A human geography of the British Isles

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A HUMAN GEOGRAPHY OF THE BRITISH ISLES
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By

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A HUMAN GEOGRAPHY OF THE BRITISH ISLES.

CHAPTER I.

CLIMATE AND WEATHER.

CLIMATE.

The average conditions of wind, rainfall, dampness, and temperature.

WEATHER.

The actual conditions of temperature, wind, and rainfall experienced.

The general conditions affecting the climate of a region are (1) its latitude, (2) its nearness to the sea, (3) the ocean currents which wash its shores, (4) the winds which cross it, (5) the position of its mountains, (6) the height of the region above sea-level, and (7) the nature and slope of its surface.

(1) Latitude.—Generally speaking, the nearer one gets to the poles the colder the temperature becomes. The reasons for this are that nearer the poles: (a) The sun’s rays strike the earth obliquely, and have to heat and light a much greater area than is the case with the rays reaching the earth near the equator. (b) To a much less extent the sun’s rays have to pass through a thicker layer of air, and consequently lose more heat before reaching the earth, than is the case at the equator.

(2,166)
For our purpose we shall divide the earth into four zones of temperature—the cold, the cool, the warm, the hot.

![Diagram showing atmospheric rays and solid earth.](image)

**Fig. 1.** (Not to scale.)—Illustrating why the Equator is the warmest part of the Earth's surface.

The **British Isles** are situated to the north of the cool zone in the northern hemisphere.

(2.) **Nearness to the Sea.**—If the surface of the earth was entirely composed of land or of water, each zone in Fig. 2 would be of uniform temperature—the whole zone being warmer in summer and cooler in winter. This, however, is not the case, land and sea being found in every zone. As water absorbs and loses heat more slowly than the land, places near the sea are cooler in summer and warmer in winter than places inland.

![Diagram showing zones of temperature.](image)

**Fig. 2.**—Zones of Temperature.
in the same latitude. The British Isles are in the sea, and as a result are cooler in summer and warmer in winter than places situated in the interior of the continents of Europe, Asia, and America of the same latitude.

If we take the average temperature for the coldest month of the year—January—we find that the British Isles have a temperature of about 40° F., while Central Russia in the same latitude has a temperature of about 20° F.

If we take the month of July, the averages are for the British Isles about 60° F., and for Central Russia about 70° F. Thus the average annual range of temperature in the British Isles is about 20° F., while that of Central Russia is from 40° to 50° F. This is what is meant by saying that the British Isles have an “equable climate,” Central Russia an “extreme climate.”

In the atlas we find isothermal maps. Isotherms are lines joining places which have the same temperature.

In Fig. 3 is a map of Europe showing a summer (60° F.) and a winter (40° F.) isotherm. From it we see that the interior of Europe in the latitude of 54° N. is much cooler than the British Isles in winter and much warmer in summer.

(3.) Ocean Currents.—Where ocean currents are composed of warm water they warm the coasts they wash. The British Isles are in the course of the warm waters which are blown from the Gulf Stream across the Atlantic, whereas countries such as Labrador and North-east Asia, though in the same latitude as the British Isles, are washed by cold currents. Consequently the western coasts are much warmer, particularly in winter, than the east coasts of the northern continents.

(4.) Winds.—Winds blowing from a warm sea bring both moisture and warmth. The winds which blow most frequently over these islands are from the west and south-west. They bring rain and warmth. In our latitudes the winds do not blow steadily from one direction for any length of time, but cross the country in great eddies, so that as a storm rises the wind may be blowing from the south-west in London, south