NATURAL REGIONS OF KENTUCKY

NATURAL WONDERS

As you travel around Kentucky taking pictures, you are excited by what you see. Kentucky offers diverse and amazing sights.

The Six Regions

In the West, you see the Mississippi River, the longest river in the United States. In the middle, you see miles and miles of grasslands. In the east, you see the tree-covered Appalachian Mountains. The Appalachians are the oldest mountains in North America.

The Cumberland River winds through these mountains. At one place, it drops 60 feet. This drop creates a huge wall of water called Cumberland Falls. On full-moon nights, a moonbow, or moonlit rainbow, appears in the mist created by the waterfall.

In another part of Kentucky, you discover Mammoth Cave. It is the longest cave system in the world!

Because Kentucky's land varies so much, geographers often divide the state into six regions that share certain physical characteristics. These are called natural resources. Places in each region may have similar landforms, bodies of water, climates, or plants.

What is one way in which geographers divide the state of Kentucky?

The Bluegrass and Knobs Regions

The Bluegrass Region stretches across the central part of northern Kentucky. The region is divided into two parts – the Inner Bluegrass and the Outer Bluegrass. The Inner Bluegrass is made up mostly of gently rolling hills and plains. A plain is an area of flat land. The Outer Bluegrass has deep valleys and less flat land than that of the Inner Bluegrass.

Rich Soil

The Bluegrass Region has very rich soil, especially in the Inner Bluegrass area. Over thousands of years, the soil was deposited on the
land by river floods. Soil created in this way is very **fertile**, or good for growing crops. As a result, that state's most profitable farmland is located in the Bluegrass Region. Major crops include corn, soybeans, tobacco, and hay.

**Grasslands**

The Bluegrass Region is also known for the Thoroughbred horses raised there. A Thoroughbred is a kind of horse used mostly for racing. Many Thoroughbreds can be seen feeding in pastures of Kentucky bluegrass near Lexington.

The bluegrass has long provided excellent grazing for many kinds of animals. **John James Audubon**, an artist who lived in the Bluegrass Region in the early 1800s, remembered seeing “vast herds of elk, deer and buffalos.”

**The Bluegrass State**

Despite its name, bluegrass is green, like most other grasses. Only its flowers are blue. At times, this gives bluegrass pastures the look that has led to the grass's name. Today, the state of Kentucky is known as the Bluegrass State.

**Big Cities**

The geography of the Bluegrass Region makes it an easy place to live, farm, and transport goods. More than half of all the people in Kentucky live in the Bluegrass Region! The state's two largest cities, Louisville and Lexington, as well as the state capital of Frankfort,
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are located in this region. Louisville and Lexington are also two of Kentucky’s largest industrial centers.

**The Knobs Region**

The Knobs Region is a small, unusual region. It runs along the western, southern, and eastern edges of the Bluegrass Region.

Erosion formed the unusual features of the Knobs. **Erosion** is the slow wearing away of Earth’s surface by wind or water. Over thousands of years, the softer land in the area eroded, or wore away. Some harder rock, however, remained. That rock formed the cone-shaped “knobs,” or hills, that give the region its name. The soil of the Knobs Region is poor. However, the region certainly offers unique scenery.

**How do land and soil influence human activity in the Bluegrass Region?**

**The Eastern Kentucky Coal Field Region**

The Eastern Kentucky Coal Field Region stretches along Kentucky’s eastern border. It has Kentucky’s highest and most rugged land and some of its most dramatic scenery.

**High and Rugged**

The region’s most noticeable feature is **Cumberland Mountain**, which is part of the long Appalachian Mountain Range. One of the peaks is called **Black Mountain**. At 4,145 feet tall, it is the highest point in the state of Kentucky.

Just west of the mountains is the **Cumberland Plateau**. A **plateau** is an area of high, flat land with lower land around it.

The Eastern Kentucky Coal Field Region has the state’s coldest weather, and snow is common in winter. Forests of softwood and hardwood trees grow
well in this climate. These forests provide homes for black bears, deer, wild turkeys, and many other animals. The largest and best-quality deposits of coal in Kentucky lie buried in this region. Also found underground are oil and natural gas. Mining all of these resources provides many jobs for the people in the region.

What mountain range runs through the Eastern Kentucky Coal Field Region?

The Mississippian Plateau Region

The Mississippian Plateau Region is also known as the Pennyroyal Region. It covers much of west-central Kentucky. This is the largest of the state’s natural regions, and one of the most varied.

A Varied Region

The southern part of the Mississippian Plateau Region is mostly flat and rolling. The soil is rich, and the area gets plenty of precipitation. Precipitation is water that falls to Earth as rain, sleet, hail, or snow. All of these factors make the Mississippian Plateau an excellent region for farming. Corn and wheat are among the crops produced there.

In the center of the Mississippian Plateau Region is an area where trees do not grow. This is called The Barrens, because the word barren means “empty” or “not fertile.”

The northern part of the Mississippian Plateau Region is rocky and steep. Much of the land here is made up of a soft rock called limestone.

Long ago, water flowing underground eroded the limestone in many places. This created holes and caves underground and sinkholes on the surface. Some of the caves are very large like the Mammoth Cave system. Sinkholes are large, bowl-shaped holes that form when limestone layers above underground holes collapse.

Why is the southern part of the Mississippian Plateau Region good for farming?
The Western Kentucky Coal Field Region

The Western Kentucky Coal Field Region is located along the southern bank of the Ohio River. The Mississippian Plateau Region surrounds it on three sides.

Similarities

Like the Mississippian Plateau, the Western Kentucky Coal Field is an important region for farming. Its soil is especially fertile in the north, near the Ohio River. Wheat, hay, corn, and soybeans are major crops there.

Also like the Mississippian Plateau, the northern part of the Western Coal Field is rugged. It has rocky cliffs and wooded areas.

The southern parts of the Western Kentucky Coal Field Region share yet another feature with the Mississippian Plateau Region – limestone. Erosion has had similar effects in both regions. Both regions have underground passages and caves.

A hundred years ago, this region was a major source of coal. However, the coal here is of lower quality than the coal in the eastern part of Kentucky. As a result, coal mining is less important here than it once was.

How are the Mississippian Plateau and Western Kentucky Coal Field alike?

The Mississippi Embayment Region

The Mississippi Embayment Region is also known as the Jackson Purchase. It covers the western corner of Kentucky. It has the lowest lands and the only swamps in Kentucky. Plains are the main landform there.

The Mississippi Embayment is bordered by the Ohio, Mississippi, and Tennessee River. In the past, these rivers flooded often, leaving rich soil behind. People once grew a lot of cotton there. Now, soybeans are the most important crop.

What landform covers most of the Mississippi Embayment Region?