

The Mississippi River (<http://www.socialstudiesforkids.com/>)

The Mississippi is the world's fourth-longest river at 3,870 miles, including the Missouri River. It flows from its source, at Lake Itasca, in Minnesota, to the Gulf of Mexico. It is the longest river in the United States.

The Mississippi, especially in its lower sections, can overflow its banks with disastrous results for the people living nearby. Federal and state governments are very vigilant in keeping up with river flow patterns and making sure that such flooding is minimal.

Many different kinds of wildlife make their homes in the river, including 241 species of fish, 37 species of mussel, 45 amphibians, 50 mammals, and a full 40 percent of the entire country's migratory birds.

The first European to see the Mississippi River was [Hernando de Soto](#), in 1541. The



Frenchmen Father [Jacques Marquette](#) and [Louis Jolliet](#) traveled down the Mississippi as far as the Arkansas River in 1673. Another French explorer, [René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle](#), sailed down the river to its delta in 1682. When he got there, La Salle claimed the entire Mississippi region for France.

The river formed the western boundary of the United States from 1783 until 1803 and the [Louisiana Purchase](#). American explorers [Meriwether Lewis and William Clark](#) traveled the length of the Mississippi River on their journey west with the Corps of Discovery.

Today, the Mississippi is one of the busiest rivers in the world, serving mainly as a commercial waterway but also a tourist destination.

Facts About the Mississippi River

Length	3,870 miles
Source(s)	Lake Itasca, Minnesota
Mouth	Gulf of Mexico, New Orleans
Countries Flows Through	United States

Major Cities Flows By/Through	St. Paul, Minn.; St. Louis, Mo.; Memphis, Tenn.; New Orleans, La.
Where Name Comes From	"Father of Waters" in Algonquian language

The Rocky Mountains (kidskonnnect.com)

Rocky Mountains, also known as the Rockies, is a major mountain system of North America and easternmost belt of the North American cordillera, extending more than 3,000 miles from central Northern Mexico to Northwest Alaska.

The Rockies were formed in the Mesozoic and early Cenozoic eras during the Cordilleran orogeny. They are geologically complex, with remnants of an ancestral Rocky Mountain system and evidence that uplift, which involved almost all mountain-building processes, occurred as a series of pulses over millions of years.

Topographically, the Rockies are divided into five sections: the Southern Rockies, Middle Rockies, Northern Rockies, the Canadian Rockies, and Brooks Range in Alaska.

Mountain soil in the Rockies is poorly developed, being extremely thin, young and too deficient in nutrients for most types of agriculture. High-valley soils are sometimes suitable for irrigation, depending on texture, steepness of slopes, length of snow cover, and the presence of trace elements that limit suitability for crop cultivation.

Along the great north-south extent of the mountains, the climate of the Rockies extends from the northern fringe of the subtropical zone in the far south to the Arctic in the far north.

The flora and fauna of the Rockies vary markedly according to elevation, latitude, and exposure. They are varied and abundant respectively.

The Early People

Human presence in the Rocky Mountains has been dated to between 10,000 and 8,000 BCE.

American Indian people inhabiting the northern mountains in modern times include the Shuswap and Kutenai of British Columbia, the Coeur d'Alene and Nez Percé of Idaho, and the Flathead of Montana.

Southwestern groups include the Hopi, other Pueblo Indians and the Navajo.

Nomadic Plains Indians who once ranged into the eastern Rockies included the Blackfoot, the Crow, and the Cheyenne.

The Modern People

Incursions by Europeans began in the southwest in the 16th century. By the early 19th century, exploration and economic exploitation brought them into contact, and often conflict, with virtually all the indigenous mountain people. These encounters, along with shifting food supplies and intertribal territorial wars, generated extensive migration and attrition among some groups. Many Native Americans now live on reservations established throughout the region.

Although settlement is now widespread throughout most of the Rockies, population is concentrated in urban areas generally located at the base of mountains, along railways, or in river valleys.

The Oregon Trail (ducksters.com)

The Oregon Trail was a major route that people took when migrating to the western part of the United States. Between 1841 and 1869, hundreds of thousands of people traveled westward on the trail. Many of them traveled in large wagon trains using covered wagons to carry their belongings.

The Route

The Oregon Trail began in Independence, Missouri and ended in Oregon City, Oregon. It stretched for around 2,000 miles and through six different states including Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Wyoming, Idaho, and Oregon. Along the way, travelers had to cross all sorts of rough terrain such as the Rocky Mountains and the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

Covered Wagons

The main vehicle used to carry the pioneer's belongings was the covered wagon. Sometimes these wagons were called "Prairie Schooners", because they were like boats going over the vast prairies of the west. The wagons were made of wood with iron around the wheels like tires. The covers were made from waterproofed cotton or linen canvas. The typical covered wagon was about 10 feet long and four feet wide.

Most of the settlers used oxen to pull their wagons. The oxen were slow, but steady. Sometimes mules were used as well. A fully loaded wagon could weigh as much as 2,500 pounds. A lot of the time the pioneers walked alongside the wagons. Traveling wasn't too bad with the wagons on the flat terrain of the prairies, but once the settlers reached the Rocky Mountains, getting the wagons up and down steep trails was very difficult.

Dangers

Traveling the Oregon Trail in the 1800s was a dangerous journey. However, the danger wasn't from Native Americans as you might think. As a matter of fact, many records show that Native Americans helped many of the travelers along the way. The real danger was from a disease called cholera that killed many settlers. Other dangers included bad weather and accidents while trying to move their heavy wagons over the mountains.

Supplies

The pioneers were able to bring very little with them. When they left their homes in the east, they had to leave most of their belongings. The covered wagon was mostly filled with food. It took over a 1,000 pounds of food to feed a family of four on the trip out west. They took preserved foods such as hard tack, coffee, bacon, rice, beans, and flour. They also took a few basic cooking utensils such as a coffee pot, some buckets, and an iron skillet.

The pioneers didn't have room for a lot of fancy items. They only had room to pack two or three sets of tough clothing. They packed candles for lighting and a rifle to hunt with along the way. Other items included tents, bedding, and basic tools such as an axe and a shovel.

Other Trails

Although the Oregon Trail was the most used wagon trail, there were other trails that led out west. Some of them branched off the Oregon Trail like the California Trail which left the Oregon Trail in Idaho and headed south to California. There was also the Mormon Trail which went from Council Bluffs, Iowa to Salt Lake City, Utah.

Interesting Facts about the Oregon Trail

In 1849, a guide was published describing the overland journey to California.

There were reports of the trail being littered with items that people cast off along the way. These included books, stoves, trunks and other heavy items.

It took about five months for a wagon train to make the journey.

The first major migration took place in 1843 when a single large wagon train of 120 wagons and 500 people made the trip.

The trail was popular until the transcontinental railroad connected the east to the west in 1869.

In 1978, the U.S. Congress officially named the trail the Oregon National Historic Trail. Although much of the trail has been built over through the years, around 300 miles of it has been preserved and you can still see the ruts made from the wagon wheels.