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(附《英语国家概况自学考试大纲》)

全国高等教育自学考试指导委员会组编

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组 编 前 言

当您开始阅读本书时,人类已经迈入了 21 世纪。

这是一个变幻难测的世纪,这是一个催人奋进的时代。科学技术飞速发展,知识更替日新月异。希望、困惑、机遇、挑战,随时随地都有可能出现在每一个社会成员的生活之中。抓住机遇、寻求发展、迎接挑战、适应变化的制胜法宝就是学习——依靠自己学习,终生学习。

作为我国高等教育组成部分的自学考试,其职责就是在高等教育这个水平上倡导自学、鼓励自学、帮助自学、推动自学,为每一个自学者铺就成才之路,组织编写供读者学习的教材就是履行这个职责的重要环节。毫无疑问,这种教材应当适合自学,应当有利于学习者掌握、了解新知识、新信息,有利于学习者增强创新意识、培养实践能力、形成自学能力,也有利于学习者学以致用、解决实际工作中所遇到的问题。具有如此特点的书,我们虽然沿用了“教材”这个概念,但它与那种仅供教师讲、学生听,教师不讲、学生不懂,以“教”为中心的教科书相比,已经在内容安排、形式体例、行文风格等方面都大不相同了。希望读者对此有所了解,以便从一开始就树立起依靠自己学习的坚定信念,不断探索适合自己的学习方法,充分利用已有的知识基础和实际工作经验,最大限度地发挥自己的潜能,达到学习的目标。

欢迎读者提出意见和建议。

祝每一位读者自学成功。

全国高等教育自学考试指导委员会

1999 年

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Part One

The United Kingdom
of Great Britain
and Northern Ireland

Land and People

I. Different Names for Britain and its Parts

When people refer to Britain, they often use different names such as Britain, Great Britain, England, the British Isles, the United Kingdom or the U.K. Do they mean the same thing? Or are they different?

Strictly speaking, the British Isles, Great Britain and England are all geographical names. They are not the official name of the country. The British Isles are made up of two large islands and hundreds of small ones. The two large islands are Great Britain and Ireland. Great Britain is the larger of these two islands. It forms the United Kingdom with Northern Ireland—the northern part of Ireland. So the official name of the United Kingdom is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. But it is too much of a mouthful to say such a long name for a country, so people just say Britain, the United Kingdom or simply U.K. This is one country on the British Isles and its capital is London. There is another country called the Republic of Ireland or Eire on the British Isles. It takes up the remainder of Ireland—the southern part of Ireland. It has been an independent republic since 1949 and its capital is Dublin.

There are three political divisions on the island of Great Britain: England, Scotland and Wales. England is the largest, most populous and generally speaking the richest section. So people tend to use

“England” and “English” when they mean “Britain” and “British”. This sometimes annoys the Scots or the Welsh who do not regard themselves as English and who have a culture and even a language of their own.

Britain has been one of the most important countries in the world. About a hundred years ago, as a result of its imperialist expansion, Britain ruled an empire that had one fourth of the world's people and one fourth of the world's land area. It had colonies not only in North America, but also in Asia, Africa and Australia. However, the two world wars greatly weakened Britain. The British colonies became independent one after another. The British Empire gradually disappeared and it was replaced by the British Commonwealth or the Commonwealth of Nations in 1931.

The Commonwealth (of Nations) is a free association of independent countries that were once colonies of Britain. Member nations are joined together economically and have certain trading arrangements. The Commonwealth has no special powers. The decision to become a member of the Commonwealth is left to each nation. At present there are 50 member countries within the Commonwealth (1991).

II. Geographical Features

Britain is an island country. It is surrounded by the sea. It lies in the north Atlantic Ocean off the north coast of Europe. It is separated from the rest of Europe by the English Channel in the south and the North Sea in the east. The English Channel between England and France is quite narrow and the narrowest part is called the Straits of Dover, which is only 33 km across. In 1985 the British government and the French government decided to build a channel tunnel

under the Straits of Dover so that England and France could be joined together by road. After eight years of hard work this channel tunnel which is called "Chunnel" was open to traffic in May 1994. Britain covers an area of 244,100 square km. It runs 1,000 km from north to south and extends, at the widest part, about 500 kilometres. So no part of Britain is very far from the coast and it provides a valuable resource. The British coast is long and has good, deep harbours. Sea routes extend far inland, providing cheap transportation.

