern and southern regions, most of North America has cold winters and warm summers.

Landforms: North America has a great variety of landforms. Among them are plains, mountains, islands, basins, plateaus, great rivers, and large lakes.

Running up the center of North America from the southern United States and into Canada is the Great Plains, a huge, fairly dry area with fertile soil. Along the east and south coasts of the United States are large coastal plains.

High mountains run the length of North America from Alaska to Central America. The greatest of these are the Rocky Mountains in Canada and the United States. On the east coast of the United States is a chain of low mountains called the Appalachians. Along eastern Mexico is a range called the Sierra Madre Oriental.

Most of the islands of North America are clustered above the Arctic Circle and in the Caribbean. Among the northern islands are four of the world's largest: Greenland, Baffin, Ellesmere, and Victoria. The larger islands of the Caribbean are called the Greater Antilles, and the chain of smaller islands is called the Lesser Antilles.

Plateaus and basins are concentrated in the western part of the United States and in north-central Mexico. In the state of Nevada in the United States is a large area of land that is surrounded by higher land. This is the Great Basin. The plateau areas of the continent are cut by canyons. The most spectacular example of this is the Grand Canyon of Arizona.

Many great rivers flow across the United States and Canada. The Mississippi River and its tributaries, which include the Missouri and Ohio, drain a huge area of North America and provide a convenient transportation route into the continent.

The largest freshwater lake in the world, Lake Superior, is among many large lakes that are scattered throughout the north-central area of North America. The Great Lakes are an important source of food and a valuable transportation route.

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Rivers of North America

Use the clues to help you match the letters on the map to the correct names.

- _____ 1. **Colorado River**—This river's source is in the Rocky Mountains. Over the centuries it has cut deep canyons, including the Grand Canyon, on its journey southwestward to the Gulf of California.
- _____ 2. **Columbia River**—Beginning at Columbia Lake in western Canada, this river flows 1,200 miles (1,920 km) south and west before emptying into the Pacific Ocean between the states of Washington and Oregon.
- _____ 3. **Mackenzie River**—This is the longest river in Canada. It flows northward over 1,000 miles (1,600 km) from the Great Slave Lakes, past the Arctic Circle, and into the Beaufort Sea.
- _____ 4. **Mississippi River**—Beginning in the state of Minnesota, this river flows south for more than 2,300 miles (3,680 km) before emptying into the Gulf of Mexico. It is the longest river in the United States.
- _____ 5. **Missouri River**—This is the second-longest river in the United States. It flows east and south from its source in the northern Rocky Mountains until it meets the Mississippi near St. Louis.
- _____ 6. **Ohio River**—This river is one of the most important transportation routes in North America. It begins in the city of Pittsburgh and flows westward until it meets the Mississippi.
- _____ 7. **Potomac River**—This river has played an important part in the history of the United States. On its journey from the Appalachian Mountains to Chesapeake Bay it flows past Washington, D.C.
- _____ 8. **Rio Grande**—This river, whose name means *big river*, is part of the boundary between the United States and Mexico. It begins in the Rocky Mountains and empties into the Gulf of Mexico.
- _____ 9. **St. Lawrence River**—This is one of the most important transportation routes in the world because it connects the Great Lakes with the Atlantic Ocean.
- _____ 10. **Yukon River**—This river begins its 2,000 mile (3,200 km) journey in the mountains of northwest Canada and flows across Alaska before emptying into the Bering Sea.



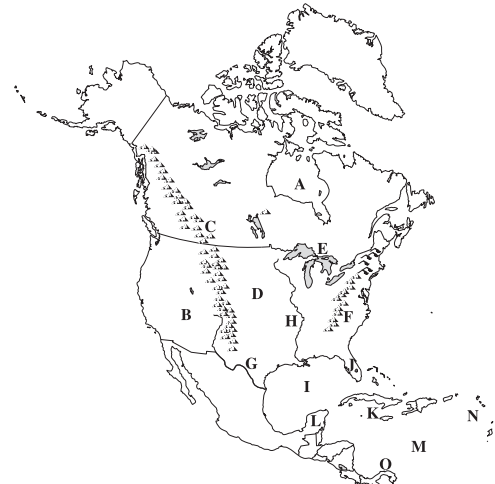
Answer Key: 1.I, 2.C, 3.B, 4.F, 5.E, 6.G, 7.H, 8.J, 9.D, 10.A

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Physical Features of North America

Some major features of North America are labeled with letters on the map. Match the letters to the names of the features listed below.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| _____ 1. Appalachian Mountains | _____ 9. Hudson Bay |
| _____ 2. Caribbean Sea | _____ 10. Isthmus of Panama |
| _____ 3. Florida Peninsula | _____ 11. Lesser Antilles |
| _____ 4. Great Basin | _____ 12. Mississippi River |
| _____ 5. Great Lakes | _____ 13. Rio Grande |
| _____ 6. Great Plains | _____ 14. Rocky Mountains |
| _____ 7. Greater Antilles | _____ 15. Yucatan Peninsula |
| _____ 8. Gulf of Mexico | |



Answer Key: 1.F, 2.M, 3.J, 4.B, 5.E, 6.D, 7.K, 8.I, 9.A, 10.O, 11.N, 12.H, 13.G, 14.C, 15.L

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