Chapter One

An Introduction to the United Kingdom



1. The Territory of U.K.

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The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (commonly known as the United Kingdom, the UK or Britain) is a **sovereign** state located off the northwestern coast of continental Europe. It is an island country, spanning an **archipelago** including Great Britain,

the northeastern part of the island of Ireland, and many small islands. Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK with a land border, sharing it with the Republic of Ireland. Apart from this land border, the UK is **surrounded** by the Atlantic Ocean, the North Sea, the English Channel and the Irish Sea. The largest island, Great Britain, is linked to France by the Channel Tunnel.

The United Kingdom is a **constitutional monarchy** and **unitary** state consisting of four countries: England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. It is governed by a parliamentary system with its seat of government in London, the capital, but with three **devolved** national administrations of varying powers in Belfast, Cardiff and Edinburgh, the capitals of Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland





respectively. The Channel Island bailiwicks of Jersey and Guernsey, and the Isle of Man are Crown Dependencies, which means they are constitutionally tied to the British monarch but are not part of the UK. The UK has fourteen overseas territories, all **remnants** of the British Empire, which at its height in 1922 **encompassed** almost a quarter of the world's land surface, the largest empire in history. British influence can still be observed in the language, culture and legal systems of many of its former colonies.

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2. The Geography of U.K.

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The total area of the United Kingdom is **approximately** 245,000 square kilometers comprising of the island of Great Britain, the northeastern one-sixth of the island of Ireland (Northern Ireland) and smaller islands. England is the largest country of the United Kingdom, at 130,410 square kilometers accounting for just over half the total area of the UK. Scotland at 78,772 square kilometers is second largest, accounting for about a third of the area of the UK. Wales and Northern Ireland are much smaller, covering 20,758 square kilometers and 14,160 square kilometers respectively.

The physical geography of the UK **varies** greatly. The Geography of England **consists of** lowland **terrain**, with mountainous terrain north-west of the Tees-Exe line including the Cumbrian Mountains of the Lake District, the Pennines and limestone hills of the Peak District, Exmoor and Dartmoor. The Geography of Scotland **is distinguished by** the Highland Boundary Fault £ –a geological **rock fracture** £ –which traverses the Scottish mainland from

Helensburgh to Stonehaven. The faultline separates the two distinctively different regions of the Highlands to the north and west and the lowlands to the south and east. The Geography of Wales is mostly mountainous, though south Wales is less mountainous than north and mid Wales.

The Geography of Ireland includes the Mourne Mountains as well as Lough Neagh, at 388 square kilometres, the largest body of water

The overall **geomorphology** of the UK was shaped by the combined forces of **tectonics** and climate change, in particular **glaciations**.



in the UK and Ireland.



The exact centre of the island of Great Britain is disputed. Depending upon how it is calculated it can be either Halt whistle in Northumberland, or Dunlop Bridge in Lancashire.

The **geology** of the United Kingdom is varied and **diverse**. This gives up to the wide variety of landscapes found across the UK. This variety, coupled with the early efforts of UK based scientists and geologists to understand it, has influenced the naming of many geological concepts, including many of the geological periods (for example, the Ordovician period is named after the Ordovices, a people of early Britain; the Devonian

period is named after the county of Devon in south-west England).

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3. Rivers and Lakes

The River Thames

The River Thames is the second longest river in the United Kingdom and the longest river entirely in England, rising at Thames Head in Gloucestershire, and flowing into the North Sea at the Thames Estuary. It has a special significance in flowing through London, the capital of the

United Kingdom, although London only inpart of its course. The river is **tidal** in Lonand fall of 7 metres and becomes non-tidal Lock. The **catchment** area covers a large Eastern and Western England and the river The river contains over 80 islands, and water and freshwater stretches supports wildlife.

cludes a short don with a rise at Teddington part of South is fed by over 20. having both seaa variety of

The river has supported human activity from its source to its mouth for thousands of years providing habitation, water

power, food and drink. It has also acted as a major highway both for international trade through the Port of London, and internally along its length and connecting to the British canal system. The river's strategic position has seen it at the centre of many events and fashions in British history, earning it a description by John Burns as "Liquid History". It has been a physical and political boundary over the centuries and generated a range of river crossings. In more recent time the river has become a major leisure area supporting tourism and pleasure outings as well as the sports of rowing, sailing, skiffing, kayaking, and punting.