Britain has, for centuries, been slowly tilting with the North-West slowly rising and the South-East slowly sinking. The north and west of Britain are mainly highlands. In western parts of Scotland this rise in the land has resulted in the formation of raised beaches-flat areas of land in an otherwise mountainous area, which provide the main farming, settlements, and industrial areas as well as routeways. The east and south-east are mostly lowlands. They are part of the Great European Plain, with its level land and fertile soil. There is much good farmland especially in the south and along the east coast of England.

During the Ice Age great ice covered Great Britain. Ice has been responsible for most of Britain's spectacular mountain scenery especially in Snowdonia, the Lake District, and the Scottish Highlands. It left Great Britain with mountains with flat tops, hanging valleys with waterfalls, ribbon lakes, flat valley floors, steep valley sides, boulder clay and fertile soil.

1. England

England occupies the largest, southern part of Great Britain with Wales to its west and Scotland to its north. It has an area of more than 130,000 square kilometres which takes up nearly 60 % of the whole island. The south-west and west except for the Severn valley and the Cheshire-Lancashire plain (round Liverpool) are largely a

plateau, with rolling plains, downs and occasional moors. The Pennines, a range of hills running from North Midlands to the Scottish border, are the principal mountain chain. But the highest peak of England, Scafell (978 m), is in the Lake District in north-west England. The east of England is mainly an open cultivated plain, narrowing in North Yorkshire to a passage (Vale of York) between coastal moors and the Pennines, and in Northumberland to a coastal strip.

2. Scotland

Scotland has an area of 78,760 square kilometres. It is in the north of Great Britain with many mountains, lakes and islands. There are three natural zones: the Highlands in the north, the central Lowlands, and the southern Uplands. The Highlands (300 – over 1,200 m) are a wild, rocky, mountainous plateau with a coastline deeply indented, especially in the west. Ben Nevis, the highest mountain in Britain (1,343 m) is located here. The western part of Highlands and the islands of Hebrides are a very beautiful region. Great sea-lochs, or fiords, alternate with wild and empty hills, and on some of the lochs there are farms which can only be reached by boat. The Lowlands in the centre comprise mostly the Forth and Clyde valleys, coal and iron fields and dairy pasture. This is the most important area in Scotland which contains most of the industry and population. The southern Uplands, a rolling moorland (mainly 240–600 m), are cut by small fertile river valleys. Scotland has about 800 islands including the Orkneys. Shetlands and Hebrides and hundreds of lakes. Edinburgh is the capital of Scotland.

3. Wales

Wales is in the west of Great Britain. It has an area of 20,761 square kilometres which takes up less than 9% of the whole island. Most of Wales is mountainous: the hills rise steeply from the sea and

are rather flat on top. 6% of Wales is covered with forest and much of the country is pasture—land for sheep and cattle. Only 12% of the land is arable. Wales forms a massif with a lowland fringe widest along the English border and south coast. The massif is largely between 180 and 600 m, rocky in the north and coal bearing in the south. Snowdonia (1,085 m) in the northwest is the highest mountain in Wales. The capital of Wales is Cardiff.

4. Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland is a fourth region of the United Kingdom. It takes up the northern fifth of Ireland and has an area of 14,147 square kilometres. It has a rocky and wild northern coastline, with several deep indentations. In the north-east lie the uplands of County Antrim, while the mountains in the south-east gradually give way to the central lowlands of the Lough Neagh basin. Belfast is the capital of Northern Ireland.

III. Rivers and Lakes

Rivers in Britain do not freeze in winter. They play a very important role in the country's economy. The great ports of London, Liverpool and Glasgow are all connected to the sea by rivers. Besides, the Tweed, the Tyne, the Tees, and the Thames rivers on the east coast all face North Sea ports on the European continent. They are also close to rich fishing grounds. On the west coast the Clyde, the Mersey, and the Severn rivers carry raw materials to busy manufacturing cities inland. The rivers in Britain are not very large. The longest river is the Severn River which is only 338 kilometres long. It rises in central Wales and flows in a semicircle through West Central England to the Bristol Channel. The second largest and most important river in Britain is the Thames River. It is 336 kilometres long.

