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Colorado

Colorado, divided about in half by the Rocky Mountains, is considered one of the western states. It is surrounded by Wyoming and Nebraska to the north; Nebraska and Kansas to the east; the Oklahoma Panhandle and New Mexico to the south; and Utah to the west. The southwest corner of Colorado touches the northeast corner of Arizona.

Early History

The most famous of the ancient people who lived in Colorado are the Anasazi, also referred to as Ancient Puebloans. The Mesa Verde National Park is a UNESCO World Heritage Site because it preserves the cliff dwellings of these people who lived in the area between 600 and 1300 CE. The Anasazi people left the area sometime between 1200 and 1300 CE and archaeologists can only speculate about why they disappeared.

Another group of Native Americans, the Utes, lived in western Colorado around the time of the Anasazi but remained there until the arrival of Europeans. In general, subgroups of the Utes lived throughout the western U.S. including California, Nevada, Utah, Oregon, and Arizona. Their lifestyles differed depending on where they lived, whether in forests or in the desert. Pawnees occupied the northeast corner of Colorado while the Comanche people made their home in the southeast corner of present-day Colorado.

Colorado was first explored by Europeans who were seeking the fabled Seven Cities of Cibola, cities reportedly filled with silver and gold. Instead the explorers met Native Americans, the Utes and Comanches. One of the first to explore Colorado was Coronado, a Spaniard, and his armored troops who arrived in 1540.

Well over a century later, in 1682, French explorer La Salle came south from Canada on the Mississippi River. He claimed the land between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains for France. This land claim included the eastern two-thirds of present-day Colorado. However, in 1706 southern Colorado became part of the Spanish New Mexico territory after Juan de Uribarri traveled north to explore the area. While the British were not involved in Colorado, they also influenced its fate.

Between 1754 and 1763, the British fought an alliance of French troops and Native American warriors in the French and Indian War which occurred east of the

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Mississippi River. After the war, France ceded its lands west of the Mississippi River, including eastern Colorado, to Spain. In 1800, France regained this territory only to sell it the United States in 1803 as the Louisiana Purchase.

Towards Statehood

After the Louisiana Purchase, Lewis and Clark explored the northern areas of the new land. While in 1806 Zebulon Pike explored eastern Colorado. Pikes Peak, the most climbed mountain in Colorado even today, was named for him. These early days of Colorado attracted traders and trappers who were seeking furs for export. In the 1820s, wagon trains began crossing through southeastern Colorado on the Santa Fe Trail, a route to California that avoided crossing the Rocky Mountains by going south of them. It wasn't until the mid-1800s that the first white settlement in Colorado in the San Luis Valley was established by families from Mexico.

The population of Colorado increased dramatically when gold was discovered in Central City in 1858. Miners from the eastern U.S. rallied to the phrase, "Pike's Peak or Bust!" The population of the area reached the point that Congress created the Colorado Territory in 1861 from the intersection of four other existing territories: Nebraska, Kansas, New Mexico, and Utah Territories. However, the road to statehood was not an easy one.

The pressures between white settlers and Native Americans escalated as more settlers came to Colorado. Other Native American groups, including Arapaho, Cheyenne and Kiowa people, were also on the move, looking for new land as they were being displaced from eastern territories. In 1864 these pressures resulted in the Sand Creek Massacre where hundreds of Native American women, children and elderly were killed by Colonel John Chivington, his cavalry and volunteers as a means to drive Native Americans from Colorado. In 1867, Cheyenne and Arapaho leaders signed the Treaty of Medicine Lodge and moved to a reservation in Oklahoma.

In 1870, the population of Colorado reached 40,000. In previous years leaders had attempted to create a state constitution but local citizens rejected the documents. Finally a state constitution acceptable to the electorate passed in 1876. After the state constitution was adopted, President Grant made Colorado a state.

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Circle True or False after analyzing each of the following statements.

1. True False The Mesa Verde National Park in Colorado is a UNESCO World Heritage Site because it preserves the cliff dwellings of the Arapaho people who lived in the area between 600 and 1300 CE.
2. True False In general, Native Americans known as Utes lived throughout the western U.S. including Colorado, California, Nevada, Utah, Oregon, and Arizona.
3. True False The Seven Cities of Cibola represented the seven groups of Native Americans who once lived in Colorado.
4. True False French explorer La Salle came south from Canada on the Mississippi River. He claimed the land between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains for France.
5. True False After the French and Indian War, France ceded its lands west of the Mississippi River, including eastern Colorado, to Spain.
6. True False All of present-day Colorado became U.S. land as a result of the Louisiana Purchase.
7. True False In the 1820s, wagon trains began crossing through southeastern Colorado on the Santa Fe Trail, a route to California that avoided crossing the Rocky Mountains.
8. True False The phrase, "Pike's Peak or Bust!" was used by farmers in the wagon trains heading for Colorado.
9. True False In the Sand Creek Massacre, hundreds of Native American women, children and elderly were killed by Colonel John Chivington, his cavalry and volunteers as a means to drive Native Americans from Colorado.
10. True False There were several failed attempts at adopting a state constitution before voters accepted a state constitution so Colorado could apply for statehood.

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Answers

1. False
2. True
3. False
4. True
5. True
6. False
7. True
8. False
9. True
10. True