The river has had a special **appeal to** writers, artists, musicians and film-makers and is well represented in the arts. It is still the subject of various debates about its course, nomenclature and history.

iñ Severn River

The River Severn is the longest river in Great Britain, at about 354 kilometres. It rises at an altitude of 610 metres on Plynlimon near Llanidloes, Powys, in the Cambrian Mountains of mid Wales. It then flows through Shropshire, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire, with the county towns of Shrewsbury, Worcester, and Gloucester on its banks. With an average discharge of 107 m³/s at Apperley, Gloucestershire, the Severn is England's greatest river in terms of water flow.

The river is usually considered to become the Severn Estuary after the Second Severn Crossing between Severn Beach, South Gloucestershire and Sudbrook, Monmouthshire. The river then discharges into the Bristol Channel which in turn discharges into the Celtic Sea and the wider Atlantic Ocean. The Severn's drainage basin area is 11,420 square kilometres, excluding the River Wye and Bristol Avon which flow into the Bristol Channel. The major tributaries to the Severn are the Vyrnwy, Teme, Warwickshire Avon and Stour.

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4. Climate and Weather

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The United Kingdom **straddles** the geographic mid-latitudes between 50-60N from the **equator**. It is also positioned on the western seaboard of **Eurasia**, the world's largest land mass. These boundary conditions allow **convergence** between moist maritime air and dry continental air. In this area, the large temperature variation creates instability and this is a major factor that influences the often unsettled weather the country experiences, where many types of weather can be experienced in a single day.

Regional climates in the United Kingdom are influenced by the Atlantic Ocean and latitude. Northern Ireland, Wales and western parts of England and Scotland, being closest to the Atlantic, are generally the mildest, wettest and windiest regions of the UK, and temperature ranges here are seldom extreme. Eastern areas are drier, cooler, less windy and also experience the greatest daily and seasonal temperature variations. Northern areas are generally cooler, wetter and have a smaller temperature range than southern areas. Though the UK is mostly under the influence of the maritime tropical air mass from the south-west, different regions are more susceptible than others when different air masses affect the country: Northern Ireland and the west of Scotland are the most exposed to the maritime **polar** air mass which brings cool moist air; the east of Scotland and north-east England are more exposed to the continental polar air mass which brings cold dry air; the south and south-east of England are more exposed to the continental tropical air mass which brings warm dry air; Wales and the south-west of England are the most exposed to the maritime tropical air mass which brings warm moist air.

The Atlantic Ocean has a significant effect on Britain's climate. Although the British Isles are as far north in latitude as Labrador in Canada, they have a mild climate throughout the



year. This is due to the Gulf Stream, a current of warm water that flows up from the Caribbean past Britain. Prevailing southwesterly winds moving across this warmer water bring moisture and moderating temperatures to the British Isles. The surrounding waters moderate temperatures year-round, making the UK warmer in winter and cooler in summer than other areas at the same latitude. Great Britain's western coast tends to be warmer than the eastern coast, and the southern regions tend to be warmer than the northern regions. The mean annual temperature in the far north of Scotland is 6 ; æ(43 "H), and in warmer southwestern England it is 11 ; æ(52 "H). In general, temperatures are ordinarily around 15 ; æ(60 "H) in the summer and around 5 ; æ(40 "H) in the winter. Temperatures rarely ever exceed 32 ; æ(90 "H) or drop below -10 ; æ(14 "H) anywhere in the British Isles. In general, **frosts**, when the temperature dips below 0 ; æ(32 "H), are rare.

Winds blowing off the Atlantic Ocean bring clouds and large amounts of moisture to the British Isles. Average annual **precipitation** is more than 1000 mm (40 in), varying from the extremes of 5000 mm (196 in) in the western Highlands of Scotland to less than 500 mm (20 in) in the driest parts of East Anglia in England. The western part of Britain receives much more moisture than the eastern areas. It rains year-round, and in the winter the rain may change to snow, particularly in the north. It snows infrequently in the south, and when it





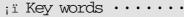
does it is likely to be wet, **slushy**, and short-lived. Southern Britain has experienced episodes of drought in recent years, although historically these are rare occurrences. Some regard these episodes as indicators of global climatic changes.

