

WORDS TO UNDERSTAND

arid
basin
climate
domestic
geography
indigenous
irrigation
landform
natural resource
plateau
renewable
sedimentary rock
tributary



Wasatch-Cache National Forest covers 1.3 million acres in northern Utah.

UTAH IS NORTH

Utah is found on a map between 37° and 42° north latitude. Utah is in the North Temperate Climate Zone, which is where most of the world's people live.



UTAH IS HIGH

Most of the state is 3,000 to 7,000 feet above sea level, making it one of the highest states above sea level in the United States. Kings Peak, in the Uinta Mountains, is Utah's **highest** mountain peak at 13,528 feet.



Chapter 1

SETTING THE STAGE

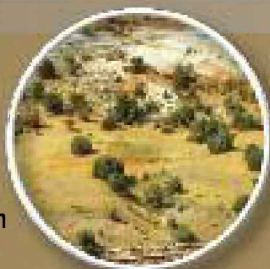
History is the study of human activities over time. Geography, then, is the stage upon which these activities take place.

Our state is a mix of unique geographic and historic features. Crossed and settled by different groups of American Indians, trappers, explorers, and pioneers, our basins, plateaus, and mountain valleys have been someone's home for thousands of years. Today, Utah is a mix of many different groups of people living in a unique place.

Utah's Geography

UTAH IS INLAND

Water vapor from the Pacific Ocean is the state's major source of water, but the ocean is over 800 miles away. Since very little water vapor travels that far inland, Utah is the second driest state in the United States.



UTAH HAS VARIED LANDFORMS

Utah has an amazing variety of landforms. Rugged mountains are dotted with small lakes. Rivers and wind have eroded high plateaus to create deep canyons, delicate arches, and majestic monuments. Flat deserts have a stark beauty all their own.



Geography— the Stage of History

Geography is the study of the earth and its mountains, plateaus, valleys, deserts, rivers, lakes, and oceans. It is also the study of where people and animals live on the earth. What is Utah's land like? Where do Utah's people live? How does our environment help us meet our needs for food, clothing, shelter, transportation, energy, jobs, and our need for beauty and peace of mind? That is the study of Utah's geography.

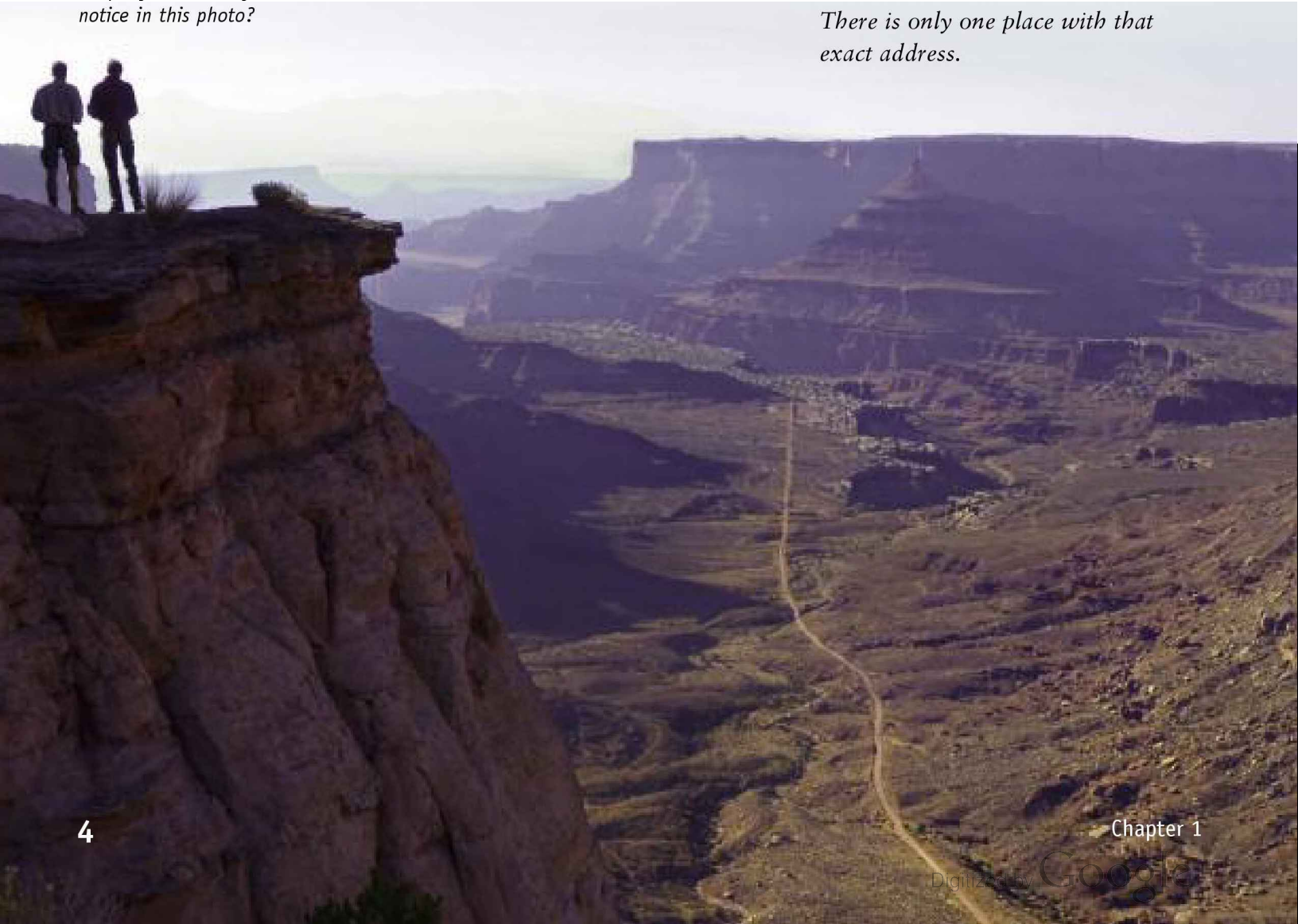
History is an account of what has happened in the past. Both geographers and historians try to learn how the features of a place affect people and events. Why did people come here? Why did they settle where they did? What happened to them once they got here? How did they help make Utah what it is today?

