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## **West Virginia**

West Virginia has one of the most unusual shapes in the United States due to the topography of the land. West Virginia has two straight-line borders with Pennsylvania to the north and a straight-line border with the western edge of Maryland. All of West Virginia's other borders are determined by land features like meandering rivers, mountains and valleys. The Potomac River forms the remainder of the border with Maryland while the Ohio River runs between West Virginia and Ohio. Kentucky is located at the southwestern edge of West Virginia.

The Allegheny Mountains, part of the extensive Appalachian Mountains that extend from Maine to Georgia, separate West Virginia from Virginia. It is the separation of Virginia from its original western section by these mountains that eventually resulted in West Virginia becoming a new state.

### **Early History**

The area of West Virginia was settled first by early cultures and then by many Native American tribes. Early people that historians call Mound Builders lived in West Virginia around 1,000 BCE. The Mound Builders living in West Virginia are known as Adena and they lasted until about 500 BCE. Mound Builders had a distinct culture, building small towns and engaging in farming. They also built earthen mounds in which they buried their dead. Grave Creek Mound, a National Historic Landmark located in West Virginia, is 69 feet high and 295 feet wide at the base. The mound is cone-shaped.

After the Adena disappeared, around 1,000 CE the people of the Fort Ancient culture began moving into West Virginia from the west, as far away as present-day Missouri. These people constructed organized towns with a central plaza. The Fort Ancient people cultivated fields of corn, beans and squash as well hunted wild game for food. Archaeologists have found the remains of a Fort Ancient village that may have housed 500 people at Buffalo Site on the Kanawha River.

Around 1600 CE, numerous Native American tribes occupied West Virginia. Shawnees, Delawares, and Hurons located along the Ohio River at the western edge of the state and maintained a lifestyle that depended on hunting rather than farming. Meanwhile Native American tribes centered in present-day New York State created an alliance called the Iroquois Confederacy. The member tribes of the

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alliance drove the tribes out of the Ohio valley, including remnants of the Fort Ancient people, and took over central West Virginia. However, the Moneton, Mingo and Cherokee tribes retained control over southern West Virginia.

Hundred of miles away along the Atlantic Coast of present-day Virginia, European settlers established Jamestown in 1607. The early colonists had enough work to do to establish settlements along the coast and did not venture as far west as West Virginia until 1671. In that year, Thomas Batts and Robert Fallam claimed the Ohio River valley for England, around the same time that France was also claiming the area. Both countries wanted control over the profits from the lucrative fur trade that was available in this wilderness territory.

However, the Appalachian Mountains blocked easy travel into West Virginia. Alexander Spotswood, the governor of Virginia, crossed the mountains in 1716 and visited the Shenandoah Valley in the eastern panhandle of today's West Virginia. German, Scottish and Irish immigrants settled into farming in the fertile Shenandoah Valley. There were about 5,000 inhabitants in the valley by 1750.

The rival claims for control of the fur trade finally resulted in the French and Indian War which lasted from 1754 until 1763. During this war, the British fought an alliance of French troops and Native American warriors. Eventually Great Britain won the war and gained control of valuable lands west of the Appalachians. After the Iroquois sold their land in West Virginia to Great Britain under the Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1768 and the Cherokees gave up their territory, settlers moved into West Virginia. In 1774 the Shawnee and Mingo tribes relinquished their land after being defeated in the Battle of Point Pleasant.

### **Towards Statehood**

At the time of the Revolutionary War, the land of West Virginia was part of the Virginia colony. However, culturally the two areas were vastly different. Eastern Virginia was home to large plantations owned by genteel individuals and worked by slaves. Across the mountains, immigrants lived in cabins and worked their farms themselves. West Virginians also needed to defend themselves against Indian attacks and the Virginia colony would not send militia there. In 1775, West Virginians asked the Continental Congress, the first government of the United States, to create Westsylvania as a new colony. The request was denied.

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Westsylvania would have included western Virginia and a portion of Pennsylvania. Virginia became a state in 1788, including the western portion.

West Virginia remained a part of Virginia until the Civil War began in 1861. Virginia joined with the Confederacy and seceded from the United States. However, the majority citizens in western Virginia did not agree with defending slavery and the plantation way of life. Delegates attended the Wheeling Convention and voted to create their own state. After writing a state constitution, Congress admitted West Virginia as a state in 1863.

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

1. True False The Allegheny Mountains and the Ohio River separate West Virginia from Ohio.
2. True False West Virginia was never a separate colony or U.S. territory before it became a state.
3. True False Unlike the Shawnee and Delaware who migrated into West Virginia, the Mound Builder and Fort Ancient cultures relied on farming for food.
4. True False Evidence of the Mound Builder culture in West Virginia can be visited by tourists today.
5. True False The Iroquois Confederacy was active in the French and Indian War and participated in the Confederate States of American during the Civil War.
6. True False The British explored the area west of the Appalachian Mountains decades after the Jamestown settlement because travel over the mountains was so difficult.
7. True False While much of the Virginia colony was dominated by large rich plantations worked by African slaves, settlers on the west side of the Appalachian Mountains struggled to make a primitive living.
8. True False Westsylvania is the name given to the proposed capital city of Virginia because it was close to Pennsylvania.
9. True False The U.S. Congress created the states of West Virginia and Virginia at the same time by splitting the original colony of Virginia.
10. True False During the Civil War, West Virginia joined Virginia in seceding from the United States.

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### Answers

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