It rises in the Cotswolds in southwest England and flows through the Midlands of England to London and out into the North Sea. The Thames flows rather slowly, which is very favourable for water transportation. Ocean-going ships can sail up it as far as London and small ships can sail up it for a further 138 kilometres. Oxford is also on the Thames. River Clyde is the most important river in Scotland. It rises in Dumfries and runs 171 kilometres, passing through Glasgow, and enters the Firth of Clyde. It is an important commercial waterway.

There are many lakes in Britain especially in northern Scotland, the Lake District in north-west England and North Wales. However, the largest lake in Britain is the Lough Neagh in Northern Ireland which covers an area of 396 square kilometres. The Lake District is one of the popular tourist attractions in Britain. It is well known for its wild and beautiful scenery and 15 lakes. The largest ones are Windermere, Ullswater, Derwentwater and Coniston Water. It was also the home of the Lake poets William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey of 19th century Britain.

IV. Climate

1. A maritime type of climate

When we say climate we mean the average weather conditions at a certain place over a period of years. We don't mean the day-to-day weather conditions at a certain place. Though it seems that people are always complaining about the weather in Britain because it is rainy and so changeable and unpredictable, the climate in Britain is in fact a favourable one. It has a favourable maritime climate-winters are mild, not too cold and summers are cool, not too hot, and it has a steady reliable rainfall throughout the whole year. It has a small

range of temperature. The average temperature in winter in the north is 4—6 degrees C. and in summer in the south is 12—17 degrees C. So even in winter one can still see stretches of green grass in the open country, in the parks and round the houses.

2. Factors which influence the climate in Britain

Britain is an island country which lies between latitude 50 to 60 degrees north. It lies farther north than even the northernmost part of Heilongjiang Province of China. Compared with other countries of the same latitudes it has a more moderate climate, which is influenced mainly by three factors:

(1) The surrounding waters tend to balance the seasonal differences by heating up the land in winter and cooling it off in summer. As the sea heats up and cools off relatively slowly it brings warm air in winter and cool air in summer.

(2) The prevailing south-west winds or the Westerlies blow over the country all the year round bringing warm and wet air in winter and keeping the temperatures moderate.

(3) The North Atlantic Drift, which is a warm current, passes the western coast of the British Isles and warms them.

Since Britain's climate is of the maritime type, it is characterised by cool temperatures, frequent cloudy days and rainstorms. It changes from day to day, and this makes it difficult to forecast. It is so changeable that sometimes one can experience four seasons in the course of a single day. Day may break as a fine spring morning; an hour or so later black clouds may have appeared from nowhere and rain may be pouring down. At midday conditions may really be wintry with the temperatures down to about 8 degrees C. Then in the later afternoon the sky will be clear, the sun will begin to shine again, and for an hour or two before darkness falls, it will be summer. It has been said that the uncertainty about the weather has

had a definite effect upon the Englishman's character. It tends to make him cautious, for example. You may laugh when you see an Englishman going out on a brilliantly sunny morning wearing a rain-coat and carrying an umbrella. However, most frequently it comes in drizzles and you don't necessarily need an umbrella.

3. Rainfall

Britain has a steady reliable rainfall throughout the whole year. The average annual rainfall in Britain is over 1,000 mm. It has 750mm-1,250 mm of rainfall along the coast in the east and south except a small area in the south-eastern corner of the country which receives less than 750mm. In the west there is as much as 1,250 mm to 2,000 mm of rainfall and in some areas in the north-west it is over 2,000 mm. The Westerlies blow over Britain all the year round bringing warm and wet air from the Atlantic Ocean. It rises, climbs the highlands and the mountains in the west, becomes colder and then causes heavy rainfall. There is not so much rainfall in the east because after climbing over the highlands and mountains the air gets warmer and drier when it descends and does not give so much rain.

As a result of the rainfall distribution in Britain there is a water surplus in the north and west, and a water deficit in the south and east. Reservoirs have therefore to be built in such highland areas as Central Wales, the Lake District and the Scottish Highlands, so that water can be stored here and then transferred to the more populated and industrial areas of lowland Britain.

