Our Regions

Week 2 of 36 • Page 4

When the Ground Feels Unsteady, You Can Be Ready!

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Does your family have an earthquake plan? Now is the time to prepare … BEFORE the earth starts to shake.
Sacramento

Sacramento is one of the largest cities in California and is our state’s capital. Sacramento is located where the Sacramento and American rivers meet. The city was founded in 1849 with the beginning of the California gold rush. It is a charter city, which means city leaders can make some laws instead of following state laws. Sacramento became our state capital in 1854. The Capitol building was completed in 1874 and cost almost $2.5 million dollars. The city became known for the Pony Express and the transcontinental railroad.

Today, Sacramento is a busy city with a lot to do and see. Sacramento is the home of the NBA Sacramento Kings, a professional opera and ballet company and many wonderful museums. Many factories are also located in Sacramento and employ many people. These factories make transportation equipment, chemicals and electronics and also prepare and process foods. The state government is another big employer for residents of the city. Some of Sacramento’s most interesting places to see are the California State Capitol, Sutter’s Fort, the Sacramento Zoo, the California State Railroad Museum and Fairytale Town. Sacramento is also within a few hours’ drive of Lake Tahoe and Napa Valley.

California was named after a character in a romantic novel that was popular during the 1500s. The book, called “Los Sueños de Espadilla,” was written by Garcí Rodríguez de Montalvo and was about an island full of pearls and gold. The story says that the island was ruled by the beautiful Queen Califia. When the Spanish explorer Cortés and his men landed in California in 1535, they found pearls and believed they had found the island in the novel. Excited about their discovery, they named the “island” California. Later, explorer Francisco de Ulloa proved that the “island” of California was not the island in the novel. The Baja coast of California, where Cortés landed, was not an island at all, but a peninsula. (A peninsula is a long finger of land that projects out into the water but is still connected to the mainland.)

How did California get its name?

California

California is divided into four major natural regions, or areas that share common landforms. A landform is a geological formation, such as a mountain, an island or a desert. The California landscape is divided into the Rocky Coast, the Central Valley, the Sierra Nevada and the California Deserts.

1. The Rocky Coast

California’s Rocky Coast spans nearly two-thirds of the coastline. That’s over 800 miles! The Rocky Coast separates the coast from the Central Valley and the deserts. The mountains along the coast include the Klamath Mountains, the Coast Ranges, the Transverse Ranges and the Peninsular Ranges. These mountains receive a great deal of rainfall. They are also covered in a variety of vegetation that can be used as a natural resource.

2. The Central Valley

The Central Valley is located between the Rocky Coast and the Sierra Nevada. It is about 50 miles wide and 400 miles long. The Central Valley was once an ancient, shallow sea but is now very fertile farmland. The Sacramento and the San Joaquin rivers drain the valley and meet up at the San Francisco Bay. The Central Valley is focused on farming. In fact, eight of California’s top agricultural counties are located in the Central Valley. The valley is known as one of the greatest farming areas in the entire world. The Central Valley also includes the San Joaquin Valley, with its great oil fields.

3. The Sierra Nevada

The Sierra Nevada is a single mountain range that is nearly 400 miles long. The highest point along this mountain range is Mount Whitney, with an elevation of 14,494 feet. Mount Whitney is the highest peak in the Continental United States. The Sierra Nevada also contains gold and other valuable minerals. Yosemite National Park is located in the Sierra Nevada.

4. The California Deserts

Deserts are regions where there is little water or plant and animal life. Death Valley, one of California’s great deserts, extends 140 miles through eastern California and western Nevada. Death Valley is part of the Great Basin and is the lowest point in the United States. Death Valley is 282 feet below sea level. The Mojave Desert is located near the Great Basin. This is one of the most barren, or lifeless, deserts in the world and is home to the Joshua tree, a plant that only grows in the desert. The Colorado Desert is a low-lying desert, about 245 feet below sea level. It is located in southern California, between the San Andreas Fault and the Mojave Desert. The Colorado Desert now receives irrigation water in some locations and has become excellent farmland.

Bay Area

San Francisco is part of the Rocky Coast of California and is located near the San Francisco Bay. Some famous geographical landmarks are the joining of the Sacramento and the San Joaquin rivers, the San Francisco Bay, Muir Woods, the Farallon Islands and Lombard Street.

What are some of your favorite San Francisco landmarks?

Sacramento

California's geography is interesting because it is made up of many different landscapes. In fact, California is divided into four major natural regions, or areas that share common landforms. A landform is a geological formation, such as a mountain, an island or a desert. The California landscape is divided into the Rocky Coast, the Central Valley, the Sierra Nevada and the California Deserts.

Where in the World Are We?

Where in the world is California? California is located in the Western Hemisphere and belongs to the North American continent. California is part of the western border of the United States of America. It is bordered by the Pacific Ocean to the west, Mexico to the south, Arizona and Nevada to the east and Oregon to the north.

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Learning Our Landforms

On the map, label each star with the correct landmark from the list. Also, label each region with the correct name of the region from the list. Color the landforms different colors for another activity. If you need help, ask your teacher or use an atlas to find the landforms.

1. Rocky Coast
2. Central Valley
3. California Deserts
4. Sierra Nevada
5. San Francisco

6. San Francisco Bay
7. Sacramento River
8. San Joaquin River
9. Muir Woods
10. Farallon Islands

California’s Global Neighbors

California is located on the west coast of the United States. On the globe, fill in the name of each place marked by a dot.

1. California
2. Hawaii
3. Alaska
4. Mexico
5. Canada
6. Oregon
7. Washington
8. Russia

Do You Know Your Region?

Did you know that California is divided into four natural regions? You may not have thought much about it, but it’s true! If you didn’t already know that California is divided into regions, then you definitely aren’t aware of which region you live in. This week, we’ll help you do a little detective work to find out exactly where you live— even if you thought you already knew!

Answer the questions below; then turn to pages 2-3 and use the California Regions Map, along with the descriptions provided, to pinpoint which region is your own. Mark the spot on the map with a red X when you’re finished. (Ask a parent or teacher for permission to access the Internet if you need help answering some of the questions.)

1. Why is our state divided into regions? Name California’s four natural regions.
2. What is the main economic focus of the Central Valley? Why do you think this industry is so successful in this region?
3. Who started the Sierra Club? When was it founded, and how did it get its name?
4. Name California’s state capital. When was it founded, and how did it get its name?

Connections

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