

California's Regions

**T H I N K I N G
F O C U S**

Mount Whitney is the highest point in California. Death Valley is the lowest point in California. How different are these two places?

Key Terms

- region
- geography
- climate
- mountain range

A rope and a canteen are some of the tools used by explorers in California's mountains and deserts.

Some people love a challenge. A high mountain begs them to climb it. A burning desert dares them to cross it. In California, adventurers can find two of nature's toughest challenges—Mount Whitney and Death Valley. Nowhere else on earth can you find two places so close together, yet so different from each other.

Mount Whitney is a snow-topped mountain that touches the clouds. It is 14,491 feet high, the highest point in the United States outside of Alaska. State officials came upon Mount Whitney in 1864, when they were mapping the state. In 1873 several groups of climbers made the dangerous journey to its peak. Then they argued over who got there first. A group of five fishermen is given the credit.

Less than 100 miles away from Mount Whitney is Death Valley. It is the lowest point in North America. There the desert sinks to 282 feet below the level of the oceans. On July 10, 1913, the temperature in Death Valley hit a blazing 134 degrees Fahrenheit. That is the highest temperature ever measured in the United States.

During the gold rush of 1849, a group of miners and their families tried to cross the 130-mile-long valley. Some got lost, ran out of water, and died. The people who made it out alive gave Death Valley its scary name.

Frightening stories were told about the valley. One writer called it "the loneliest, the hottest, the most deadly and dangerous spot in the United States." "Once you enter it," the writer said, "there is no escape." Today, however, many people visit Death Valley to see its strange and lonely beauty.



Four Regions

On any one day in California, you can swim in the ocean, ski in the mountains, pick fruit on a farm, or drive across the desert. California is the only state in the country where you can do so many activities in so many regions. A **region** is an area of land whose features set it apart from other areas. The number of people, the kinds of business, and the weather are some features that can make one region different from another. A region's geography may also set it apart. **Geography** is all of the land and water features, such as mountains, lakes, meadows, and rivers, that are found in an area. If you look at California's geography you can see four main regions. They are the coast, the Central Valley, the mountains, and the deserts.

People and the Regions

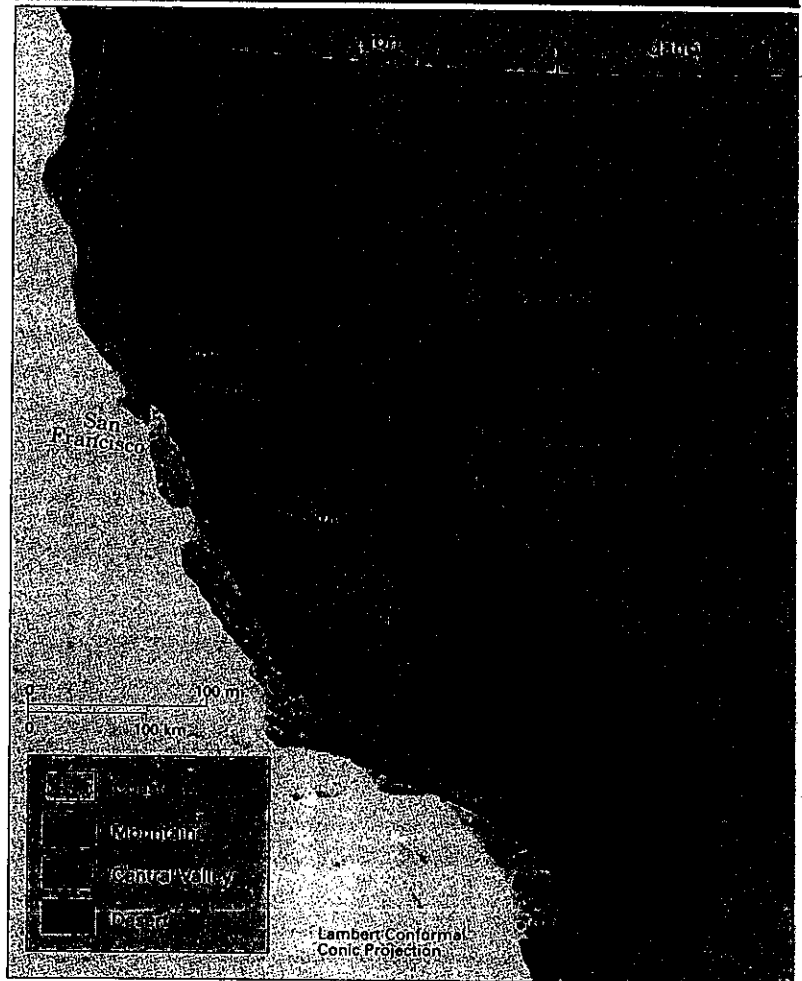
For early settlers, each region held different challenges. The first explorers came by sea and braved the storms of the coast. Later, families in covered wagons crossed the hot desert and rugged mountains. Still later, farmers in the Central Valley, had to find ways to bring water to their land.

