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Utah

Utah is located in the middle of the American Southwest between Nevada on the west; Arizona to the south; Colorado to the east; and Idaho and Wyoming to the north. The corners of four states (Utah, Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona) meet at the southeast corner of Utah.

Early History of Utah

The area known today as Utah has been inhabited by native people for thousands of years. Archaeologists estimate that the unusual rock paintings at Horseshoe Canyon, an extension of Canyonlands National Park, date back about 7,000 years ago. One of the murals at Horseshoe Canyon is approximately 300 feet in length and features about 200 human and other-worldly figures.

The Anasazi people, the ancestors of the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico and Arizona, once lived in the Utah area. The reasons why they left Utah still remain a mystery to historians. Around the fourteenth century, the Shoshonean people (Shoshones, Goshutes, Southern Paiutes, and Utes) began moving into Utah. In the early 1600s, the Navajo people migrated from western Canada and adapted to the desert climate of Utah, becoming a powerful group due to the skill of their warriors. Around the same time, the Utes and Shoshones adopted horses which had been brought to North America by the Spanish in the 1500s.

European explorers made limited excursions into Utah, and it wasn't until the early 1800s that American settlers became interested in the distant lands of Utah. In the 1820s trappers interested in obtaining furs from the animals of the Rocky Mountains explored and mapped the area in and around Utah. Historians believe that these men explored the Great Salt Lake around 1824 and 1825. The earliest explorers thought they had reached an inlet of the Pacific Ocean because the lake contained salt water.

Between 1843 and 1854, the U.S. government hired John Fremont to map and measure the landscape in the Utah area. He eventually reached California through the Great Basin in the northwest corner of Utah. Shortly thereafter wagon trains used this route, known as the Hastings Cutoff, because it was shorter and less mountainous than other routes. However, parts of Utah still belonged to Mexico.

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The Mormons

The Mormons are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, founded in 1830 by Joseph Smith. Smith's first community was in Kirtland, Ohio. The group next moved to Illinois and again faced religious persecution where Smith was killed. Brigham Young became the Mormon leader and declared that the church members must leave the United States. On April 16, 1847 Young and an advance group left Nebraska in search of a new home for the approximate 10,000 Mormons who had gathered for the journey. In July of that year, the Mormons decided to settle in the Salt Lake Valley and they established Salt Lake City. As more Mormons arrived, they expanded their territory and founded additional towns like Ogden and Provo.

Meanwhile the United States and Mexico were at war from 1846 to 1848. When the Mexican-American War was settled by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Brigham Young's safe haven in Utah was under control of the United States. Young decided to begin the process of statehood and in 1850 the Mormons petitioned Congress to create a new territory called Deseret. Congress and President Fillmore approved but called the territory Utah. The original Utah Territory included most of today's Nevada and parts of today's Wyoming and Colorado. President Fillmore named Brigham Young as the first territorial governor.

However, Americans east of the Mississippi River objected to the lack of separation between church and state in the Utah government and the fact that Mormons practiced polygamy. Polygamy means having multiple wives at the same time. There were unfortunate violent conflicts between the Mormons and wagon trains and the U.S. army marched into Salt Lake City in 1858. However, instead of fighting, the Mormons had boarded up their homes and about 40,000 fled. Young eventually negotiated a peace with the army and his people returned home.

The Utah Territory was relatively unaffected by the Civil War but during the 1860s the U.S. clashed with both the Navajo and Utes Indians. Over time the Utes and Navajos were forced onto reservations. Meanwhile the United States was pressing forward with the concept of Manifest Destiny, the idea that the United States was destined to reach from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. The

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Transcontinental Railroad linking Omaha, Nebraska to Sacramento, California was completed on May 10, 1869 when the last spike was driven at Promontory, Utah.

The people of Utah petitioned the federal government six times for statehood, but they were denied until the Mormon Church declared that polygamy was no longer allowed. Utah finally became the 45th state on January 4, 1896.

Utah Today

Today about 2.5 million people live in Utah and the population of the state has doubled between 1970 and 2000. The major employers in Utah are the State of Utah, Brigham Young University, The University of Utah and the U.S. Air Force at Hill Air Force Base in Ogden. Utah is home to one of the world's largest copper mines, Bingham Canyon Copper Mine.

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

1. True False The states that border on Utah are: Arizona, New Mexico, Wyoming and Idaho.
2. True False Horseshoe Canyon is the site of ancient cliff dwelling people who were the ancestors of the Pueblo Indians.
3. True False The Navajo people in Utah migrated there from Canada.
4. True False The Shoshone Indians adapted to using horses.
5. True False In the 1800s explorers who reached the Great Salt Lake thought it was an inlet of the Pacific Ocean.
6. True False Brigham Young was the founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints.
7. True False Even though Brigham Young was named as the territorial governor of Utah, he maintained a strict separation between Church and State.
8. True False Americans outside of Utah objected to the Mormon practice of polygenesis.
9. True False The Navajo and Utes Indians in Utah were forced on reservations during the 1800s.
10. True False Today the largest employers in the state of Utah do not manufacture any products.

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Answers

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