

Ozarks' History Study Guide

A Synopsis

The Ozarks has been home to a wide variety of peoples for many, many years. Flint work, dating back 10,000 years, was left by hunters and gatherers who migrated through the region. Arrowheads of spear points and knives, which belonged to ancient Indian tribes, have been found dating back 1,000 to 3,000 years.

Prior to the 1880s, the Ozarks' countryside was a rugged wilderness that contained an abundance of wildlife. Since there were no roads, the White River became the highway of commerce for French explorers and trappers. It was the French who gave the Ozarks its name. It began as "aux arc", which was the French name for the bows and the bends in the area's streams. French Canadian trappers also made bows out of the Osage orange trees, which grew in this area.

In the early 1800s Napoleon Bonaparte, ruler of France, was badly in need of money to finance his wars in Europe. Unites States President Thomas Jefferson purchased the Louisiana Territory from France in 1803. The northern part of the territory was called Upper Louisiana and included the present state of Missouri. Upper Louisiana extended northward from the 33rd parallel to Canada and westward to the Rocky Mountains. The Ozark Mountain range extends from the southern part of Illinois, across Missouri, and into Arkansas and Oklahoma.

The Ozarks rise from 1500 feet to 2300 feet above sea level. The highest peaks are the Boston Mountains of Arkansas. The Ozarks region has a total area of about 40,000 square miles, and is surrounded by the Missouri River on the north, the Mississippi River on the East, the Neosho River in Oklahoma on the West, and the Boston Mountains in Arkansas on the South. The hills are covered with timber and contain rich mineral deposits.

The Osage Indians were the last Indian tribe to live in this area. They were moved to the Indian Territories of Oklahoma in the early 1880s. During the same era, the Ozark Mountains became home to a rugged group of people of Scottish-Irish-English descent. The first settlers to the Ozarks' hills make their way up the White River in 1810. The settlers, bringing skills from the Tennessee woods, adapted well to the rugged terrain in the White River area of the Ozark Mountains. The Ozarks' "Hillbilly" persona has cultural roots that date back several hundred years to "the old country."