Each region also offered many advantages to early settlers. Features such as natural beauty, rich soil, and the kind of weather drew different people to different areas. A scientist named Luther Burbank described California's beauty in a letter he wrote after arriving in California in 1875. ■

I firmly believe from what I have seen that it is the chosen spot of all this earth as far as nature is concerned. . . . The sunshine is pure and soft, the mountains . . . are very lovely. The valley is covered with majestic oaks placed as no human hand could arrange them for beauty.

▼ The map below shows the four regions of California. To find out more about California's land, climate, and people, see the Minipedia, pages 310-311.

Map of California's Regions



■ Name four geographic regions in California and give one word to describe each region.

The Coast

It's like entering a gray, misty tunnel. The water whispers as the ferryboat cuts slowly through the soupy fog. Out of nowhere, seagulls cry out.

"You're really sensitive to sound when you're on fog watch," says Nancy MacLean. As the ferry's lookout, she listens and watches for the sailboats, fishing boats, and oil tankers that travel across the busy San Francisco Bay. Each morning, MacLean's ferry carries people from their homes in Marin County to their jobs in San Francisco.

▼ *State fish: the golden trout*



The Northern and Southern Coast

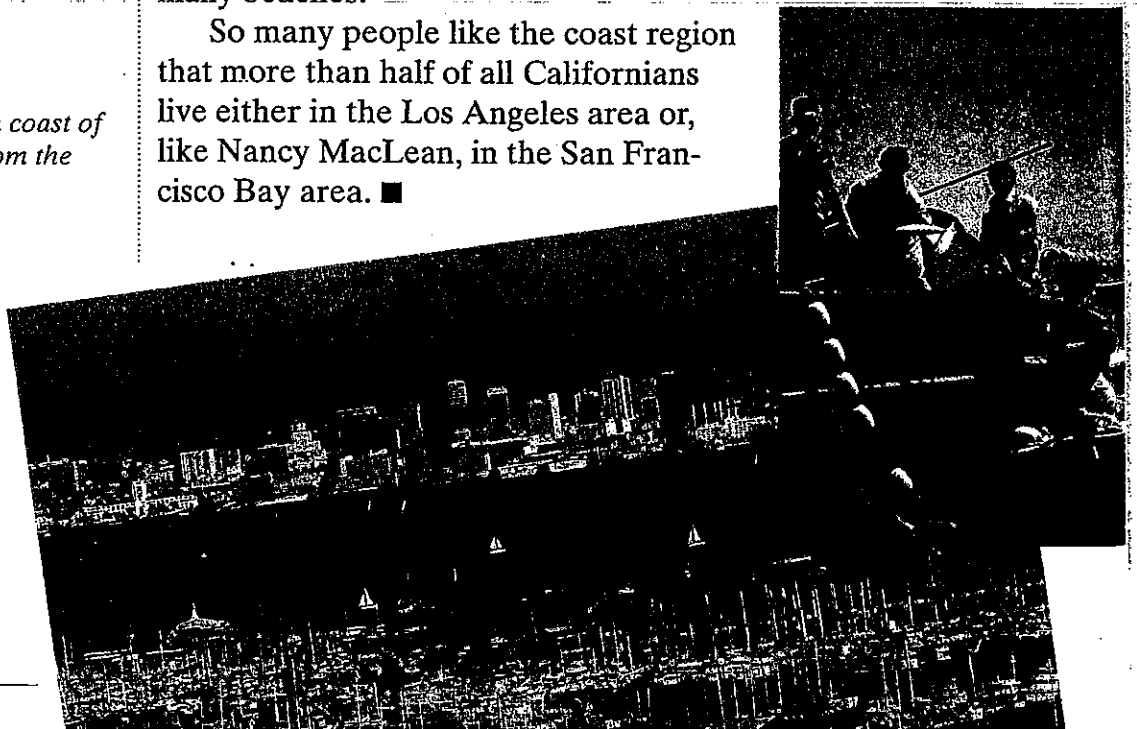
Most mornings, ocean mists cover much of the northern coast. But later in the day, the fog usually burns off with the heat of the sun. The general condition of the weather in an area is called its **climate**. On the northern coast the climate is cool and damp. San Francisco usually gets about 23 inches of rain a year. The wet climate along the northern coast helps thick forests grow there. The northern coast attracts lots of visitors to places like Big Sur and Redwood National Park.