People from all over the world come to experience Utah's geography. What unique features do you notice in this photo?

Location Shows Where We Are

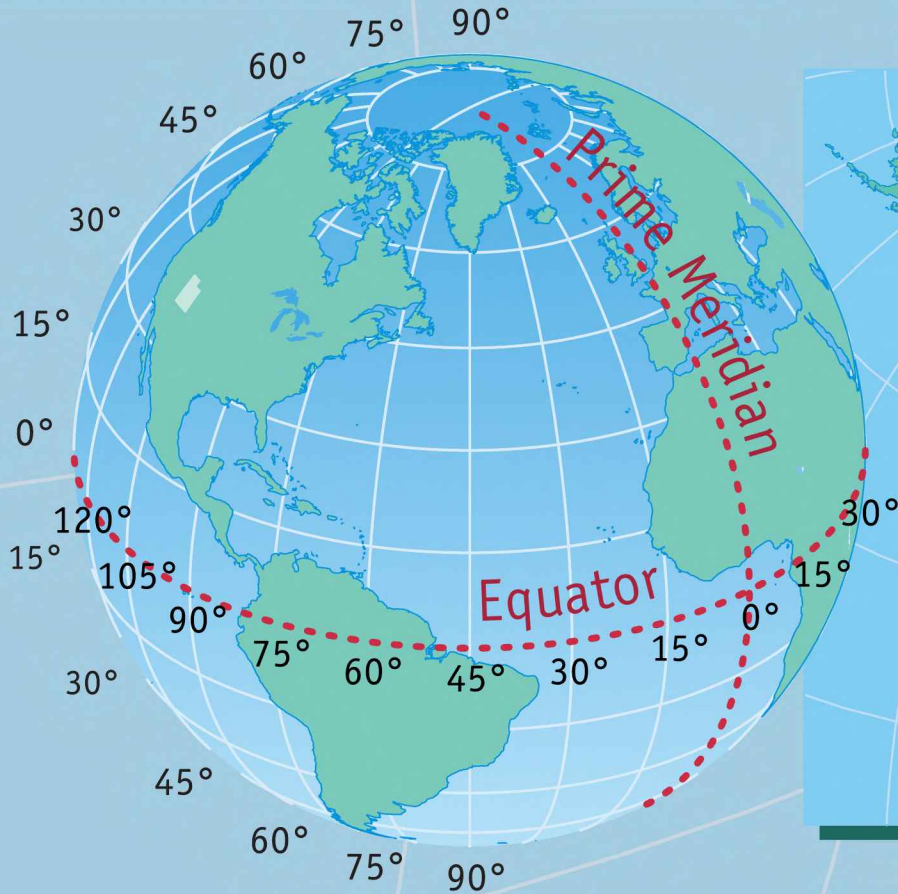
Where did it happen? Both historians and geographers ask this question about any event. Finding out where something happened involves location. The exact location of a place is measured by longitude and latitude. For example, Salt Lake City, our state capital, is 41° north latitude and 112° west longitude. If you live in Logan, Ogden, Sandy, Orem, Provo, Price, Moab, Cedar City, St. George, or any other town, your town would have a different longitude and latitude.

Longitude and latitude are measured north or south of the equator and east or west of the prime meridian. They show the exact location of a place. A street address is also an exact location. There is only one place with that exact address.



Utah's Place in the World

- Is Utah north or south of the equator?
- Is Utah east or west of the prime meridian?
- What continent is Utah on?
- Is Utah in the eastern or western part of the United States?
- Which states surround Utah?



Physical Features and Natural Resources

“Utah is very beautiful. The scenery is majestic because of all the wildlife and plants.”

—Tynan Jakins,
thirteen-year-old boy
from South Africa

“I love living in Utah. There are so many things in Utah I like. There are mountains, animals, and parks.”