The climate has affected settlement and development in Britain for thousands of years. The mild, wet climate ensured that thick forests rich in game, as well as rivers and streams **abundant** with fish, were available to prehistoric hunters and gatherers. Britain was regarded as a cold, remote, and distant part of the ancient Roman Empire in the first few centuries AD, so relatively few Romans were



motivated to move there for trade, administrative, or military reasons. Pre-industrial settlements clustered in southern England, where the climate was milder, the growing season longer, and the rich soil and steady rainfall produced bountiful harvests. **Successive** waves of invaders made the plains of southern England their primary objective. After the Industrial Revolution began in the 18th century, populations grew enormously in areas with rich resources beneath the ground, particularly coal, even though these resources were sometimes located in the colder, harsher northern regions of England or the western Lowlands of Scotland.

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5. Resources

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The UK has a variety of natural resources including:

Geological: coal, petroleum, natural gas, **limestone**, chalk, gypsum, **silica**, rock salt, china clay, iron ore, tin, silver, gold, lead.

Agricultural: arable land, wheat, sheep.

The UK has large coal, natural gas, and oil reserves; primary energy production accounts for 10% of GDP, one of the highest shares of any industrial nation. Due to the island location of the UK, the country has great potential for generating electricity from wave power and tidal power, although these have not yet been exploited on a commercial basis.

iñ Soils

Britain's soil quality varies greatly. In northern areas the soils are thin, lying right above rock formations, while the south possesses areas of rich **loam** and heavy clay soils. When handled carefully the soils of eastern and south central England are very productive. While 77 percent of the land in Britain is used for agriculture, only 25 percent of this land is used to grow crops. Almost all of the rest is used as grazing land.

in Forests and Woodlands

Trees grow well and quickly in the heavy soils of England, and for a long time prehistoric settlers did not have tools strong enough to cut down the heavy oak forests. Over the centuries the expanding human population cut back the forests, so that today only 10 percent of the United Kingdom is forested, roughly 2 million hectares (6 million acres). In contrast,



25 percent of Europe is forested. Only 8 percent of England is covered by forest, 15 percent of Scotland, 12 percent of Wales, and 6 percent of Northern Ireland. Britain's forests produce about 15 percent of the total wood the country consumes, and Britain imports **substantial** amounts of wood and wood products. Efforts have been made in Britain to grow more trees and expand the managed forest areas. Local authorities have the power to protect trees and woodlands. It is an offense to cut down trees without permission, and when trees protected by the government die they must be replaced.

in Mineral Resources

Britain's mineral resources were historically important, but today most of these resources are either exhausted or produced in small quantities. Britain currently relies upon imports from larger, cheaper foreign supplies. Before and during the Roman occupation, about 2000 years ago, Britain was noted for its tin mines, which were concentrated in Cornwall. The tin was mixed with copper to produce bronze, an important material in ancient times used for weapons and jewelry. Today nearly every tin mine in Britain has been exhausted and shut down.

Britain's small deposits of iron ore were critically important to the Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries, particularly because iron ore deposits were located close to rich deposits of coal. When iron ore and coal are heated together, they produce iron alloys, such as wrought iron. When iron ore is heated at high temperatures with coke, a **derivative** of coal, it produces pig iron, a cheaper, softer iron that is more easily purified into the iron and steel essential for constructing machines and railroads. During the Industrial Revolution towns and cities sprang up close to these resources, and they remain among Britain's leading urban areas. Today Britain imports iron, along with most other minerals used for industrial production,



although small amounts of iron, zinc, and copper are still produced.

Raw materials for construction, particularly aggregates (minerals mechanically separated from ores), are still important, and many quarries continue to operate profitably. Limestone, sand, gravel, rock, sandstone, clay, chalk, salt, silica sands, gypsum, potash, and fluorspar are all quarried.



in Energy Resources

Britain has the richest energy sources in the European Union (EU), and its abundant resources of oil and natural gas are of **vital** importance to the British economy. Until the 1970s small amounts of oil were produced from onshore wells, but this amount was far less than Britain needed. In 1969 large supplies of oil and natural gas were discovered in the North Sea off the eastern coast of Britain, particularly off the coast of Scotland. Oil and natural gas production soared after supplies were brought ashore in 1975. Today Britain is the world's eighth largest producer of crude oil and natural gas liquids, with more than 60 offshore fields. **Refined oil** products are one of Britain's major exports today, most of which are sold to European nations.

