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Oregon

Oregon is located in the northwest corner of the United States, and its western edge borders on the Pacific Ocean. Oregon is surrounded by four other states: Washington to the north; Idaho to the east; and California and Nevada to the south. The Columbia River forms much of the boundary between Washington and Oregon.

Early History

At the time that European explorers were reaching the Pacific shore of North America, over a dozen distinct Native American groups occupied small stretches of seacoast in present-day Oregon. About another dozen were scattered across the remainder of the state. The best known residents were the Northern Paiute and the Shoshone peoples who occupied the southeastern quadrant of Oregon. Historians estimate that there could have been as many as fifty tribes and twenty languages in Oregon around 1700. It is difficult for historians to document these groups because about 90% of Native Americans of the area died as a result of eventual exposure to European diseases like smallpox and measles.

The Spanish explorers who visited the American Southwest introduced horses to the area. As horses escaped captivity, they created migrating herds which wandered as far north as Oregon. Native American groups that migrated in the grassy plains of Oregon learned to utilize horses and became excellent horsemen. Tribes like the Nez Perce dramatically changed their way of life with the advent of horses.

In the 1700s, the fur trade changed the area of the present-day northern United States. French and British fur trappers vied for land and beaver pelts in the central United States while Chinese and Russian traders sought sea otter pelts in Oregon. When the sea otter population declined as a result of overhunting, traders turned to mink and beaver.

In 1803 the size of the United States territory doubled with the Louisiana Purchase. President Thomas Jefferson commissioned the Lewis and Clark expedition to explore the northern area of the new land and find a water route to the Pacific Ocean. In December 1805, the expedition built Fort Clatsop at the mouth of the Columbia River along the Pacific Coast of Oregon. Based on the glowing reports of

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fertile soil and warm climate returned by the expedition and other explorers, many farmers in the eastern U.S. were eager to move to Oregon. Americans also believed in Manifest Destiny, the concept that the United States was ordained to stretch "from sea to shining sea."

Towards Statehood

By the 1840s wagon trains of settlers were making the long and difficult six-month cross-country trip in search of a better life in Oregon. Settlers traveled along the Oregon Trail, a route known by wagon train leaders and their scouts that followed rivers and crossed the plains and mountains. The ruts in the earth made by the wagons along the Oregon Trail remained visible for 100 years thereafter.

In 1845 the town of Portland, Oregon was founded. Up until that time settlements were clustered around a trading post for furs. By the mid-1840s though the fur business was dying out as the supply of animals dwindled and European fashions changed. The British, with ties to near-by British Columbia, Canada, maintained a presence in Oregon. The U.S. Congress, fueled by Manifest Destiny, wished to drive the British out of Oregon Country.

Many in Congress wanted the northern border to be at latitude 54 degrees 40 minutes, north into Canada. President James Polk's campaign slogan was, "Fifty-four forty or fight!" This meant that he was willing to wage war with Great Britain once again to obtain this territory. However, Great Britain and the United States negotiated an agreement that set the northern boundary at the 49th parallel in 1846. Congress then officially created the Oregon Territory in 1848.

The year 1848 also marked the beginning of the California Gold Rush. Gold had been found in California and in 1849 thousands of eager gold seekers flocked to California in search of golden riches. It's reported that two-thirds of the white men in Oregon moved to California to pan for gold. As more fortune-seekers migrated to California, they continued to use the Oregon Trail. Towns in southern Oregon became supply centers for the wagon trains heading to California.

The Oregon Territory continued to grow and prosper. Even though it was far removed from other states, it was influenced by the major political issue of the day, slavery. People in the Oregon Territory, by and large, were opposed to slavery. In

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order to prevent slavery from being an issue, Oregon applied for statehood. Oregon was admitted as a Free State in 1859, shortly before the Civil War.

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

1. True False The Columbia River forms much of the boundary between Washington and Oregon.
2. True False Historians estimate that there could have been as many as fifty Native American tribes and twenty languages in Oregon around 1700.
3. True False The French explorers who visited the Pacific Northwest introduced horses to the area. Native American groups that migrated in the grassy plains of Oregon learned to utilize horses and became excellent horsemen.
4. True False In the 1700s Chinese and Russian traders sought sea otter pelts in Oregon.
5. True False After Oregon became part of the United States through the Louisiana Purchase, it fulfilled American desire for Manifest Destiny.
6. True False President James Polk's campaign slogan was, "Fifty-four forty or fight!" This meant he wanted fifty-four 40-acre homesteads developed in the American West each day.
7. True False Great Britain and the United States fought the War of 1812 over the placement of the border between the U.S. and Canada.
8. True False The California Gold Rush impacted the towns in Oregon because many fortune seekers from the eastern U.S. traveled to California on the Oregon Trail.
9. True False The people in Oregon were far removed from the plantations of the American South and did not want slavery to exist in Oregon.
10. True False Oregon was admitted as a Free State shortly before the Civil War.

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Answers

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