

7 North America

Lesson Highlights

1. Location and Extent
2. Political Divisions

3. Physical Divisions
4. Rivers and Lakes

North America is the world's third largest continent. Both the North and South Americas get their name from Amerigo Vespucci, an Italian explorer who reached there in 1507 CE. However, Christopher Columbus was the first to reach the Caribbean Islands (Islands of the Caribbean Sea called together the West Indies) in 1492 CE, when he sailed westward in search of India. He mistook Caribbean Islands for India and called it 'Indies', and the inhabitants, 'Red Indians'. Later, he realised that he had discovered America! Americas (North America and South America together) came to be known as the 'New World' because they were discovered later than the other known continents.

LOCATION AND EXTENT

North America lies entirely in the northern hemisphere. Its latitudinal extent is from 7°N to 85°N and longitudinal extent is from 20°W to 179°W. The continent is intersected by both, the Arctic Circle and the Tropic of Cancer. North America is bordered on the north by the Arctic Ocean, in the east by the North Atlantic Ocean, in the south by the Caribbean Sea and in the west by the North Pacific Ocean. The Bering Strait separates North America from Asia. The continent is joined to South America by the Isthmus of Panama and separated from it by the Panama Canal. The continent does not have a long indented coastline like Europe; instead, it has a few large and wide indentations along the coast which are now identified as large water bodies such as—Hudson Bay, Gulf of Mexico, Gulf of California, Gulf of St. Lawrence and the Beaufort Sea. There are

numerous islands, off the continent's coasts. These are—Greenland, the Arctic Archipelago (a large group of islands north of the continent in the Arctic Ocean), the West Indies (lying in the Caribbean Sea); the Greater and Lesser Antilles; the Alexander Archipelago and the Aleutian Islands.

CO Challenge Question

Why did Christopher Columbus call the inhabitants of Caribbean Islands 'Red Indians'?



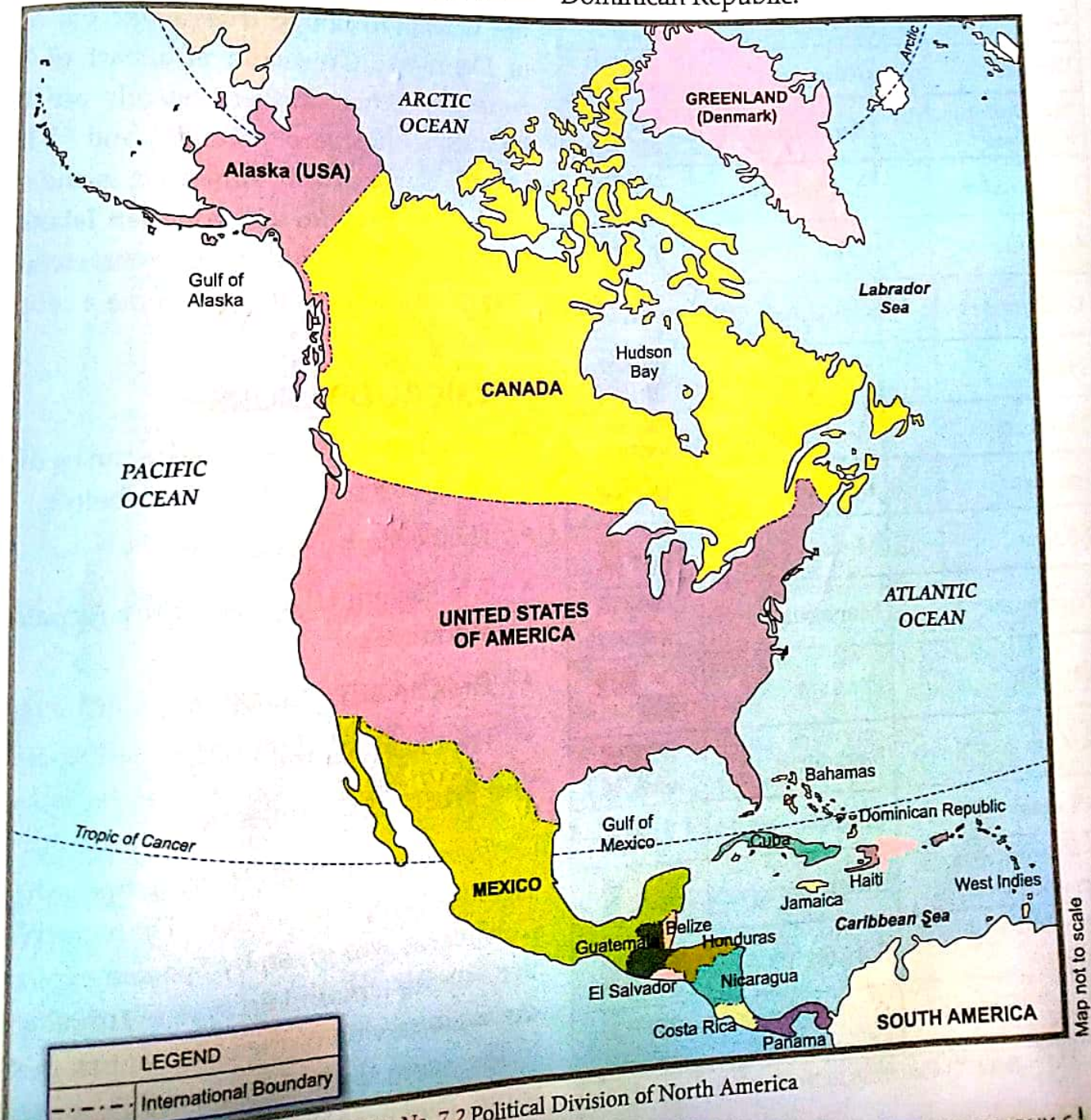
Map No. 7.1 Location of North America in the world

