

许鲁之 编著
青岛海洋大学出版社

UNDERSTANDING THE U. S. AND THE U. K.

新编英美概况



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前 言

《新编英美概况》是一本关于英语学习的背景知识书。它主要介绍英美两国的地理、经济、历史、政治、教育、家庭、社会习俗等方面的情况。本书编写目的,是帮助学生开阔视野,扩大知识面,为学好英语扫除缺乏背景知识的障碍。

在编写中,注意引用新资料;语言叙述力求准确、通俗易懂;知识介绍详略得当,重点突出。

该书可作大专院校英语专业学生的概况课教材,亦可供电视大学英语专业学生或英语自学者使用。书中章节划分是参考《高等学校英语专业基础阶段教学大纲》所要求的课时进行编排的。书中每章后面均配有阅读理解练习、问答题和讨论题。这有利于检查学生的知识掌握情况,也为自学者进行自测提供了方便。

本书的编写得到多位专家和同行们的支持和帮助。山东大学李玉陈教授、聊城师范学院张德禄副教授对本书全稿进行了审阅。省教委张传真教授、山东师范大学侯明君教授、曲阜师范大学王守元教授、聊城师范学院星兆钧教授、华东石油大学赵化学副教授对本书的编写都给予热情支持和鼓励,并提出许多宝贵意见。对上述师长或友人的帮助,编者在此表示衷心感谢。

由于水平所限,书中内容疏漏不妥之处,在所难免。恳请外语界同仁和广大读者批评指正。

编 者
1993年6月

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Chapter I

Geographical Features and Natural Resources

1. Location, Size and Geographical Divisions

The United States lies in the central part of North America with its two youngest states — Alaska on the northwest tip of the continent and Hawaii in the central Pacific. The continental United States stretches 4,500 kilometers from the Atlantic Ocean on the east to the Pacific Ocean on the west. It borders Canada on the north, and reaches south to Mexico and the Gulf of Mexico. The total area of the country is a little over 9,360,000 square kilometers, which makes it the fourth largest country in the world.

So far as the geographical features are concerned, the large territory of the continental United States can be divided into three basic areas; the Atlantic Seacoast west to the Appalachian Mountains; the great Mississippi River Basin between the Appalachian and the Rocky Mountains; the Rockies west to the Pacific Ocean.

(1) The Atlantic Seacoast West to the Appalachians

Along the Atlantic Seacoast is a narrow plain which begins far up the coast and becomes wider as it goes south. In the Northeast, the land extending to the Atlantic coastline is hilly, rocky and mostly infertile. Much of it is covered by heavy forests. The coastline, however, is broken by many excellent harbors which were once important centers of commerce and trade in the early days of the coun-

try. The Middle Atlantic Seacoast, the most densely populated region in the U. S. , is a flat and fertile region. Despite the fact that some of the largest cities in the world are situated here, there are miles and miles beautiful, open country all through this section. Many heavily wooded mountains and deep valley cut by wide and beautiful rivers can be found. Three important rivers, the Hudson, the Delaware and the Susquehanna, flow through this part of the country. In the deep south, the coast plain is very low and wide. The soil of this region varies greatly. Some parts along the coast are almost pure sand. Other sections contain some of the richest soil in the whole country. However, the weather, the land and the rivers that run through the south have made it, for most of its history, a great agricultural region.

The coastal plain appears to be fenced in by the Appalachian Mountains that begin in Canada and reach all the way to Georgia and Alabama. These are old mountains with rounded tops and wooded hills, usually not exceeding 800 meters in height. Most of the mountain ridges are low enough to be easily crossed by modern roads. In parts of the Appalachians the land is not good for farming. But the Appalachians have much beautiful scenery, and there are many tourist resorts.

(2) The Mississippi River Basin

The Mississippi River Basin between the Appalachians and the Rochies is one of the largest areas of flatland in the world, which takes up about half of the continental United States, and covers a distance of some 2,000 kilometers in width.

The northeastern part of this region is called the Middle West. It lies in the general area of the Great Lakes. From east to west, the states in the Middle West are Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Missouri, Iowa, and Minnesota. This region has great mineral resources, rich soil, a good climate for agriculture, fertile plains, low rolling hills, and no high mountains. It is one of

the richest sections of the U. S.

The large area to the west of the Mississippi valley is called the Great Plains. It covers, from north to south, these five states: North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, and Oklahoma. This area appears to be very flat, which rises gradually toward the west. Except for a few widely separated sections, there are no trees or forests in this whole region. The soil here is generally fertile. Wheat and corn are important crops in the plains states. But in the west sections, cattle raising is more important.

(3) The Rockies West to the Pacific

To the west of the great Plain lie the Rocky Mountains, "the backbone of the continent". These majestic mountains stretch all the way from Mexico to the Arctic and form what is known as Continental Divid, or Great Divid, the most important watershed on the continent. The Rockies are more than twice as high as the Appalachians and high enough to receive more precipitation than the surrounding plains and plateaus. Consequently, they are mostly forested. The striking and varied scenery of the Rockies has given rise to the establishment of many national parks here. The most famous one is the Yellowstone National Park which covers an area of about 9,000 square kilometers. It is in the northwest corner of Wyoming, but also takes up part of Montana and Idaho. Yellowstone has about 3,000 geysers and hot springs. It also has mud volcanoes, fossil forests, and volcanic glass.

