



**G**raslands are the regions where grasses form the dominant type of plantlife. Grasslands make up almost a quarter of the total land surface of the Earth. Grasslands are of two types. **Tropical grasslands** are those that grow on either side of the equator and extend till the tropics. **Temperate grasslands** are found in the mid-latitudinal (temperate) zones and in the interior part of the continents. We shall take up two case studies here, the Prairies in the Northern Hemisphere and the Velds in the Southern Hemisphere.

### The Prairies

The temperate grasslands of North America are known as the Prairies. The word 'Prairie' originated from Latin word 'priata' which means meadow. Tall grass, upto two metres high, dominates the landscape. The Prairies are bound by the Rocky Mountains in the West and the Great Lakes in the East between 40° N and 55° N latitudes. It is a region of hilly, gently sloping or flat land. The Prairies cover parts of United States of America and parts of Canada. In the USA, the area is drained by the tributaries of the river Mississippi and the Canadian Prairies are drained by the tributaries of Saskatchewan rivers.

### Climate

The Prairies are located in the interior part of the continent North America. Therefore, the climate is of **continental type**, i.e., with extreme temperatures (high difference in day and night temperatures). The summers are short and warm (average temperature 20° C), while winters are long and very cold (–20° C in Winnipeg, Canada). However, the USA part is warmer than the Canadian part. That is why, in the USA part of the Prairies, wheat is grown in winter. In the Canadian part wheat is a spring crop. The absence of a mountain range in the north allows the entry of cold winds from the polar areas especially in the winter. For the same reason, the hot winds sweep in from the south in summers raising the temperature upto 38° C. Due to absence of north-south barrier, a local hot wind "Chinook" blows in winter which melts

the snow to uncover the pasture land for grazing of animals. The annual rainfall is moderate (never above 60 cm a year). It is ideal for the growth of grass.

### Flora and Fauna

For the most part Prairies are practically treeless. It requires at least 100 cm rainfall a year for tree growth. Where water is available (in the low lands) trees such as willows, alders and poplars grow. For the most part, tall grass, upto two metres high dominates the area. It is actually a 'sea of grass'.

Places that receive rainfall of over 50 cm, are suitable for farming though the major crops of this area are wheat and maize, other crops including soyabeen, oats, barley, cotton, alfa and potatoes are also grown.

In the Western part of the Prairies area lying in the foothills of Rockies where rainfall is very little, grasses are short and sparse. Large herds of goats, sheep and pigs are reared. Corn and oats are fed to make them fat. Large cattle farms called ranches are looked after by sturdy men called cowboys. Bison or the American buffalo is the most important animal found in this region. Rabbits, gophers, coyotes and Prairie dogs are also found. Along with rearing of cattle, bisons, deer and antelopes are domesticated.

### People

The United States and Canada, two of the most developed countries in the world are located in this region. Farming is like any other industrial occupation here. All farming operations are mechanised. People of this region use machines called combines that plough, harrow and sow the seeds in one operation. Wheat or maize is also harvested by the combines which have interchangeable parts. Thus, the combines do the work of both tractors and harvesters. Besides all the modern methods of communication including telephone and Internet are available on the farm. In this way, North America has become a surplus food producer. Due to the huge surplus of wheat production, the Prairies are called the 'Granaries and bread basket of the world'. Hardwork of people along with use of technology has made this possible.

Dairy farming is also done on a large scale. The dairy belt extends from the Great Lakes to the Atlantic Coast in the east. Many industries have been set up to manufacture processed food from grains and milk. The Praire regions of Canada and USA are most developed industrialised



*The Prairies in North America*



*The Prairies*



*Bison*



## Fact File

When the Europeans settled in the Prairies they called the original tribes as Red Indians. These people were mostly huntergatherers. They walked almost barefoot. The Europeans also called them Blackfoot Indians. They revered bison, a kind of buffalo. As the European settlements in the Prairie region grew, millions of bisons were hunted by the Europeans and the bison became an endangered species. As the natural grasslands were cleared for farming and cattle grazing, soil erosion set in. The strong winds removed the loose soil. Vast area of land reduced into a 'dust bowl'. Then the farmers were encouraged to plant trees at the periphery of their fields in rows facing the wind. Grazing was restricted to selected fields and tall grass was planted over vast areas. In time the farming was restored but millions of bisons and other animals and tribals could never be recovered.

regions in the world because there are large mineral deposits particularly coal and iron. A good network of roadways, railways and canal way helps in the transportation of raw materials, goods and workers.

Though the soil is rich, the winters are long. It prevented people from settling in the area. So, people were offered free land by the Government and railways were constructed first to attract people to the area. Most of the settlements in the Prairie region came up within 25 km distance of the Canadian Pacific Railway (opened in 1885). In USA Prairies, Chicago, St Louis, Kansas city are some of the large cities.

## Velds

Velds in Afrikaans language means 'field'. It was so called as it was

an open uncultivated country. They were homes to large number of grass eating native mammals. The temperate grasslands of South Africa are called **velds**. A large part of South Africa is a high plateau. Velds are rolling plateaus with varying heights ranging from 610 m to 1120 m. It slopes from east to west. It is bound by the Drakensburg Mountains on the east. To its west lies the Kalahari desert. It is called Middle Veld. Below Middle Veld is low Veld. It is a ridge and forms watershed of the regions. On the north-eastern part High Velds are located with height ranging from 1120 m to 1670 m. The Velds lies in the Transvaal and the Orange free state.

