
Most departments of geology offer a course in the systematic survey of the landforms of the United States, though it is sometimes called physiography and sometimes regional geomorphology. This course is commonly popular, not only with geology students, but with geographers, ecologists, and students of American history. But everywhere the problem is the same: whether to use the two encyclopedic Fenneman volumes or to be satisfied with the superficial approach of the Atwood book. Now there is an answer to this problem—the book by Thornbury (a professor at Indiana University and author of a widely used book on geomorphic principles).

The outstanding characteristic of this book is its completeness. Each of the standard geomorphic provinces, as defined by Fenneman, occupies a chapter. Also included are chapters on the Continental Margins (meaning essentially the continental shelves) and on the two newest states, Alaska and Hawaii. Each chapter begins with a very brief statement of the general characteristics and boundaries of the province, followed by a survey of the geology and structure of the area. The rest of the chapter discusses the nature and origin of the geomorphic features. Here again, Thornbury has made a valiant and remarkably successful attempt to be complete. Almost every significant geomorphic controversy is presented, with references to the positions of the major protagonists, and often with quotations from their critical publications. (References to all this literature, as well as to significant sources, are listed at the end of every chapter.) However, because all this material is being presented in one book (one large book: 10 1/2 x 7 1/4 x 1 3/4 inches), each controversy has to be handled in a very abbreviated form. As a result, some of the discussions may not be adequately understood by those unacquainted with the subject. Material in discussions and in general summaries is often stated almost in outline form or is even listed without discussion; scientific terms are sometimes used without adequate explanation, or with explanation only coming later (e.g. Fall Line is first used on p. 74 and is not explained until p. 92). However, because these discussions are so condensed, Thornbury manages to compress a survey of every major province in the United States together with summaries of practically every major geomorphic controversy into one book.

Illustrations are adequate in number and outstanding in quality. All are clear and well chosen; especially noteworthy are some air photos by John S. Shelton. A number are maps, including a few physiographic maps, and several show sections of standard topographic maps.

Because of its complete coverage, and despite its condensed abbreviated discussions and its high price, this book will provide a good answer to the need for an adequate textbook on the physiography of the United States and will also serve as an outstanding source book for those concerned with geomorphic problems.

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