

CHAPTER 10 SECTION 1

Landform

Mexico is a large country; almost three times the size of Texas. Most of the country is made up of a rugged central plateau, called the **Mexican Plateau**. Three mountain ranges border the Mexican Plateau.

Sierra Madre Orientals-east mountains
Sierra Madre Occidental-west mountains
Sierra Madre del Sur-mother range

Coastal plains line both east and west sides of Mexico; Pacific Ocean on the west and the Gulf of Mexico on the east.

Mexico City the capital of Mexico is located at the southern end of the interior plateau. Many of the mountains south of the capital are volcanic. The highest peak is **Mt. Orizaba** at 18,700 feet. In southern Mexico, the landforms become more complex, with many small mountain ranges, narrow valleys, and volcanoes. The rugged terrain makes overland travel difficult. Single-lane roads connect many villages.

Mexico narrows in the south to form an isthmus. An **isthmus** is a narrow strip of land connecting two larger land areas. The Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico's flattest region is located in southeastern Mexico. Limestone lies beneath the Yucatan surface. Water tends to drain through the limestone limiting the number of rivers there and creating many caves and caverns below the surface. Sometimes the ceiling of these caves collapse and form **sinkholes**.

Climate, Biomes, and Natural Resources

Mexico climate varies by region. Vegetation varies as the climate regions change. There are desert plants in the north and tropical forest in the south. The climate conditions of Mexico can be explained by three factors.

First is a regional high-pressure system known as the **Pacific subtropical high**. It creates the dry conditions of the northwestern part of Mexico. The warm dry air that blows across about two-thirds of Mexico limits rainfall.

Second are the trade winds off the Gulf of Mexico. During the summer months large amounts of rainfall occurs. Vegetation ranges from forestlands to tropical plants. Hurricanes are frequent along the east coast during the fall season.

Third are the elevated areas of Mexico. 3.5 degrees is lost for every 1,000 feet of elevation. Also the mountains of the east coast blocking moisture cause rain shadow conditions.

Mexico does not have many permanent rivers. What rivers of any volume are dammed to create hydroelectricity.

Other minerals of Mexico are silver, which Mexico is the world's leading producer. Also iron, gold, lead, and mercury are mined.

Oil resources in the gulf contribute to Mexico's economy. Most of the oil is exported to the US.

CHAPTER 10 SECTION 2

History and Culture

Mexico's early peoples belonged to many different cultural and language groups. Some of the American Indian peoples of what are now Mexico and Central America created high complex civilizations. These peoples included the Maya, Olmec, Toltec, and Zapotec. The last of these civilizations was the Aztec. Skilled in warfare, the Aztec built an empire in what is now central and southern Mexico. Their splendid capital city, *Tenochtitlan* occupied an island in the Valley of Mexico, and was one of the largest cities in the world at that time.

Colonial Period

In 1519 a band of Spanish adventurers landed on the east coast of Mexico. These **conquistadors**, conquerors, formed crucial military alliances with people who feared the Aztec.

New diseases, such as smallpox, arrived along with the Spanish. The Indians had no resistance to these European diseases so many natives died. This weakened the Aztec empire; this allowed a small band of Spanish along with their alliances to defeat the Aztec. The Spanish called their newly conquered land *Nueva Espana – New Spain*. Their first colonial development was built over the Aztec capital.

The Spanish explored the land for the wealth they could acquire from gold and silver deposits. Later Catholic Missionaries built small churches – **Missions** in an attempt to Christianize the Indians. They would teach the Indian skills like farming, and pottery, or other useful skills. Mission villages were developed. Open markets or **Plazas** soon became the center of activity in these villages. Wealthy Spaniards soon discovered the wealth of the plantation system. They built haciendas, large estates. The natives were used to work the land, and later slaves were imported.

Mexico's social structure today consists of some pure descendents of Europeans, but many are mestizos. These are people of mixed Indian and European blood.

