

# Geography of the High Plains

The High Plains Borders are as follows: the east border is the Cap Rock escarpment, the north and west borders are the Texas/Oklahoma and Texas/New Mexico borders down to the Pecos River, and the south border is the Pecos river.

The general terrain of the High Plains is flat fields stretching out in all directions; however, occasionally one will find a gorge engraved into the land with a river running through it. On the East side of the High Plains the Cap Rock escarpment drops from 200 to 1,000 feet down to the central plains.

One of the rivers is the Canadian River, which was named by a group of early explorers who thought that it flowed into Canada. The river actually starts in New Mexico and then flows through the Texas Panhandle and then stops in Oklahoma. On its route through Texas, the Canadian is in a deep gorge. The river provides water for eleven cities in the panhandle. It is very difficult to bridge because of all the quicksand along its banks.

Amarillo is one of the biggest cities in the High Plains, and it is located south of the Canadian River and on the north bank of the Red River (SEE Next Paragraph). Beginning as a train station, its growth is due to the oil that has been found there. Another industry that has proved profitable has been natural gas and Helium. The Northern Panhandle is one of the finest natural gas fields in the world. Natural gas is in some ways more useful than oil; for instance, it can be used by industrial plants, consumed as abundant, ready-made fuel, piped for long distances where fuel is rare, converted into products like gasoline, butane, synthetic fiber, rubber or plastics, or even converted into electric power! Helium also can be extracted from the gas.

Just south of Amarillo, the Red River flows through the Panhandle. It starts in New Mexico, then through the Texas

Panhandle, and finally through Louisiana into the Mississippi River. The river is named after its red current color. The 1,360 mile-long Red River over a millions of years eroded the rock into the Palo Duro Canyon. The Canyon is over 1,000 feet deep and 100 miles long and is located in the south-west area of the Panhandle.

The next significant city is Lubbock, located directly south of Amarillo on the south outskirts of the Panhandle. It came to be a relatively large city because of the agricultural value of the abundant water that was found there for growing cotton. Now However, So much water has been drawn that the waterline has receded, and it is now very expensive to draw. The city also grew when a significant amount of oil was found in the area. The area surrounding the city is flat plains and fields dotted with oil wells.

Midland and Odessa are two commercial cities located south-west of Lubbock. Both cities sprang up practically overnight when oil and water were abundantly found there. The land is dry, and not good for farming, and the surrounding area was deserted until oil was found. An interesting spot in Odessa is where a meteor crashed into Earth over 20,000 years ago. The crater expelled or shifted more than 43,000,000 cubic feet of rock creating a crater 500 ft wide and over 100 feet deep. No one has ever found the main mass of the meteor, it is believed to be embedded over 170 feet under ground.

The Monahans Sandhill s State Park is located south-west of Odessa very close to the Pecos River. Many bones of extinct animals such as Mammoths have been found there, as well as 3,000 acres of sand! Wavy ripples of sand flow over the area that was probably once a sea-bottom.

## **The Kiowa Indians**

The Kiowa Indians are part of the Plains Indians, who follow the buffalo for food. The name Kiowa comes from the word Kaigwa, meaning "Main People" in the Kiowa language. They came closer than all the other tribes to creating their own written language. They painted their pictographic symbols onto skins of deer, antelope, or on buffalo hide. Their primitive language was used mainly for calendars or recording events of the tribe. They practiced the Sun Dance, and organized military activity. They believed that 10 medicine bundles would protect the tribe. Medicine bundles are skin pouches or wrappings in which were kept pipes, which are hand-crafted hollow, wooden stems with bowls of clay-like rock on the end, stones, an arrow or a piece of an animal. The contents of these pouches were considered magical. One of the of the warrior societies was the "Principal Dogs" or the "Ten Bravest". This group was made up of 10 braves who were the most courageous. The leader of the Principal Dogs wore a long sash reaching from his shoulders to the ground. When a battle involving the Kiowans began, the leader would dismount his horse and throw a spear through his sash into the ground and would fight from that spot and would not move until he was killed or until one of the other "Dogs" pulled his sash out.