—Toby Sorensen,
twelve-year-old
Kane County resident

All places on the earth have physical features that make them different from other places. The physical features of a place include things that are natural to the environment such as mountains, valleys, rivers, and lakes. **Natural resources** such as plants, animals, minerals, and fresh air are also part of the physical features of a place.

People usually live in places where the physical features make life possible and enjoyable. People use the natural resources to meet their needs. For example, for many years the Ute Indians in today's Utah County lived in a region that had long narrow valleys between mountain ranges. Utah Lake and mountain streams provided fresh water. There was tall grass in the valleys and timber in the mountains. Deer, small animals, and fish were abundant.

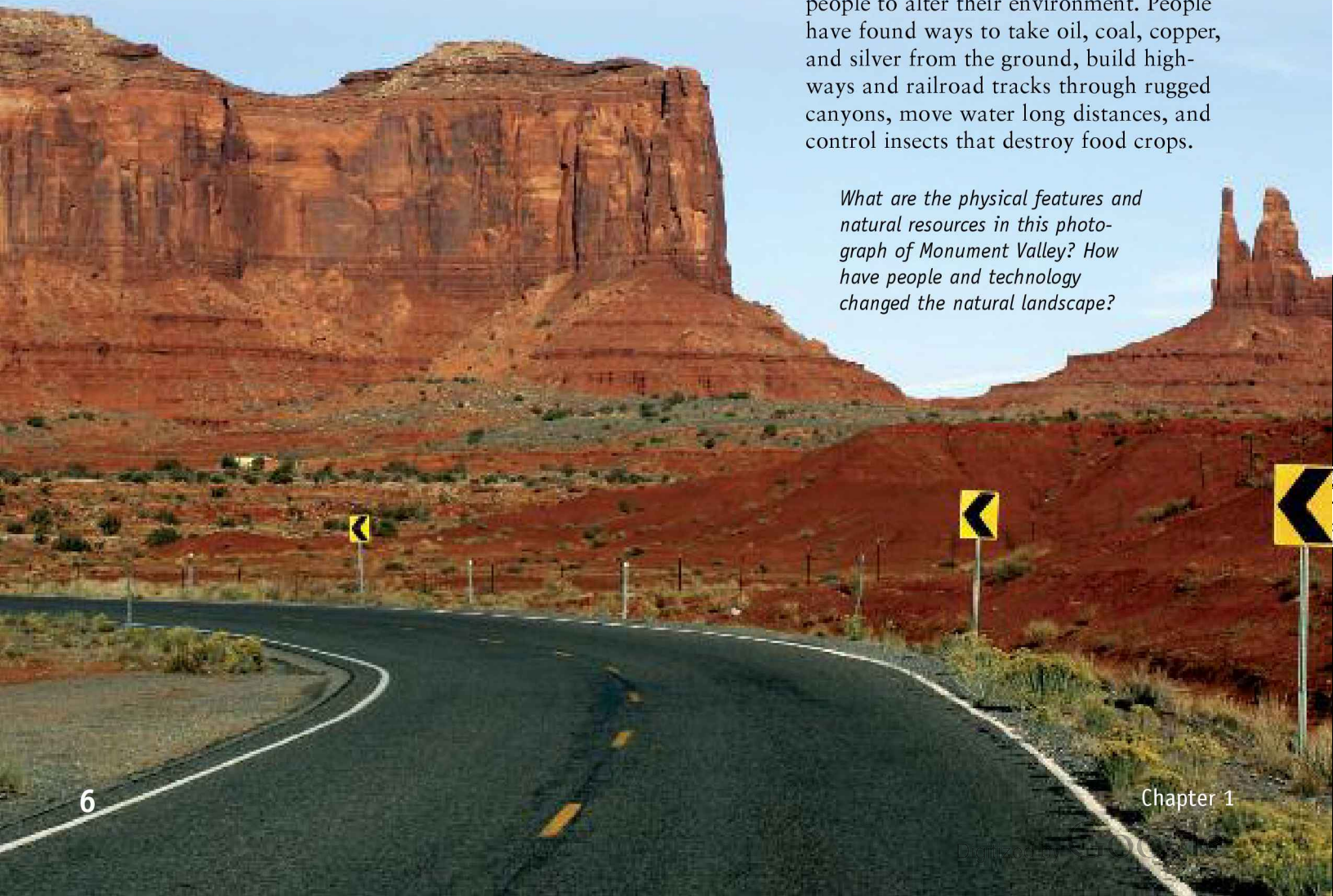
In other places in Utah, there were no high mountains with timber or grassy valleys where wild animals lived. The Paiutes who lived in barren desert regions irrigated crops of corn and beans and hunted only small desert animals such as gophers, rabbits, and prairie dogs. Life was hard for the desert dwellers.

People Use and Change the Land

Later, Utah's pioneers settled in valleys next to mountains. They built adobe and log homes with clay from the ground and trees from the mountains. Because there was not enough rain to water crops, the men dug irrigation ditches to bring water from mountain streams. Their cattle grazed on grasses in the foothills.

