**Georgia’s Geography**

The state of Georgia is located in the **southeastern United States**. It is located on the **continent of North America,** and it is in the **Northern (latitude) and Western (longitude) Hemispheres**. The state of Georgia is divided into five geographic regions. In the north, there are three small mountainous regions, each with a differing topography. In the middle of the state is the hilly Piedmont area which is home to many of Georgia’s largest cities including Atlanta. Finally, the state is dominated by the Coastal Plain region, which takes up three-fifths of Georgia. The Coastal Plain, which is divided into an inner and outer section, was actually covered by water millions of years ago.

**The Blue Ridge Region**

The Blue Ridge region is located in the **northeastern portion of the state**. The region is home to Georgia’s largest mountains, including **Brasstown Bald** which is the highest peak in the state and the southernmost point of the Appalachian Trail. Important cities in the region include Dahlonega, the site of **America’s first Gold Rush**. In the past, the primary industry of the region was mining. Today, due to the region’s scenic beauty, it is tourism. The Blue Ridge receives the most precipitation in the state, with over 80 inches of rain annually and is the **starting point of most of Georgia’s rivers**.

**The Valley and Ridge Region**

The Valley and Ridge region is characterized by **low open valleys and narrow ridges**. The area was traditionally a **mining region, with the valleys being used for agriculture**. The region has several cities and towns, including Cartersville and Calhoun. However, **Dalton** is probably the Valley and Ridge’s most important city due to its **textile and carpet industry**. Historically, this region was a major battle ground during the Civil War and is a major transportation route between Georgia and Tennessee.

**The Appalachian Plateau**

The Appalachian Plateau is located in the **northwestern corner of the state** and is **Georgia’s smallest region**. The region is sometimes called the “TAG” region, as the states of Alabama, Tennessee, and Georgia all connect at one point. The **region has many scenic areas** and is the location of Cloudland State Park. Lookout Mountain, the site of a major Civil War battle, is located in the region, though it is actually in the state of Tennessee. As with the other mountain regions of Georgia, mining was an important economic activity in the region. In the case of the Appalachian Plateau, **coal was the most important product**. However, unlike the other two northern regions, **due to poor soil, agriculture in the Appalachian Plateau was limited.**

**The Piedmont Region**

The Piedmont region is in the **middle of the state and is the most populous** of the five regions. With over 4.5 million people, **almost one-half of Georgia’s population lives in the region**. Many of Georgia’s most important cities are located in the region including Athens, Atlanta, Augusta, and Macon. **Due to these urban centers, manufacturing is important in the region, though agriculture, primarily in the form of poultry, is also a significant business.** In addition, due to the large amount of granite found in the region, **mining has been important** (**Stone Mountain** may be the most obvious example of the large amount of granite that can be found in the region, but the town of Elberton is known as the “Granite Capital of the World).

**The Coastal Plain Region**

The **largest region in Georgia is the Coastal Plain. Making up three-fifths of the state**, this region is actually divided into two areas: the Inner and the Outer Coastal Plain. **The Inner Coastal Plain is the agricultural heartland of the state.** In this region **peaches, peanuts, cotton and the famous Vidalia onions are important crops**. The Outer Coastal Plain is the home of Georgia’s oldest city, Savannah, which was founded in 1733. Due to **the abundance of pine trees in the region, naval stores were an important industry in the state**. Today, the trees are used in pulp and paper production; however Baxley, Georgia is the only naval stores producer in the nation today. **With its location on the Atlantic Ocean, tourism, shipping, and seafood are all important industries in the region**.

**The Fall Line**

**The fall line is a natural boundary that separates the Piedmont and the Coastal Plain regions**. Due to the **drop-off of the hilly Piedmont region into the flat Coastal Plain**, the waterfalls found on the fall line caused many rivers in the area to be difficult to navigate. However, **the waterfalls did offer sources of water power and many mills** were located on the fall line. In addition, many of Georgia’s most important cities such as **Columbus, Macon, and Augusta** were located on the fall line due to their location as the last navigable upstream points in the state.