The southern coast has another kind of beauty. Rainfall is very low. San Diego gets less than 10 inches a year. The sunshine attracts many people who want to live in a warm climate. It is also perfect for television and movie filming, as well as sports such as surfing, biking, running, and sailing. Tourists enjoy visiting aquariums, theme parks, and the many beaches.

So many people like the coast region that more than half of all Californians live either in the Los Angeles area or, like Nancy MacLean, in the San Francisco Bay area. ■

■ *How is the northern coast of California different from the southern coast?*

► *Many people enjoy sailing in San Diego's natural harbor. San Pedro's fishermen earn a living from the sea.*



The Central Valley

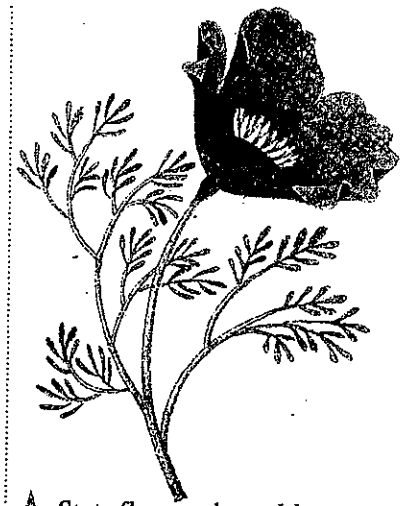
You don't have to be a farmer to know what crops grow in the Central Valley. Just use your nose. As you pass each farm, the air fills with the thick scent of the fruit or vegetable planted there. A grove of orange trees fills the air with a sweet scent. The smell of an onion field is so sharp it makes your eyes water.

The land in the Central Valley is some of the most productive farmland in the world. Almost every kind of crop is grown on the farms in this valley. These crops are shipped all over California, the United States, and the world. A child on the East Coast might drink juice from Central Valley oranges on a frosty winter day. A Japanese family can enjoy avocados grown nearly halfway around the world.

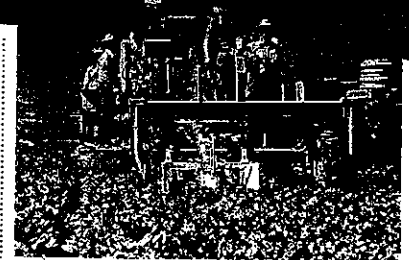
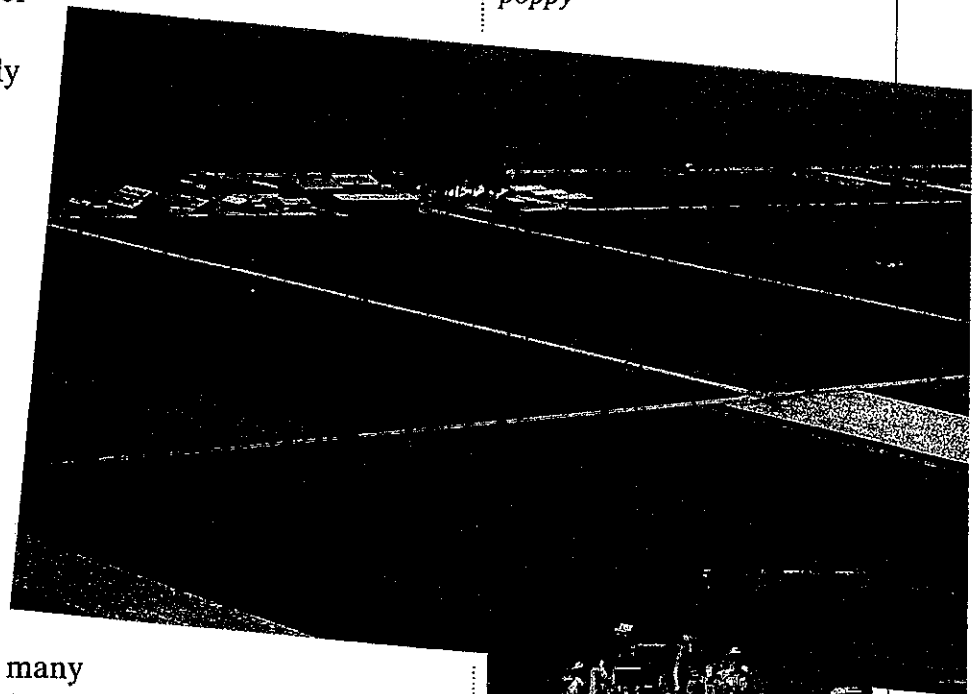
Crops and Climate