Between the Sierra Nevada Mountains and the Rocky Mountains there is a large area of high land called the Great Basin. Nearly all Nevada and large portions of Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and California are included. This wide area receives little rainfall and much of it is desert. Death Valley is on the western edge of this region. The valley, 200 kilometers long and 86 meters below the sea level, is the lowest and hottest place in America.

Along the Pacific coast, from Washington to southern Califor-

nia, extent the Coast Ranges. One hundred miles farther east and parallel to them lie the Cascade and Sierra Nevada ranges. Between the Sierra Nevada and the Coast Ranges lies the valley of California, also called Central Valley, which is a highly productive lowland extending more than 800 kilometers from northwest to southeast. Since it consists chiefly of alluvium and easily irrigated, it produces enormous amounts of fruits and vegetables. It is important, too, for such basic field crops as sugar beets, beans, rice, and cotton.

2. Rivers and Lakes

The Mississippi River is the most important and longest river in the country. It flows about 6,400 kilometers from its northwestern source in the Rockies to the Gulf of Mexico. It drains all the central area of the USA and has a wide delta, and many tributaries. Before America completed her railway system, the Mississippi had been the most important artery of transportation in the country. On the river there is a famous town of Hannibal where the noted American writer Mark Twain was raised. His most popular and important writings are concerned with this area. His book *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* tells the story of how the boy Huckleberry Finn and his black friend Jim, a runaway slave, sailed down the Mississippi on a raft.

The Missouri River, 3,725 kilometers long, is the main tributary of the Mississippi. It rises in southwest Montana and joins the Mississippi at St. Louis. Over its course it typically is a broad, silt-laden river, giving rise to its nickname "Big Muddy". The vast drainage basin of the Missouri and its tributaries covers an area of about 1,372,000 square kilometers. Many dams were built on the river for flood control, hydroelectric power, and irrigation.

The Ohio River, 1,500 kilometers long, is the major eastern tributary of the Mississippi. It runs from the rainy east and joins the Mississippi at Cairo, Illinois. It reaches the Great Lakes area, the most important region in America. Its drainage basin, including all

tributaries, is about 327,000 square kilometers.

The Colorado River rises in the snow-capped Rocky Mountains, flowing 2,330 kilometers through Colorado, Utah and Arizona and north Mexico into the Gulf of California. It drains an area of 637,000 square kilometers, and slashes its way through a wilderness of mountains, plateaus, and deserts, which offer some of the most dramatically beautiful scenery to be found anywhere in the world. The river is cliff-bound nine-tenths of its way and travels 1,600 kilometers through deep canyons. Grand Canyon in Arizona is the largest, deepest, and most spectacular gorge of the Colorado. It is 349 kilometers long, 6 to 29 kilometers from rim to rim, and 1.6 kilometers deep. For the million and a half people who view it each year, Grand Canyon is an inexpressible wonder. For geologists it is the world's largest and oldest book which recorded the 2-billion-year history of the earth.

The Rio Grande River is another large river in southwest America. It runs about 3,000 kilometers which, for much of its length, forms the border between Texas and Mexico. It rises in the southern Rocky Mountains in Colorado and flows to the Gulf of Mexico. The economic importance of the river is restricted to areas in northern New Mexico and Southern Texas. The deserts and plains remain for the most part unaffected by the river.

The Columbia River, about 2,000 kilometers long, rises in British Columbia on the western slope of the Rocky Mountains. It flows first northwestward, then generally southward through British Columbia and Washington, and finally westward to the Pacific Ocean. In its lower course it forms the border between Washington and Oregon. The volume of the Columbia's flow is second only to that of the Mississippi, among U. S. rivers.

The rivers east of the Appalachians are usually short. All of them run to the Atlantic Ocean. The Potomac River is famous not only because Washington D. C. is located on its bank but also be-

cause it is the dividing line between the South and the North. The Hudson River is famous because New York stands at its estuary. It is connected with Lake Erie by a canal and New York City owed much to this connection for its prosperity in the 19th century.

The most important lakes in America are the Great Lakes which include five big lakes; Lake Superior, Lake Michigan, Lake Huron, Lake Erie, and Lake Ontario. Only Lake Michigan is wholly in the United States; the other four are shared with Canada. These five lakes cover an area of about 240,000 square kilometers and are the largest group of freshwater lakes in the world. All the five lakes are inter-connected, reaching the Atlantic by way of the Lawrence River. Now ships carrying goods can go to any city on the Great Lakes.