### Climate

The Velds have a mild climate due to the influence of the Indian Ocean to the east and south. Winters are cold and dry. Temperatures vary between 5° C and 10° C and **July is the coldest month**. It looks strange to us as we live in the Northern Hemisphere where July is the month of Summer. But Velds is in Southern

Hemisphere where July is the month of winter. Velds has a cold and long winter and short and warm summer like the Prairies. The temperature ranges from 15° C to 25° C in summer. The velds receive rainfall mainly



Velds In Africa

in the summer months from November to February. It receives some rainfall in winter months also from June till August.

**Note** 'Veld' and 'Velds' both words are used nearly in the same sense.

### Flora and Fauna

The Velds are treeless and grassy with scattered bushes. Red grass grows in bush velds. In the high velds acacia and maroola are seen to be growing. The wildlife includes lions, leopards, cheetah and kudu.

### People

Main occupation of the people in Velds are cattle rearing and mining. The land is not very fertile. However, crops are grown where the land is fertile. The main crops are maize, wheat, barley, oats and potato. Maize is the staple food of the region. Cash crops like cotton, tobacco, groundnuts, sugarcane and fruits are also grown.

Sheep is bred for wool. Merino sheep is popular for its very warm wool. South Africa is the second largest producer of wool in the world. Cattle are reared in the warmer and wetter regions and the dairy products are sold in the domestic market as well as exported.

The Velds are rich in mineral deposits. Pretoria is famous for its iron and steel industry as coal and iron are present nearby. Johannesburg is known for gold mining. It is called the 'gold capital of the world'. Situated on the Western borders of the Veld, Kimberley is famous for its diamond mines.

The Prairies and Velds are both mid-latitude grasslands. The Prairies lie in Northern hemisphere and Velds in Southern hemisphere. The Prairies is a vast low lying plain away from oceanic influence, but Velds is a plain atop a plateau. It is influenced by oceanic climate. Further Prairies are vastly developed now and has become the granary of the world. Its chief crop is winter wheat. Velds are not so vastly developed. It is called 'Maize Triangle' and sheep are also reared for 'merino' wool.



*Leopard*

### Key Words

- » Ranches : a large farm where cows, sheep, horses, etc. are bred.
- » Prairies : grasslands of North America.
- » Velds : grasslands of South Africa.
- » Combine : a machine carrying out several agricultural operations having interchangeable parts.
- » Cowboy : a person who rides a horse and takes care of cattle in Prairies.
- » High Velds : plateaus with varying heights ranging from 1120 m to 1670 m.
- » Middle Velds : plateaus with varying heights ranging from 610 m to 1120 m.
- » Temperate Grasslands : grasslands found in the mid-latitudinal (temperate) zones.



## SUMMARY

- ▶ Grasslands are the regions where grasses form the dominant type of plant life.
- ▶ Temperate grasslands are found in the mid-latitude (temperate) zones.
- ▶ The Prairies is a region of hilly, gently sloping or flat land.
- ▶ The Prairies has a climate of continental type, i.e. with extreme temperatures (high difference in day and night temperatures).
- ▶ For the most part of the Prairies, tall grass, up to two metres high dominates the area.
- ▶ Bison or the American buffalo, rabbits, Prairie dogs, etc. are found here.
- ▶ Farming is like any other industrial occupation here. All farming operations are mechanised.

## Exercise Time

### A. Tick (✓) the only correct choice amongst the following :

- In Prairies the winters are
  - long and cold
  - short and warm
  - short and cold
  - long and warm
- Merino is a species of
  - Fish
  - Sheep
  - Snake
  - Bird
- Kimberley is famous for
  - Gold
  - Silver
  - Diamonds
  - Steel
- Staple food in South Africa is
  - Wheat
  - Barley
  - Maize
  - Oats

### B. Fill in the blanks :

- Wheat is a \_\_\_\_\_ crop in the Canadian Prairies.
- The Prairies in North America extend between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
- The Prairies experience the \_\_\_\_\_ type of climate.
- The \_\_\_\_\_ part of South African plateau is called the High Velds.
- The main crop of Prairies is \_\_\_\_\_.

### C. Match the Following :

- |            |                   |
|------------|-------------------|
| 1. Chinook | a. Johannesburg   |
| 2. Coal    | b. Animal         |
| 3. Gold    | c. Prairies       |
| 4. Kudu    | d. Hot wind       |
| 5. Cowboys | e. Iron and Steel |

### D. Write true (T) or False (F) against the following statements in given brackets :

- The cowboys love elephants more than horses.
- The Velds is situated in South America.
- The climate of the Prairies is suitable for farming.
- When it is summer in the Prairies, it is winter in the Velds.
- South Africa is the first largest producer of the wool in the world.





**E. Identify the following :**

1. Grasslands of North America
2. The South African grassland found at an altitude of above 1100 m
3. Farms for rearing the animals in the Prairies
4. Supervisors of the cattle rearing in the Prairies
5. The place where the diamond mines are located in south Africa
6. Main occupation of the people of the Velds

**F. Answer in one word or one phrase :**

1. What are the Temperate Grasslands of North America called ?
2. What is the main crop of the Prairies ?
3. What are the cattle farm in the North American Grasslands known as ?
4. When is the rainy season in the Velds ?
5. What is the major occupation of the people of the South African Grassland ?

**G. Answer these questions briefly :**

1. Where are mid-latitude grasslands found ?
2. How is farming carried in the Prairies ?
3. Why are the Prairies known as the 'Granaries of the world' ?
4. What are the chief occupations of the people in the Prairies as well as the Velds ?
5. What kind of climate is found in the Prairies ?

**H. Answer these questions in detail :**

1. Describe the climate and soils of Prairies. Also state why is Prairie a treeless plain ?
2. In what way settlement of people in the Prairies different from that in the Ganga-Brahmaputra plain ?
3. What is known as Velds ? Describe its three divisions and activities of people in them.

**PROJECT WORK**

- On an outline map of the world locate and label the temperate grasslands.