People still live where the pioneers settled. Farmers still irrigate crops and raise cattle. However, today's freeways, shopping malls, office buildings, churches, schools, and homes reflect how modern people use natural resources in different ways. Advanced technology has allowed people to alter their environment. People have found ways to take oil, coal, copper, and silver from the ground, build highways and railroad tracks through rugged canyons, move water long distances, and control insects that destroy food crops.

What are the physical features and natural resources in this photograph of Monument Valley? How have people and technology changed the natural landscape?

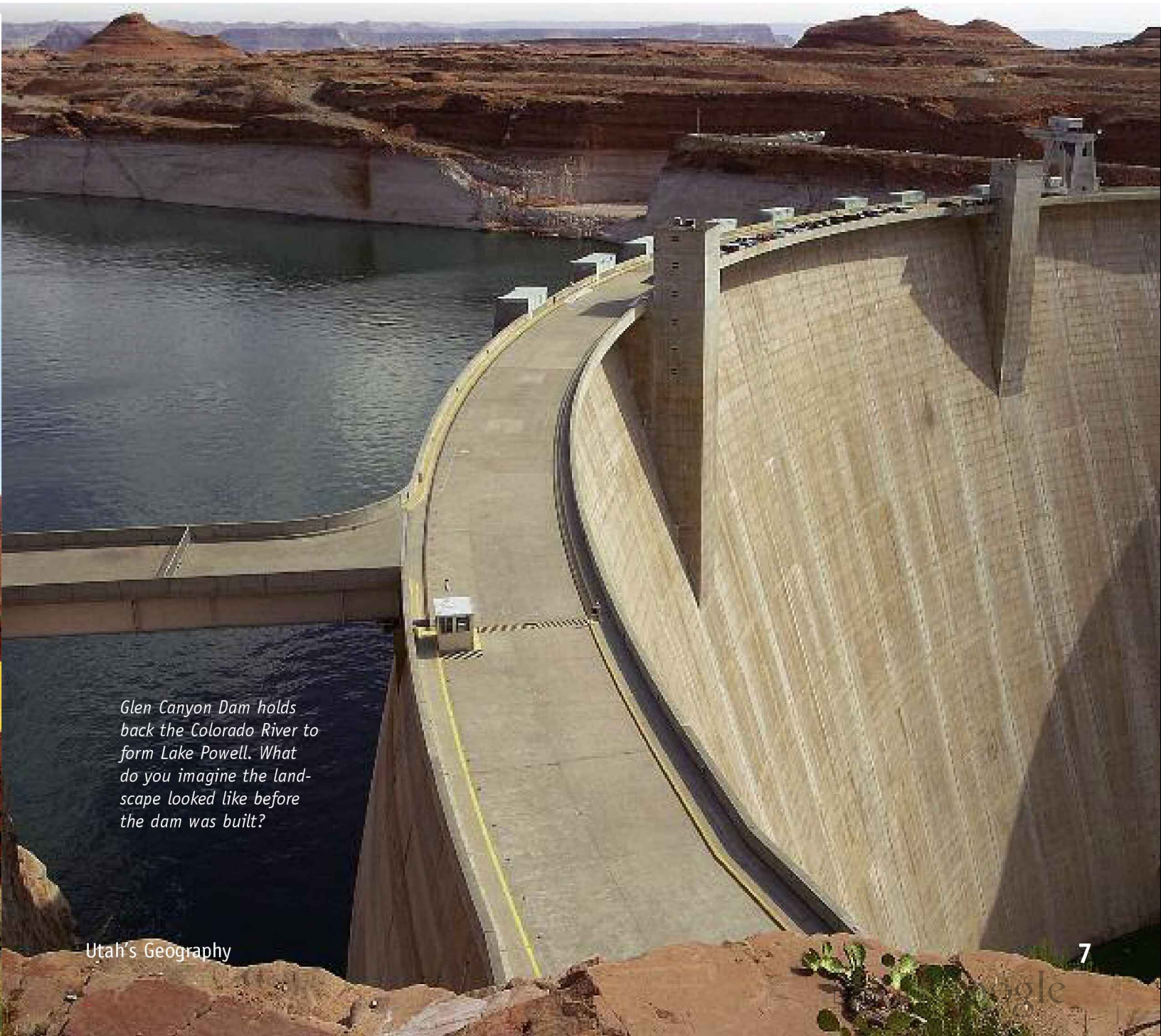


Dams, Electricity, and Flood Control

One of the modern ways people use and change the landscape is by building huge earthen or concrete dams across rivers. Generators inside the dams produce electricity for our electric lights, heat, and air-conditioning. Water backs up behind the dams and forms beautiful lakes that are used for boating, water-skiing, fishing, and lakeside picnics.

