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South Dakota

South Dakota is located in the north central part of the Great Plains region of the United States which lies just about in the center of the country. The Great Plains are a geographic feature of the North American continent and extend from Mexico well into Canada. South Dakota is flanked by its sister state North Dakota to the north; Minnesota and Iowa to the east; Nebraska to the south; and Montana and Wyoming to the west.

Early History

Historians estimate that sometime between 1300 CE and 1500 CE a Native American people known as the Arikara lived in present-day north central South Dakota near the junction of the Grand and Missouri Rivers. Around the same time, members of the Sioux Nation traveled to eastern South Dakota from Minnesota for hunting and fishing. As the Sioux people divided into groups, each major group settled in a different part of South Dakota. The Lakota Sioux settled in the northwest corner of South Dakota near Montana; the Dakota group settled in the southeast corner; while the Nakota Sioux remained in the eastern portion of South Dakota.

The Native Americans in South Dakota did not have much contact with Europeans until the 1700s. Some trappers and traders in search of furs entered South Dakota in the late 1600s but the first known exploration didn't occur until 1743. The La Vérendrye brothers traveled from Canada and explored the western half of South Dakota. Even without direct contact with Europeans, the Arikara nation succumbed to European diseases like smallpox that they contracted second-hand from Native Americans who had been in contact with Europeans. Thousands of Arikara people died from the new diseases.

The land in South Dakota was so remote from established European settlements that the first known European building wasn't constructed until 1793, well after the Revolutionary War. Most of South Dakota was controlled by Spain at that time, but in 1800 Spain returned these North American lands to France. In 1803, most of the land in present-day South Dakota became part of the United States under the Louisiana Purchase. In the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, President Thomas Jefferson nearly doubled the size of the United States by buying land west

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of the Mississippi River that was owned by France. Jefferson sent explorers Lewis and Clark to map the northern section of the new territory. Their expedition explored parts of South Dakota before moving further westward.

Meanwhile representatives from four countries (America, France, Spain and England) were interested in establishing a fur trade in South Dakota. French trader Pierre Chouteau Jr. established a major trading post called Fort Pierre and Fort Pierre is still a town today. In the 1830s, Chouteau was the first person to employ steamboats to speed up trade between South Dakota and St. Louis, Missouri.

Towards Statehood

As settlers came to South Dakota, the United States government wanted to move the Native Americans to reservations to avoid conflicts. In 1851 several tribes, including the Lakotas, signed a treaty not to attack settlers traveling through the territory in wagon trains. In 1855 the government established Fort Randall near the Nebraska border and housed 500 soldiers there to maintain the peace.

In 1861 the federal government created the Dakota Territory, a vast expanse of land that extended from the western edge of Minnesota almost to the western border of present-day Montana and Wyoming. Meanwhile, justified fears of Indian attacks kept settlers from moving to South Dakota. In the 1870s, railroads opened up transportation into South Dakota.

In 1874 General George Custer and his troops found gold in the Black Hills of South Dakota which prompted a gold rush the following year. However, the gold was found on lands that the government said belonged to the Lakota Sioux people under a treaty signed in 1868. Finally in 1876 Lakota leaders Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse warred against Custer and his U.S. soldiers. The Lakotas defeated them at the Battle of the Little Bighorn but eventually the federal government removed the Indians from their lands.

The Homestead Act of 1862 promised 160 acres of land to settlers who moved westward, including into South Dakota. By 1889, nearly 350,000 people lived in South Dakota. In 1889 Congress created North Dakota as the thirty-ninth state and South Dakota, with its present boundaries, as the fortieth state. Statehood did not end the conflicts with Native Americans. In 1890 the U.S. government decided to arrest the great Chief Sitting Bull, but instead he was killed.

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This action eventually resulted in the massacre of about 350 Lakota people at Wounded Knee, South Dakota.

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

1. True False North Dakota, South Dakota and Nebraska are all states in the Great Plains section of the United States.
2. True False Around 1500 CE the Native American groups known as Arikara and Sioux were living in South Dakota.
3. True False The Lakotas, Dakotas and Takotas were the three major divisions of the Arikara.
4. True False Even without direct contact with Europeans the Arikara nation succumbed to European diseases like smallpox that they contracted second-hand from other Native Americans.
5. True False In 1803 most of the land in present-day South Dakota became part of the United States under the Louisiana Purchase which was made by President George Washington.
6. True False Explorers Lewis and Clark devoted their entire expedition to mapping the lands in South Dakota.
7. True False In the 1800s steamboats and railroads helped to bring goods and settlers to South Dakota.
8. True False The Battle of the Little Bighorn was fought between Lakota leaders Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse and their warriors and General George Custer and his soldiers.
9. True False The Homeowners Act of 1862 promised 160 acres of land to settlers who moved westward, including into South Dakota.
10. True False Chief Sitting Bull was killed at the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

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Answers

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