4. Natural calamities

Generally speaking the climate in Britain is favourable and equable. Extremes of heat or cold, or of drought or prolonged rainfall are rarely experienced. It is estimated that on average about 3—6 cubic metres of rain per person per day fall over Britain. This is far more than is needed, but problems, still remain. Sometimes there

are several months of drought, and at other times too much rain causes flooding. Fog, smog, frost and severe gales are not uncommon and often cause great damage to crops and to people's life. In 1952 the sulphur dioxide in the four-day London smog, an unhealthy atmosphere formed by mixing smoke and dirt with fog, left 4,000 people dead or dying. Since then most cities in Britain have introduced "clean air zones" whereby factories and households are only allowed to burn smokeless fuel.

Although Britain does not experience hurricanes, that is, storms with a strong fast wind such as typhoons or cyclones, many areas are subjected to severe gales, especially in winter. Gales can cause flooding, shipwrecks and loss of life.

V. The People

Britain has a population of 57,411,000 (1990). This is a very large population for such a small country. So it is a densely populated country with an average of 237 people per square kilometre and it is very unevenly distributed. 90% of the population is urban and only 10% is rural i.e. most people live in the cities and towns and only a few live in the country. On the other hand, there are some quite large tracts of barren, hilly country, especially in Northern Scotland, which are almost uninhabited.

There is a great concentration of population in England. Of about 57 million people, 47 million live in England. 14 million live in London and south-eastern England. Scotland has a population of 5 million, most in Central Lowland. Wales has less than 3 million. In Northern Ireland one and half million people live there and half a million live in Belfast.

The population of Britain is made up mainly of the English

(81.5%), the Scottish (9.6%), the Welsh (1.9%), the Irish (2.4%), the Northern Irish (1.8%) and other peoples (2.8%).

Today British people move about the country more than they used to. Northerners come to live in the south and Southerners and East Anglians go to the north. Lots of Scottish, Welsh and Irish come and live in England. They take on each other's way of life and this makes it more difficult for people to distinguish between people from different parts of Britain. However, differences in regional character and speech can still be seen and heard. In fact in some regions people are doing all they can to preserve their own language and culture.

1. The English

The English are Anglo-Saxons, but the Scots, Welsh and Irish are Celts. The Celts were different groups of ancient people who came originally from Germany and spread through France, Spain and Britain. The Celts came to Britain after 700 BC. When they came, one group was called Britons and from this group the people of Britain grew. Later they were conquered by the Romans. During the fifth century when the Roman Empire fell, the Germanic Angles and Saxons invaded and conquered Britain. The Germanic conquerors gave England its name 'Angle' land. During the 9th century Britain was invaded by the Danes or Vikings and in 1066 by the Norman French. It was from the union of Norman conquerors and the defeated Anglo-Saxons that the English people and the English language were born. Today the names of most English people still bear the trace of their ancestors. The commonest English name "Smith" comes from the German name "Schmidt" and some English families have Norman French names such as D'Arcy, Beaufort and Beauchamp. It is estimated that there are about 800,000 people called Smith in England and Wales.

The English have many differences in regional speech. The chief division is between southern England and northern England. Generally speaking southerners speak the type of English closer to BBC English. They do not have a special accent except the Cockneys from the East End of London. A Cockney is a Londoner who is born within the sound of Bow Bells—the bells of the church of St. Mary-Le-Bow in east London. Cockneys pronounce the vowel /ei/as/ai/and pronounce words “wait”, “late” and “tray” like “white”, “light” and “try”. They also pronounce “have” like “ave”.

Regional speech is usually “broader” in northern England than that of southern England. A noticeable change in pronunciation is the way they pronounce words like “love”, “bus”, “mother” and “much”. In the north the vowel /ʌ/in these words is pronounced as /u/and the vowel /ɑ:/in words like “France”, “dance” and “chance” is pronounced as /æ/. Sometimes northerners also leave out the article “the” and the possessive adjectives “my”, “your”, “their”, etc.

2. The Welsh

The ancestors of the Welsh were the ancient Britons who escaped from the invading Angles and Saxons and found shelter in the wild mountains of Wales. The Celts of Wales defended their freedom for 1,000 years and were not conquered by the English until 1536. Today about a quarter of the Welsh population still speak Welsh as their first language and about one per cent speak only Welsh. Welsh is an ancient Celtic language. It was given equality with English for all official use in Wales in 1965. So many school children have to learn Welsh and most public signs are in Welsh as well as in English. Welsh is quite different from English and Welsh names are different too. Names beginning with “L1” are Welsh, like Llewellyn, Lloyd and Llyn. Other common Welsh names are Lewis, Davies, Morgan, Edwards.