The climate in the Central Valley is hot and dry in the summer and cooler and wetter in the winter. The winter rains and summer sun make the region perfect for growing the 200 different kind of crops produced there. Farmers grow cotton, grapes, walnuts, wheat, potatoes, tomatoes, and cherries, as well as many other kinds of fruits, vegetables, and nuts. Other farmers raise dairy cows, chickens, or beef cattle. The region gets its water from the Sacramento and the San Joaquin (*san waw KEEN*) rivers. Most of the people who live in the Central Valley are farmers or do work connected to farming.

Most Central Valley farms are run by big companies. But there are some small family farms too. Lupe Villarreal and his family raise peaches, almonds, and walnuts on their 70-acre farm in Hughson. Villarreal loves farming in the Central Valley. He says, "I think the most beautiful thing is when I'm driving down the road and I see so many different varieties of crops. That really makes me feel good. That's why I think we're very lucky to have the Central Valley." ■

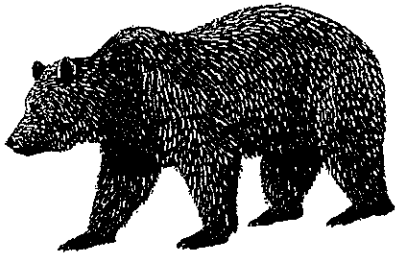


▲ *State flower: the golden poppy*



▲ *These fields of flowers are one of the Central Valley's many crops. Across the valley farmers use machines like the one you see here harvesting a crop of lettuce.*

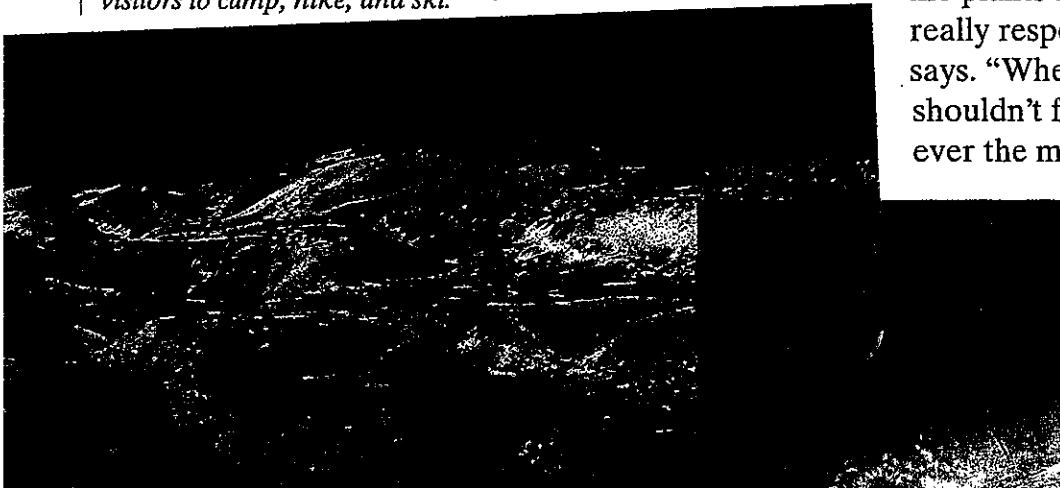
■ *Why is the Central Valley such a good farming area?*



▲ *State animal: the California grizzly bear*

■ *Why do you think California's mountain region attracts visitors from all over the world?*

▼ *The natural beauty of the Sierra Nevada brings many visitors to camp, hike, and ski.*



The Mountains

The rains that fall on the mountaintop trickle into small streams. These streams of fresh water join together and gather speed as they rush down the mountainside. Suddenly, there is a roar like thunder. The stream has become a giant waterfall. It races over a cliff and pounds into the valley over 2,000 feet below.