In northwest Utah lies the Great Salt Lake, the largest inland salt lake in North America. Rather rectangular in shape, the lake stretches 115 kilometers in a southeast-northwest direction and is about 50 kilometers wide at its widest point. It covers 2,435 square kilometers. Its maximum depth is 8 meters. The Great Salt Lake is several times more saline than seawater. It contains about 4.4 billion tons of minerals. Approximately three fourths of this total is common table salt.

3. Climate

The United States is mainly situated in the northern temperate zone. But, owing to its large size and varied landforms, it has different types of climate in different areas.

The climate of New England is relatively cold. The winters are long and hard. In many parts of Maine, there is snow on the ground from early November to late May. The summers are short and warm. The fall, however, is a beautiful time of year. In the fall, the leaves of trees turn different colors, giving the hills and woods a bright look. This change of color is a memorable sight, and many people visit New England at this time of year just to ride

through the woods and enjoy their beauty.

The climate of the Middle Atlantic States region is generally pleasant. There are four definite seasons. The winters are cold and snowy, and the springs are warm, with plenty of rain to help the growth of crops. Summers are short and hot but pleasant, while the falls are cool.

The South enjoys a warm climate and abundant rainfall. Many of its states lie within the band that stretches across the entire southern third of the nation known as the Sun Belt. The climate, however, varies with the geographical position of each state. Virginia and North Carolina have a temperate climate like that of Maryland. In southern Florida, on the other hand, the climate is almost tropical. Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana all have warm climates with almost no cold or winter weather. Some states in this region are sometimes harassed by the disaster of hurricanes.

Since the Great Plains stretch from the Canadian border to Texas, the climate in this region varies widely. North Dakota has extreme temperatures, strong winds, and low precipitation. Oklahoma, on the other hand, has a more temperate climate. The open treeless, unbroken land offers little protection against storms or against the rapid changes of weather that occur in this area. In winter, snow piles up to 6 meters high in some places. In summer, in these same places, both plants and animals may die from the extreme heat. In many parts of the plains states there is little rain. Water in such areas becomes more important than land. For thousands of farmers, a few inches more or a few inches less of rain during the growing season may make the difference between success and failure. Extended periods of very hot weather during a summer without rain may not only destroy crops but also turn the land into dust. This dust often turns into the infamous dust storms of this area, destroying farms and farm buildings and leaving the land bare

of all fertile soil.

The climate of the Midwest is temperate. The region lies in a great valley between the Allegheny Mountains to the east and the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains to the west. This is a largely open country, and the wind blows freely, often bringing sudden and extreme changes in temperature. Midwest summer are sometimes very hot; winters are sometimes extremely cold.

The states west of the Rocky Mountains have sharply different climatic conditions. This is largely because of the effects of the mountain ranges and the Pacific Ocean. Winds from the Pacific bring plenty of rain, yet these winds are conditioned by the mountains along the coast. Generally speaking, the western slopes of the Coastal Mountains are cool, rainy, and cloudy. The part of Washington near the Pacific Ocean has the highest rainfall in the country. But after crossing these mountains, very little rain falls and deserts appear.

4. Natural Resources

The United States is a land rich in natural resources. Some of these resources, such as water, iron ore, coal, oil, silver, and gold, are especially plentiful in the country.

America has a large deposits of iron ore. The nation produces more than 80 million tons of iron a year. For many years, iron ore came primarily from the great Lake region of Minnesota and Michigan, but the mines were severely depleted during the two World Wars. The richer ores are exhausted, though large amounts of lower-grade materials remain and form the basis of a thriving industry. Iron ores are also mined in Missouri, New York, Utah and Wyoming.

Coal is another major natural resource found in large quantities in the U. S. which can last for hundreds of years. Coal deposits are widely distributed in the country. Most of coal reserves are to be found in the Appalachians, the Central Plain, and the Rockies.

America, very rich in oil, was once the largest oil producing country in the world. Oil wells in the United States produce more than 3,200 million barrels of petroleum a year. The production, processing and marketing of such petroleum products as gasoline and oil make up one of America's largest industries. Most domestic production of oil and natural gas comes from offshore areas of Louisiana and Texas, and from onshore areas of Texas, Oklahoma, and California. Although the oil production in the U. S. is very large, her big consumption has made America insufficient in oil supply. The shortage of domestic supplies of energy was forcefully publicized by the Arab oil embargo of 1973-1974. Until this embargo most Americans did not realize that the United States does not have enough energy to meet its evergrowing needs.

Other basic metals and minerals mined on a large scale in America include zinc, copper, silver, and phosphate rock.

America enjoys abundant water resources, Today the rivers and streams of America furnish 63% of the water supply for cities, towns and farmlands, 93% of the water used by industry, and almost all of the water used to create electric power. Unlike some other countries, America as a whole has little trouble as caused by the shortage of fresh water.

America has also plenty of fertile soil. Farmlands in the United States make up about 12% of the arable lands in the world, and they are among the richest and most productive. Of the 2.3 billion acres of land in the 50 states an estimated 300 million acres are planted annually. The country's very large acreage of highly productive farmlands could be expected to continue to supply the nation generously, with substantial surplus for export.

Exercises