Mexico's Independence

In 1810, Mexicans began to revolt against the Spanish. In 1821, Mexico was given its independence. Despite winning independence the government was not ruled as a democracy. Many wealthy people over the next hundred years are going to control the government and rule

as **dictators**. This type of ruler has absolute authority to make all decisions. In 1848, war with the US, Mexico lost land stretching from Texas to California. Civil unrest from 1910 to 1920 causes a change in government leadership, but did not change how the country was governed. One result of this new leadership was land reform. Haciendas were broken up into village farms that work on a cooperative effort of the villagers. This system was not successful because the land that was distributed was not the best estate land. Plots were often too small to meet the needs of the village. In 1992, this system was disbanded and much of the land was sold.

Modern Mexico

Since 1990, Mexico has opened its doors to foreign investment. This came mainly from the government signing the **NAFTA** Treaty. This lowered trade barriers between Mexico, the US and Canada.

Tourism has increased the economy of Mexico. Cities like Acapulco, Cancun and Mazola are major resort locations. Mexico City is also a major tourist location. The ruins of its past civilization draw many visitors.

Cultural activities in Mexico have been improving for many years. Mexico is not considered a modern nation, but the recent changes in economic policies are making some positive changes. Access to modern conveniences has increased moving Mexico to a more middle-income country.

CHAPTER 10 SECTION 3

Mexico is divided into 31 states and the capital district. Different parts of the country exhibit great geographical, economic, and cultural diversity. It is useful to divide the country into 4 geographical regions.

Greater Mexico City

Greater Mexico City is the cultural, political and economic center of Mexico. This metropolis includes many smaller cities and holds about a $\frac{1}{4}$ of Mexico's population. It also generates most of the nation's GDP. The city's economic activities draw many new residents, those leaving their farms looking for new job opportunities. Many of these people find low paying or no jobs available. This leaves most of them living in poverty. Houses are makeshift homes- **shanty's**. These homes have no electricity, sewer systems or freshwater. The city also has great wealth from the industries that are there. The city also suffers from air pollution caused by the mountains trapping exhaust fumes and factory smoke.

Central Mexico

Central Mexico stretches northeast of Mexico City and across the Mexican Plateau. Most cities here are ones developed by Spanish as ranches and mining towns. Mexico's second-largest city, Guadalajara is located in this area. Fertile valleys dot the central area. This was once colonial Mexico's great grain-producing region. Agriculture there is a mix of small family farms and

medium sized commercial farms. These grow cash crops for market. Crops specifically grown to sale in a market.

Gulf Lowlands and Southern Mexico

Throughout much of Mexican history, this area was sparsely populated. The land was used for grazing livestock and growing sugarcane. Much of the land today is still used for ranching and sugarcane. Oil discoveries in the Gulf have helped the city of Veracruz to develop into a major seaport. From the production of oil comes several petro industries and jobs. Another part of the economy along the coast is tourism. Several cities have developed beaches and hotels to attract visitors.

Southern Mexico is the poorest region of the country. The Yucatan Peninsula has provided land for farming. Because of the lack of development there are few main roads, little communication networks, no real industries, education structures are poor. Subsistence farming is the main economic activity of the region. Village life has changed very little over the centuries. Many of Mexico's Indians live in this area. Most still practice many of their tradition lifestyles and speak their native language.

Northern Mexico

The large dry region of northern Mexico has become one of the most prosperous parts of the country. Much of the regions infrastructure is new and modern. The roads are good, and communication networks are strong. Monterrey is the great industrial city of the north. Many towns provide industrial jobs that have attracted many workers from other areas of Mexico. Ranching, mining, and tourism are important activities of the north.

Challenges

Mexico has experienced many changes over the past decade. Leadership is trying to be more responsible to the people, more democratic in practice. The economic growth in Mexico has been stimulated by the signing of the NAFTA treaty. Despite these changes Mexico still has to deal the with problems that relate to their people. Many people still live in great poverty. The imbalance of wealth creates some hostility from the population. Providing basic services like water, electricity and education are still a burden on the government. Indian populations have protested and rioted against the government. Immigration mainly illegal movement has created some problems with the US. Crime because of poverty has attracted many farmers to produce marijuana to meet their families economic needs. Finally building modern infrastructures to meet the general needs of the population and attract foreign investments are greatly needed.