OKLAHOMA

THE SOONER STATE *Became a state November 16, 1907 (46th)*

Oklahoma sits where eastern forests give way to wide western plains. It is home to dozens of Native nations, and its story is full of cowboys, oil wells and wild weather.



Why the Sooner State?

At noon on April 22, 1889, the government opened about two million acres in central Oklahoma to settlers. About 50,000 people waited at the line, then raced in to claim land. Some sneaked in early and hid to grab the best spots. They were called Sooners. Many claims became farms, and wheat is still a leading crop.



Land of Many Nations

About 1,000 years ago, Native people built earthen mounds at Spiro. Objects found there include conch shells from the Gulf Coast and copper from the Great Lakes, signs of trade across the continent. The Caddo and Wichita nations are recognized as the builders' descendants. Oklahoma comes from two Choctaw words meaning red people. Nearly 40 tribal nations are here today.



Black Gold

In 1897 the Nellie Johnstone No. 1 well struck oil near Bartlesville. It was the first well in Oklahoma to produce enough oil to sell. More wells followed, each under a derrick, the tall tower that holds the drill. Tulsa became known as the Oil Capital of the World. Wells pumped oil beside the state capitol until 1986.



A Whale Beside the Road

Route 66, a highway created in 1926, crosses all of Oklahoma. Beside it near Catoosa sits a big blue whale made of iron and concrete. Hugh Davis built it as a surprise for his wife Zelta, who loved whale figurines. It was finished in 1972. Davis brought in sand and picnic tables, and families came to swim.



The Bison Come Home

Huge bison herds once roamed the plains. Hunters killed so many that by the late 1870s almost none were left on the southern plains. In 1907, fifteen bison from the Bronx Zoo in New York City were sent to the Wichita Mountains. Comanche leader Quanah Parker was there to greet them. About 650 bison live there today.



Crystals in the Salt

The Great Salt Plains are more than 11,000 acres of flat white salt. Under the surface, crystals of a mineral called selenite grow in the wet, salty sand. Each has an hourglass shape inside, made of trapped sand. Visitors may dig for them from April to mid-October. This is the only place in the world to dig for hourglass crystals.

BY THE NUMBERS

Population	About 4.1 million (28th most)
Size	About 69,900 square miles (20th largest)
Highest point	Black Mesa, 4,973 feet
Counties	77
Neighbors	Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Arkansas

DID YOU KNOW?

- Cowboys once drove cattle from Texas across Oklahoma to railroads in Kansas. The path was named for a trader, Jesse Chisholm.
- The shopping cart was invented in Oklahoma City in 1937 by Sylvan Goldman, who owned grocery stores.
- The first parking meter in the world was put in Oklahoma City in 1935.
- Woolaroc is a ranch and museum near Bartlesville. Its name is made from three words: woods, lakes and rocks.

FIND IT ON THE MAP

1. Which river forms Oklahoma's southern border?
2. Which city is closest to Black Mesa?
3. In what year did Oklahoma become a state?

Answers: 1. The Red River 2. Guymon 3. 1907