POLITICAL DIVISIONS

North America consists of the United States of America (USA), Canada and Mexico and also includes the countries of Central America and the islands of the Caribbean. Canada is the largest country and occupies almost half of the total area of North America. The term *Anglo-America* is often used to refer to Canada and the United States of America (USA) combined. Both of these (Canada and USA) constitute almost three-fourths of the area

of the continent of North America. The term *Middle America* is used to describe Mexico, the regions below Mexico and the Caribbean Islands. The countries of Middle America or the Central America include—Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama, Costa Rica and Honduras.

The West Indies also lies in North America. It includes Puerto Rico, Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti and Dominican Republic.













Country	Capital	
Antigua and Barbuda	Saint John's	
The Bahamas	Nassau	
Barbados	Bridgetown	
Belize	Belmopan	
Canada	Ottawa	
Costa Rica	San Jose	
Cuba	Havana	
Dominica	Roseau	
The Dominican Republic	Santo Domingo	
El Salvador	San Salvador	
Grenada	Saint George's	
Guatemala	Guatemala City	
Haiti	Port-au-Prince	
Honduras	Tegucigalpa	
Jamaica	Kingston	
Mexico	Mexico City	
Nicaragua	Managua	
Panama	Panama City	
St Kitts and Nevis	Basseterre	
St Lucia	Castries	
St Vincent and the Grenadines	Kingstown	
Trinidad and Tobago	Port-of-Spain	
The United States of America	Washington DC	

Table 7.1 Countries in North America



Fig. 7.1 The Statue of Liberty

Greenland is famous as the largest island in the world. Although it is under the control of Denmark, Greenland is a part of North America. Other northern islands are **Baffin Islands**, **Ellesmere Islands** and **Victoria Island**. Some North American islands such as **Newfoundland** and **Aleutian Islands** are famous. Newfoundland is commercially an important island as it has become a centre for fishing.

PHYSICAL DIVISIONS

The continent of North America can be divided into four major regions as given below:

- The Western Cordilleras
- The Eastern Highland or the Appalachian Mountains
- The Canadian Shield
- The Great Central Plains

The Western Cordilleras

Cordillera is derived from a Spanish word meaning 'a rope' or 'a chain'. The name Western Cordilleras was given by Spanish explorers to the extensive mountain system running down the western side of the continent from Alaska in the north to the Isthmus of Panama in the south. They are a chain of young fold mountains



Map No. 7.3 Physical Features of North America

and have three parallel ranges separated by plateaus called **intermontane plateaus**. They are the widest in the middle and narrow down at the northern and southern ends. In the east are the **Rocky Mountains** or Rockies, which are the highest part of the Western Cordilleras.

In the north are the Alaskan Range and the Brooks Range. Both these mountain ranges are in Alaska and are separated by the Alaskan Plateau.