For many years coal was mined extensively, providing the primary source of energy in Britain. It was also exported. Coal production reached its peak in 1913, when more than 300 million tons were mined. Today production is less than a sixth of that figure and coal is far less important to the British economy. Britain imports much more coal than it exports.

Britain also has a number of nuclear energy facilities. Britain meets 26 percent of its energy needs through nuclear energy. Recently much research has been devoted to developing biofuels£-energy from wastes, landfill gas, and crops-as well as to developing solar energy, wind power, and waterpower.

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6. The British National Anthem and the Union Jack

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The Union Jack

The Union Jack flag is the most common name for the flag of the United Kingdom. The Union Jack has been in existence since 1606, when England and Scotland **merged**.

In 1606, the first Union Jack flag was created by glish flag (the red cross of Saint George) with the **diagonal** white cross of Saint Andrew on a blue Then, in 1801, the addition of Ireland to the United the Irish flag to the flag (the red Saint Patrick's of the merger of the flags can be found online.

(The crosses on the flags relate to the each **entity** £-St. George is the patron St. Andrew is the patron saint of Scotland, patron saint of Ireland.)

merging the En-Scottish flag (the background). Kingdom added cross). An image

patron saints of saint of England, and St. Patrick is the

The term "Union Jack" is attributed to various origins. The "union" is thought to come from the union of the three flags into one and "jack" has for many centuries referred to a small flag flown from a boat or ship. The Union Jack is most properly called the Union Flag, but that term is not as commonly used as Union Jack.

Today, Union Jack flag is the flag of the independent country that has absorbed England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland£-the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The Union Jack is also incorporated into the flags of four independent countries of the British



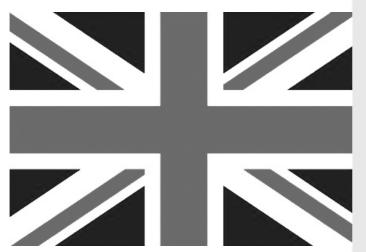
Commonwealth £-Australia, Fiji, Tuvalu, and New Zealand.

Mational Anthem

"God Save the Queen" is the national anthem of the United Kingdom. Like many aspects of British constitutional life, its official status derives from custom and use, not from Royal Proclamation or Act of Parliament. In general only one or two verses are sung, but on rare occasions three. The variation in the United Kingdom of the lyrics to "God Save the Queen" is the oldest amongst those currently used, and forms the basis on which all other versions used throughout the Commonwealth are formed; though, again, the words have varied throughout the years.

England has no official national anthem of its own; "God Save the Queen" is treated as the English national anthem when England is represented at sporting events (though there are some exceptions to this rule). There is a movement to establish an English national anthem, with Blake's "Jerusalem" and Elgar's "Land of Hope and Glory" among the top **contenders**. Scotland and Wales have their own anthems for political and national events and for use at international football, rugby union and other sports in which those nations compete independently. On all occasions Wales' national anthem is "Mae Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau" (Land of my Fathers). Scotland has no single anthem; "Scotland the Brave" was traditionally used until the 1990s, when "Flower of Scotland" was then adopted. In Northern Ireland, "God Save the Queen" is still used as the official anthem.

Since 2003, "God Save the Queen", considered an all **inclusive** Anthem for Great Britain and Northern Ireland, as well as other countries within the Commonwealth, has been dropped from the Commonwealth Games. Northern Irish athletes receive their gold medals to the tune of the "Londonderry Air", popularly known as "Danny Boy", **whilst** English winners hear



Elgar's Pomp and Circumstance March Number 1, usually known as Land of Hope and Glory. In sports in which the UK competes as one nation, most notably as Great Britain at the Olympics "God Save the Queen" is used to represent anyone or any team that comes from the United Kingdom.



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ÁJÁTÁTÁ

O Lord our God arise,
Scatter her enemies,
And make them fall:
Confound their politics,
Frustrate their knavish tricks,
On Thee our hopes we fix:
God save us all.
Ô,ÉḤÛ'Ó ŒĤĐE

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ÂŒŒÛ

Thy choicest gifts in store
On her be pleased to pour;
Long may she reign:
May she defend our laws,
And ever give us cause
To sing with heart and voice
God save the Queen.

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