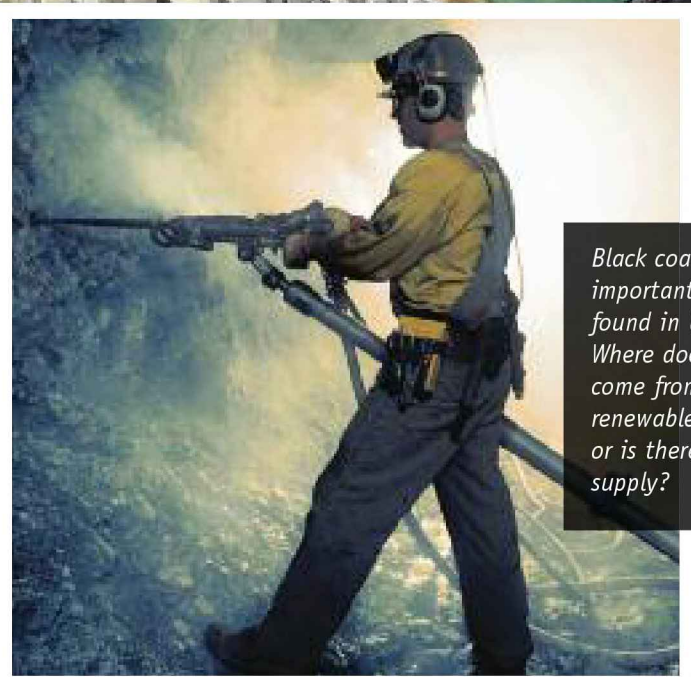
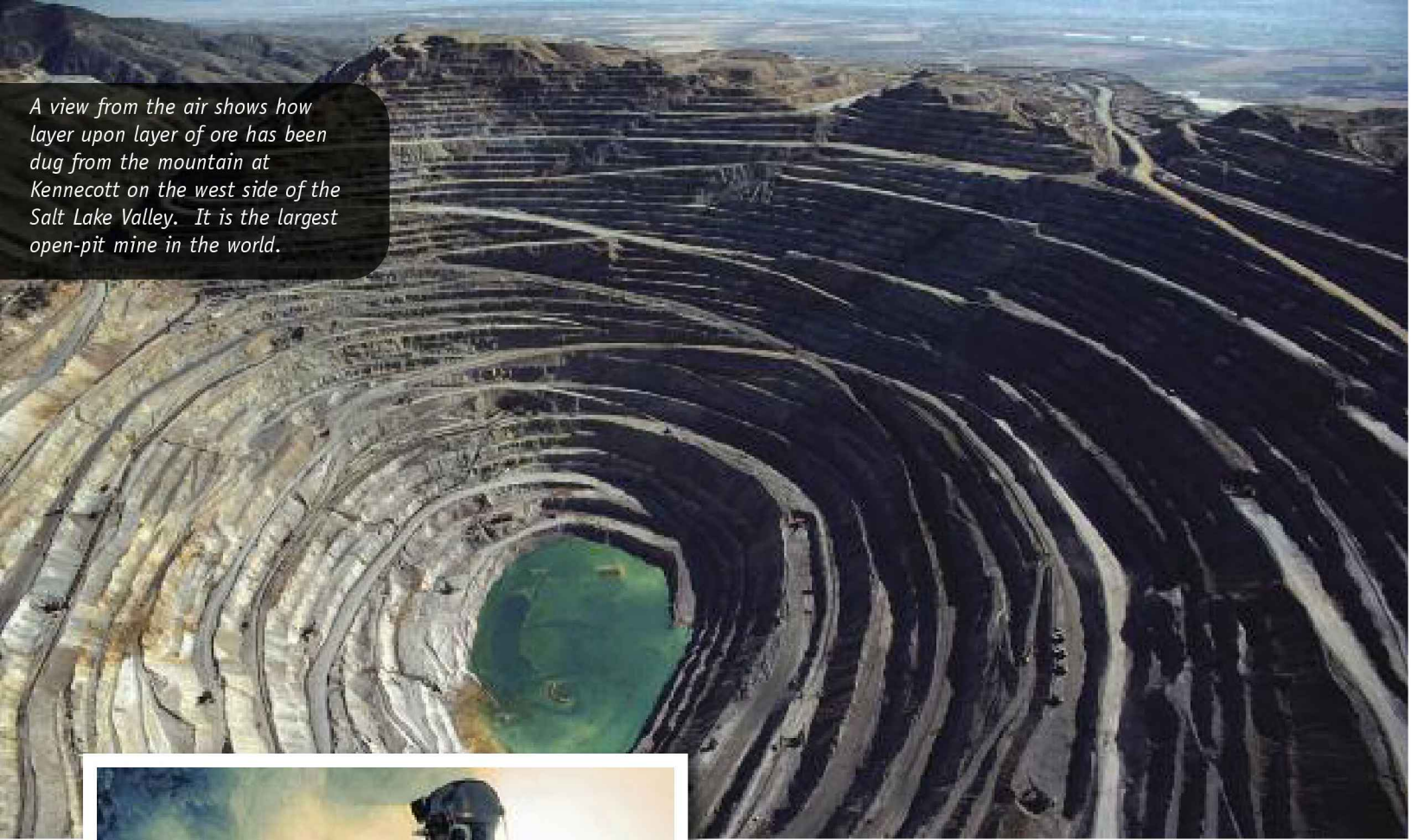
Dams back up the Colorado River to form Lake Powell and the Green River to form Flaming Gorge Reservoir. Reservoirs save water for when it is needed. These dams are valuable for flood control. They can release water at a steady flow. In the past, gushing rivers often flooded towns along the rivers.