The valley is the Yosemite (*yoh SEHM ih tee*) Valley, one of the most beautiful spots in California. There are more waterfalls here than in any other place in the world. Visitors are amazed by the sound and size of these giant waterfalls.

Yosemite is in the Sierra Nevada, an area whose name means "snowy mountain range" in Spanish. A **mountain range** is a long row of mountains. The Sierra Nevada is just one of many mountain ranges in California. In fact, over half of the land in the state is covered with mountains.

John Muir and the Sierra Nevada

The Sierra Nevada was the favorite spot of John Muir, a famous man who wrote about nature. Muir spent many years hiking through this mountain range. After his first visit to Yosemite in 1868, he wrote in his journal:

As long as I live, I'll hear waterfalls and birds and winds sing. I'll interpret the rocks, learn the language of flood, storm, and the avalanche. I'll acquaint myself with the glaciers and wild gardens, and get as near the heart of the world as I can.

Today, rangers at Yosemite National Park continue Muir's work of teaching people about nature. One Yosemite ranger, Althea Robison, especially likes working with children. She walks children through the woods and shows them the plants and animals. "Children really respect rangers," Robison says. "When you tell them they shouldn't feed wildlife, or whatever the message is, they teach other people." See Making Decisions on page 26 to learn about John Muir's efforts to save California's forests. ■

The Deserts

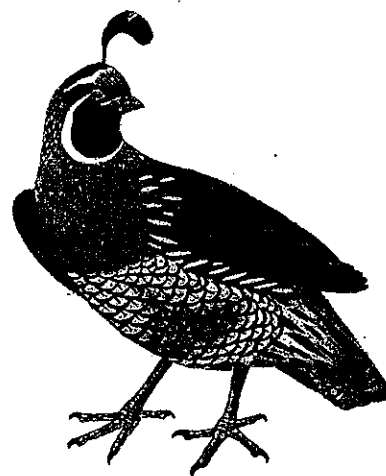
Compared to the busy coast, the Central Valley's rich cropland, and the mountains filled with wildlife, the desert might seem very empty. But actually, California's desert region is full of life too.

The two big deserts in the region are the Mojave (*moh HAH vee*) Desert and the Colorado Desert. In these areas the climate is very extreme. You can fry an egg on a flat rock in the heat of summer and freeze a glass of water on a winter night. But hundreds of types of plants and animals have found ways to live with these hard conditions. Cactus plants, for instance, can stay alive during long dry spells. Many of them store moisture in their thick skins. Their sharp spines keep animals from raiding their storehouses of water. One type of desert lizard has a special feature like windshield wipers to wipe blowing sand from its eyes. The tiny bush rabbit never drinks water. Instead, it gets the water it needs from the plants that it eats.

The Fort Mojave Indians

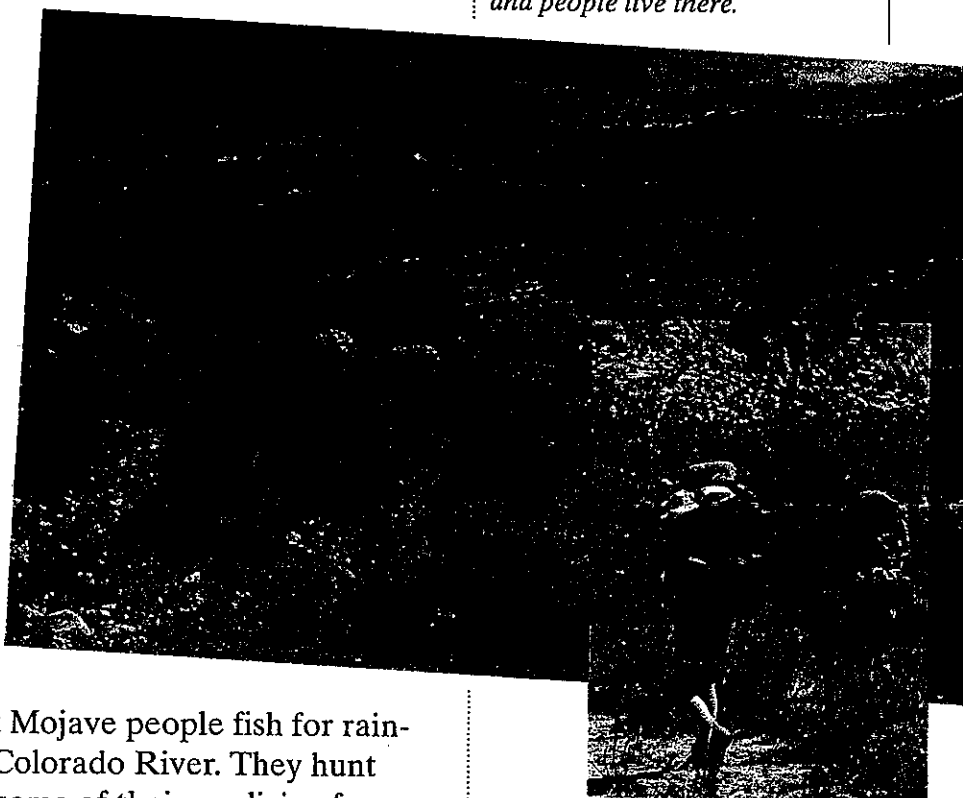
People have found ways to live in the desert too. The Fort Mojave tribe of Native Americans has lived in the Mojave Desert for thousands of years. "This is where the Almighty has placed us," says Llewellyn Barrackman, a leader of the tribe. The desert is not an easy place to live. But Barrackman believes that God "protects us and gives us food from the river or the land or the desert." The Fort Mojave people fish for rainbow trout and catfish in the Colorado River. They hunt rabbits in the desert and get some of their medicine from the desert plants.