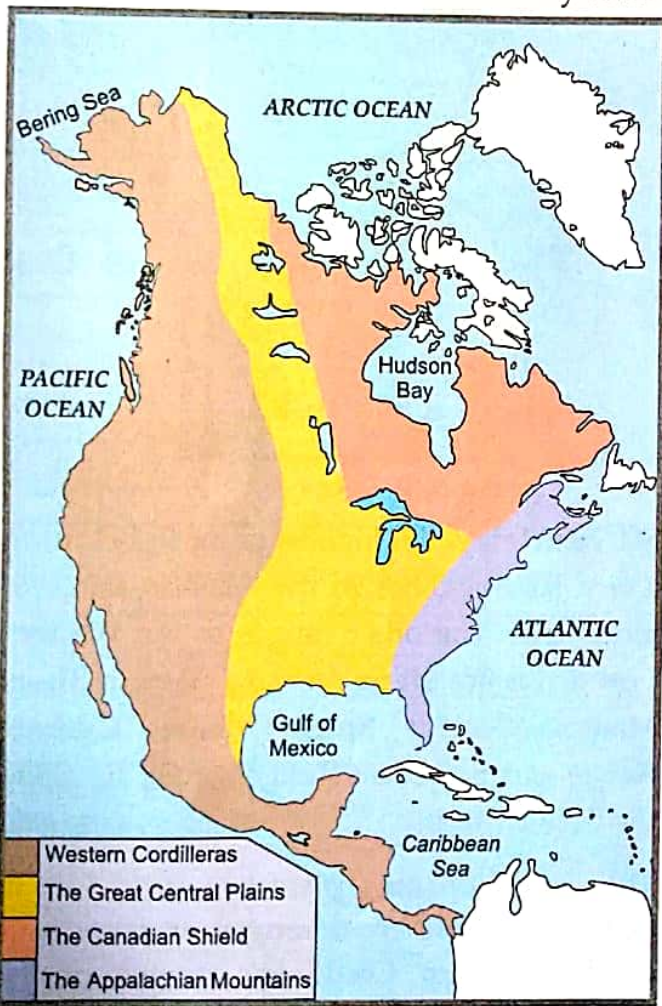
Mt. McKinley, the highest point (6,194 m) in North America, lies in the Alaskan range of mountains. The other ranges in the Western Cordilleras are **Sierra Nevada**, **Eastern Sierra Madre**, **Western Sierra Madre**, **Cascade Range** and the **Coast Ranges**. They lie along the Pacific Coast.

The intermontane plateaus that lie in between the different ranges of mountains of the Western Cordilleras consist of the **Alaskan Plateau**, **Colorado Plateau** and the



Fig. 7.2 Mt. McKinley

Columbian Plateau. The Colorado Plateau and the Columbian Plateau separate the Rocky Mountains (Rockies) from the mountain ranges along the Pacific Coast. Along with plateaus, there are also basins that lie in between the mountain ranges. The **Great Basin** is the largest basin. Plateaus are dissected by rivers



Map No. 7.4 North America-Physiographic Regions

CO Challenge Question

What is the difference between a gorge and a canyon?

Geo Fact

Mt. St. Helens is an active volcano in North America. It is located in Washington (USA). It erupted violently in 1980 AD and caused great destruction in the region.

which have created gorges or canyons. The Colorado River has carved out many gorges and canyons along its course in the soft rocks. The **Grand Canyon** of USA is very famous.

Volcanic rocks form the base of Western Cordilleras. This helps us to conclude that this region has many extinct and active volcanoes. These volcanoes form part of the **Pacific Ring of Fire**. The heat from the interior of the Earth makes the underground water boil and gush up to the surface forming **hot springs**. In hot springs, water is allowed to circulate to the surface and move freely, giving off steam and heat. Geysers are hot springs in which a jet of hot water and steam come out at regular intervals. The **Old Faithful Geyser** in the Yellowstone National Park, USA is very famous.

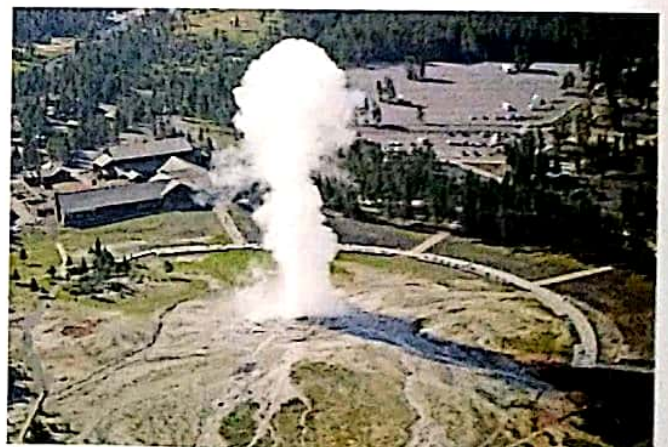


Fig. 7.3 An Aerial view of the Old Faithful Geyser

□ Answer the following questions.

1. After which Italian explorer Americas get their name?

2. Who discovered America?

3. Why the Caribbean Islands also called West Indies?

4. Write the latitudinal and longitudinal extent of North America.

5. Name the water bodies that surrounded North America.

6. Why New Foundland is an important island?

7. List the four Physical Division of North America.

8. Differentiate between Hot spring and Geyser.

■ Fill in the blanks -

1. The _____ separates North America from Asia.

2. North America is joined to South America by the _____ and separated from it by _____.

3. The term Anglo-America often used to refer to _____ and _____ combined.

4. _____ is famous as the largest island in the world.

5. _____ is the highest part of western Cordilleras.

6. _____ is the highest point in North America.

7. _____ is the largest basin.

8. The _____ of USA is

very _____ famous.