How have people changed the land in and around your community? How have altered landscapes affected people of Utah?



Glen Canyon Dam holds back the Colorado River to form Lake Powell. What do you imagine the landscape looked like before the dam was built?

A view from the air shows how layer upon layer of ore has been dug from the mountain at Kennecott on the west side of the Salt Lake Valley. It is the largest open-pit mine in the world.



Black coal is an important resource found in Utah. Where does coal come from? Is it a renewable resource, or is there a limited supply?

Treasures From the Ground

A treasure is something of value. Utah's land holds unknown quantities of treasures in the form of minerals. The minerals are mined, refined, transported, sold, and made into many products people want.

Renewable and Non-Renewable Resources

Natural resources are important for everyone. Some resources are **renewable**. That means they keep coming back and can be used over and over again. The wind is a renewable resource. So is the sun. Are forests renewable? If you cut down a forest, new trees will grow back, although it will take a very long time.

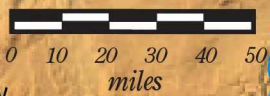
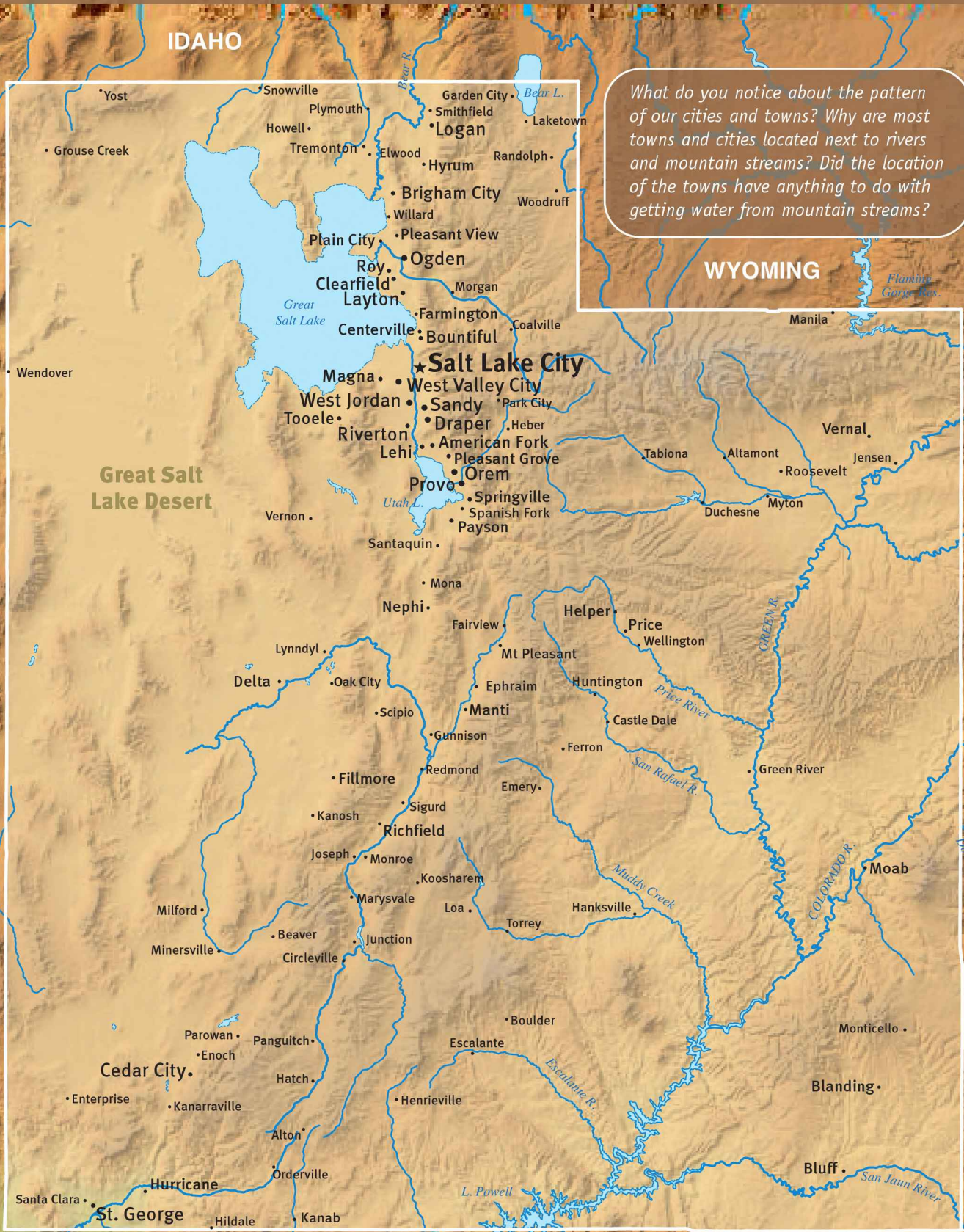
Other resources are non-renewable. That means that we will probably never have any more than we have now. Coal and oil are examples. Once they are gone from a site, people will have to find new sites or use a different energy source. You will read more about Utah's minerals in Chapter 2.