**The Okefenokee Swamp**

The Okefenokee Swamp covers 700 square miles and **is the largest freshwater swamp in North America.** Located in southeastern Georgia, Native Americans lived in the swamp dating back to the Archaic period. The Choctaw Indians gave the swamp its name which means **“land of the trembling earth”.** From 1910 until 1937, before Franklin Roosevelt established 80% of the Okefenokee as a wildlife refuge, **the swamp was a major source of timber**. Now, protected by the federal government, **over hundreds of animal species live in the area, the most well-known being the American alligator.**

**The Appalachian Mountains**

**The southernmost point of the Appalachian Mountains is located in Georgia**. Georgia’s highest peaks are in the Appalachian Mountain ranges and they can be found in the three mountain regions. In the southern states, **these mountains are often called the Blue Ridge due to the blue haze that appears around their peaks**. Long ago, the Appalachians were some of the tallest mountains in the world, though millions of years of erosion have weathered them tremendously. **Today, the highest peak in Georgia is Brasstown Bald, which has an elevation of over 4700 feet above sea level**. In comparison, the highest peak in the continental United States is Mt. Whitney which is almost 14,500 feet.

**The Chattahoochee River**

The Chattahoochee River begins it journey to the Gulf of Mexico in the Blue Ridge Region of the state and **forms part of the border between Alabama and Georgia**. Native Americans long used the river as a food and water source, as did Georgia’s European settlers. Due to the Fall Line, the Chattahoochee becomes difficult to navigate between the Piedmont and Coastal Plain regions. **Today, the Chattahoochee is used primarily as a water source for the millions of Georgians living in the Piedmont area, though the river is also used for industry and recreation as well**.

**The Savannah River**

**The Savannah River forms the border between Georgia and South Carolina**. One of Georgia’s longest waterways, the Savannah River begins in Hart County, forms Lake Hartwell, and then flows to the Atlantic Ocean. **The river has been a source of water, food, and transportation for thousands of years.** Paleo Indians lived around the river and Spanish explorer Hernando De Soto was the first European to cross it. James Oglethorpe chose a site 18 miles upriver to create Georgia’s first city, Savannah. Today, **the river is navigable for over 200 miles between the city of Savannah and Augusta.** **In addition to shipping, the river is used as a major source of drinking water for Savannah and Augusta, to cool two nuclear power plants in South Carolina, and to generate hydroelectric power.**

**The Barrier Islands**

**The Barrier Islands, also known as the Sea Islands or Golden Isles, are a chain of sandy islands off the coastline of Georgia.** **These islands protect the mainland from wind and water erosion**. There are 14 Barrier Islands off Georgia’s coast including Tybee, St. Simons, Jekyll, and Cumberland. Some of the islands, such as Cumberland, **are wild life refuges and are national or state parks**. Others, like St. Simons, have been developed and three (Little Cumberland, Little St. Simons, and St. Catherine’s) are still privately owned. People have lived on these islands for thousands of years. Indians lived on them and in the 1500s the Spanish set up missions there. During the Colonial and Antebellum periods, plantations were set up on the island to grow products such as rice and indigo. **Today, the islands are mainly tourist and recreation destinations though the fishing and paper industries are still important economic enterprises.**

**Georgia’s Climate**

**Georgia has a humid subtropical climate with hot summers and mild winters, though the mountainous areas tend to be cooler than that of the rest of the state**. Georgia usually has a large amount of precipitation throughout the year and ranges from 45 to 75 inches per year depending on the area, but receives very little snow fall. Georgia is prone to tornadoes and often feels the effects of hurricanes, though the state has not been hit directly since 1898. **Georgia’s warm, wet, climate has made it an ideal location from agriculture.** From its beginning, Georgia was established for growing crops, and James Oglethorpe and the rest of the trustees hoped its climate would allow for the cultivation of rice, indigo, wine and silk. Though wine and silk proved to be unsuccessful, rice and indigo grew well in Georgia. Once slavery was allowed in the colony, Georgia developed the plantation based agriculture of the rest of the South. Slavery became more entrenched when Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin in 1793, which in turn, caused the demand for cotton production to increase. After the Civil War, Georgia remained predominately an agricultural state until the 20th century. During this time period most of Georgia’s population was involved in agriculture, primarily working as sharecroppers or tenant farmers. **Today, while most Georgians are not involved in agriculture, it is still Georgia’s number one industry. In addition, Georgia’s relatively mild climate has brought many people and businesses to the state, making it the 9th most populous in the nation.**