



Revised History

What Is The West?

By Al Benson June 18th, 2022

The West is many things to many people. To those who have never experienced it, I can only say that they have missed something that will not long remain even as it is now.

The West is more than a geographical location. It is more than just the great state of Texas which most Easterners seem to think all Westerners come from. It is more than the dry, burned-out desert that most who have never seen it think it is.

The West is a place, but it is more. It is an atmosphere, an enigma, a way of life, and a people... As a way of life, it is something that can be carried far beyond its geographical boundaries.

The West is dark thunderheads far off over the canyon; it's the Prairie Dog Fork of the Red River at flood, It's Monument Valley, with its red sandstone monuments and it'd the Painted Desert in Arizona during the noonday heat. It's the country in the Texas and Oklahoma Panhandles that appears to be flat but really isn't. It's the majestic peace of the high plains country on the Platte River in Wyoming. It is a land so varied and so big that when you stand in it you must realize within your deepest being that GOD created it, and that man, mighty though he would like to think he is, is only one small finite part of it.

The west is people, though. It's the old cowboy at the Pawhuska Cavalcade Rodeo, who, upon hearing the announcer reveal the name of the next contestant in the saddle bronc riding, shouted "That's my cousin Homer! He can't ride nothin'. He'll get throwed first jump out the gate." And Homer did! It's the man sitting in front of the store in Guymon, Oklahoma who, when asked if it was always this windy here said "Hell, no. Sometimes it gets windier," Knowing the country in the Oklahoma Panhandle, I could agree with him. It's the ancient Indian at Taos Pueblo in New Mexico who, when the smart-aleck tourist tried to talk him into letting him in for nothing, charged him three times what he charged me to get in. The irate tourist tried to tell the Indian that forty years ago he'd gotten in for nothing. After his ten-minute tirade the old Indian simply answered "Times change,"

For me, the West has not really ended each time I crossed the Mississippi River heading east. Thankfully now, even though we can't travel anymore due to health issues. we live west of the Mississippi. For me, the West is a good part, along with the South, of the sum total of all I have seen, felt, lived and experienced during my numerous times in it. The deepness of its experience is not something that leaves you upon the crossing of a boundary line. You either hate it and never go back, or you love it and continue to go back as you are able. There's no middle ground. You either live it wherever you go, or you've never really experienced it at all, even if you had to pass through it.