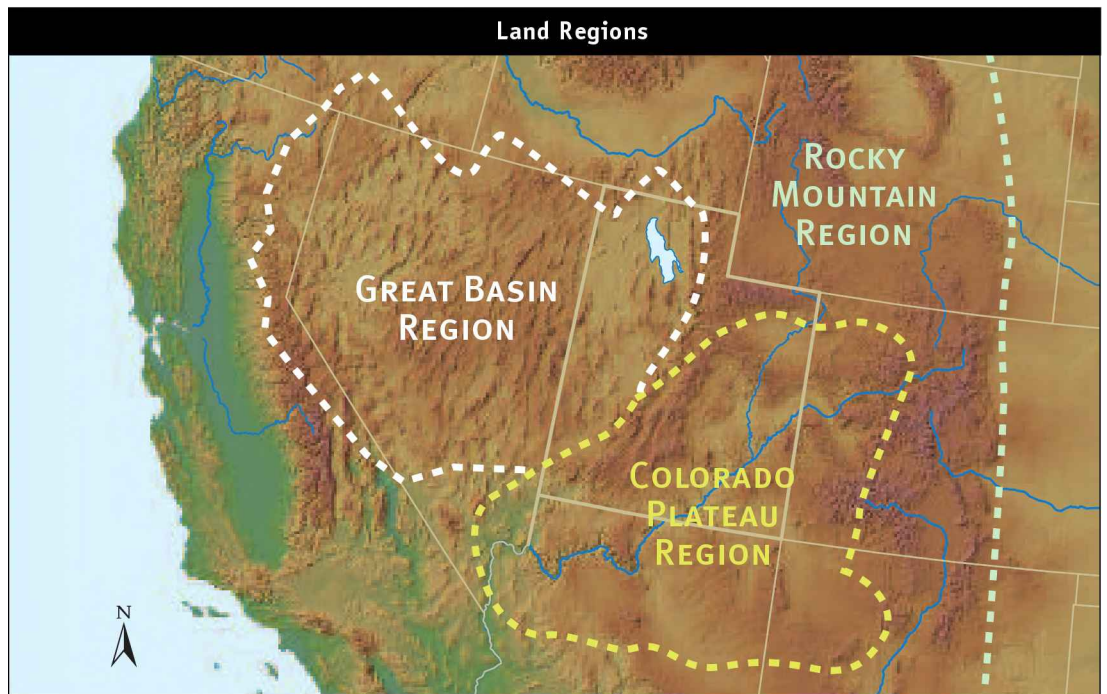
What do you think?

- Are soil and water renewable or non-renewable resources? What about gravel and building stones? Wild animals? Fresh air?
- How important are these resources?
- What factors are involved in keeping these resources available for our use now and in the future?

Utah's Political and Physical Features

What do you notice about the pattern of our cities and towns? Why are most towns and cities located next to rivers and mountain streams? Did the location of the towns have anything to do with getting water from mountain streams?





Utah's Land Regions

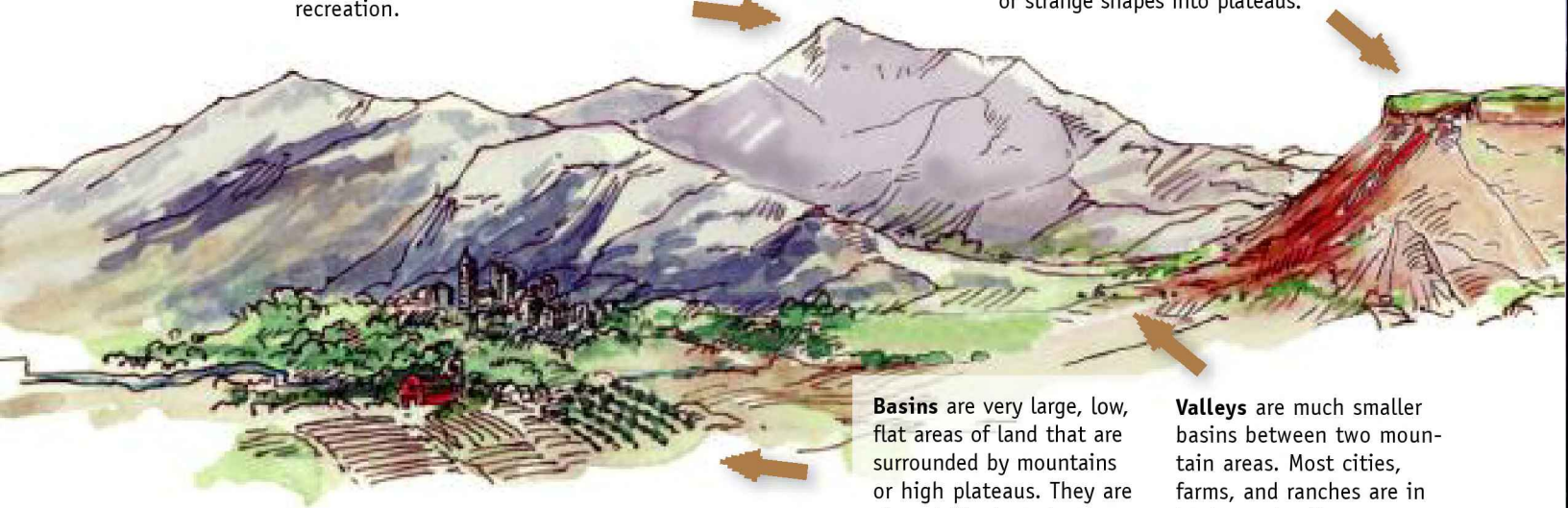
Geographers divide large land areas of the world into smaller parts called regions. A region can be large or small. You can live in many regions at the same time. There are political regions such as voting districts, counties, states, and countries. There are agricultural regions where crops are grown or cattle and sheep graze. There are mining regions.

