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# Canadian Shield

shield, North America



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**Alternative Titles:** Canadian continental shield, Canadian-Greenland Shield, Laurentian Shield, Precambrian Shield

**Canadian Shield**, one of the world's largest geologic **continental shields**, centred on **Hudson Bay** and extending for 8 million square km (3 million square miles) over

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## Canada: The Canadian Shield

By far the largest of  
Canada's  
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regions, the **Canadian  
Shield** (sometimes  
called the  
Precambrian Shield)  
occupies...

The Canadian Shield constitutes the largest mass of exposed **Precambrian rock** on the face of **Earth**. The region, as a whole, is composed of ancient crystalline rocks whose complex structure attests to a long history of **uplift** and depression, **mountain building (orogeny)**, and **erosion**. Some of the ancient mountain ranges can still be recognized as a ridge or belt of hills, but the present appearance of the physical landscape of the Canadian Shield is not so much a

result of the **folding** and **faulting** and compression of the rocks millions of years ago as it is the work of **ice** in relatively recent **geologic time**. During the **Pleistocene Epoch** (2.6 million to 11,700 years ago), the vast continental **glaciers** that covered northern **North America** had this region as a centre. The ice, in moving to the south, scraped the land bare of its overlying **mantle** of **weathered** rock. Some of this material was deposited on the **shield** when the ice melted, but the bulk of it was carried southward to be deposited south and southwest of the Canadian Shield.



### Canadian Shield

Map depicting the extent of the Canadian Shield in North

America. The Canadian Shield constitutes the largest mass of exposed Precambrian rock on the face of Earth.

*Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.*

The resulting surface consists of rocky, ice-smoothed hills with an average relief of 30 metres (100 feet), together with irregular basins, which are mostly filled by [lakes](#) or [swamps](#). In places the old mountain ranges may be recognized by hills several hundreds of metres in height. The northeastern portion, however, became tilted up so that, in northern [Labrador](#) and [Baffin Island](#), the land rises to more than 1,500 metres (5,000 feet) above [sea level](#).

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*This article was most recently revised and updated by [Adam Augustyn](#), Managing Editor, Reference Content.*

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