Desert dwellers become attached to the strange and special beauty of the rainbow-colored sunsets, the soaring hawks, and the cries of the coyote. They look forward to spring, when the dry, brown land blooms with brightly colored wildflowers. ■




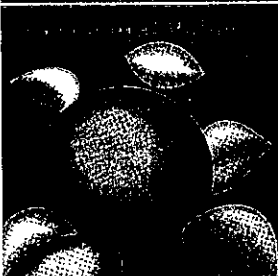
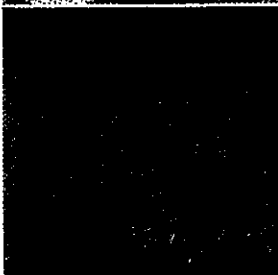
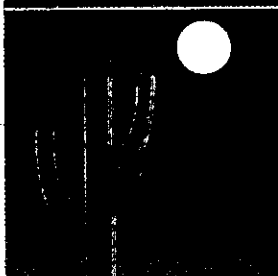
▲ State bird: the California valley quail

▼ Even though much of California's desert region looks empty, many plants, animals, and people live there.



■ How are desert plants and animals well suited to their climates?

The Four Regions of California

| Region | Cities | Activities | Natural Features | Interesting Facts |
|---|---|---|---|--|
|  <p>The Coast</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Los Angeles • San Diego • San Francisco • Oakland | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • oil • film and television • shipping and fishing • aviation • computers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • San Francisco Bay • San Diego Harbor • Big Sur • The redwood forests | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 in 18 Americans live within about 200 miles of downtown Los Angeles. |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sacramento • Fresno • Stockton • Modesto | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture: fruit, vegetables, cotton, dairy products, poultry, cattle | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sacramento River • San Joaquin Valley • Kern River • Flat-topped hills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Central Valley leads the nation in sales of such crops as raisin, grapes, walnuts, almonds, peaches, and olives. |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mammoth Lake, Tahoe • Inyo, 1869 • Bishopville • Placerville | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreation (skiing, hiking) • Gold and copper mining • Logging • Sand and gravel extraction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mount Lassen • Lake Tahoe • Wheeler Lake • Mineral, Whitney | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mount Lassen is 14,923 feet high and is the highest waterfall in the United States. |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Palm Springs • Los Angeles • Calexico • Indio | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fruit growing • Commercial agriculture • Automobile • Commercial fishing • Irrigation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colorado River • Colorado Desert • Colorado Falls • Colorado River | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Colorado River is the longest river in the United States. |

REVIEW

- FOCUS** How are California's geographic regions different from one another?
- CONNECT** The Sierra Nevada spreads into one of California's neighboring states. Which state do you think that is?
- GEOGRAPHY** Why have the Fort Mojave Indians been able to live for so long in the dry and hot desert?
- CRITICAL THINKING** What could you learn from growing up in one of California's four regions that you couldn't learn in another region?
- WRITING ACTIVITY** Find your city or town on a map of California. Then write a two-paragraph description of the region your town is in. Describe the region's landscape and climate and the activities you can do there.