In Utah, three major landform regions of the western United States meet. The major landforms of the regions are **basins** (wide bowl-shaped areas), **plateaus** (high, wide, flat areas), and mountains. Each region is made up of one main kind of landform but may also contain others. See page 25 for a map of Utah's rivers, mountain ranges, and plateaus.

A landform is a natural feature of the earth's surface.

Mountains are very high land formations with large bases and small peaks. A long line of mountains is a mountain range. They are very important for our water supply, timber, and recreation.

Plateaus are high, wide, flat areas that often end with steep cliffs. They look like tables or wide steps many miles across. Wind and water often cut deep canyons or strange shapes into plateaus.



Basins are very large, low, flat areas of land that are surrounded by mountains or high plateaus. They are shaped like huge bowls.

Valleys are much smaller basins between two mountain areas. Most cities, farms, and ranches are in basins and valleys.

The Rocky Mountain Region

This region contains the Wasatch and Uinta Mountain Ranges. They are part of the larger Rocky Mountains that run from Alaska to New Mexico.

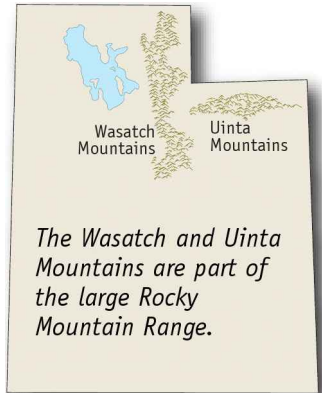
Most of the mountains are covered with forests that shelter wild animals and have hundreds of small lakes, streams, campgrounds, and hiking trails. People backpack in the remote areas of the Uintas. Kings Peak, the state's highest peak, at 13,528 feet, is part of the Uinta Mountains.



Snow in the Wasatch Mountains provides some of the best powder skiing and snowboarding in the world and makes this region a popular tourist destination. The tourists pay for hotel rooms, food, and recreation, which helps Utah's economy.

The mountains are the most important water source for cities and farms in the valleys below. Melted snow runs down in streams and is stored in reservoirs and lakes. Some mountain valleys are wide enough for small farming and recreational communities. Ranchers take advantage of the natural plant growth to raise cattle and sheep in the valleys.

There is still a rich supply of coal, copper, silver, gold, and other minerals in Utah's mountains. Mining provides jobs for Utah's people. Our minerals are refined here and sold across the world, helping our economy. Many mountain towns were once mining communities where men came to "strike it rich." After all of the minerals were taken from the ground, many of these towns were turned into ski resorts.



If you watch a weather report on television, you often hear the term "Wasatch Front." This term refers to the communities along the west side of the Wasatch Mountains. A newer term for towns such as Morgan, Coalville, Park City, and Heber City is the "Wasatch Back."





The Great Basin Region

This huge land region is part of America's western dry desert region. The Great Basin is like a large, flat bowl with many small mountain ranges in the bowl. It has no river outlet to the Pacific Ocean. In Utah, streams and rivers from the bordering mountain region run to lower parts of the valley floor and fill them with water, forming Utah Lake and the Great Salt Lake.

Most of Utah's largest cities and towns are in the basin. Why do people live in such a dry desert region? They live on the edge of the flat, fertile basin near the mountains. Outside the towns, farms cover much of the land. Irrigation ditches bring water for crops and animals. Industries in the basin provide jobs and products people need. You will read more about jobs and products in later chapters of this book.



Salt Lake City, Provo, and Ogden, the state's three largest cities, are on the edge of the Great Basin. What physical features do you see in these photographs?



Activity | My Kind of Town

Choose a town or city and learn more about it by writing a letter to the local Chamber of Commerce or researching sources on the Internet or in your town's library. What land features are in or around it? How do people in the town earn a living? How has the town changed in the last 10, 50, or 100 years? Think of an interesting way to present your town to the class.

Provo and Utah Lake.

