

# Red River Valley History

Near Fulton, Arkansas, the train crosses the Red River, a very important river system to the people of southwestern Arkansas from prehistoric times to present day. The river gets its name from the red color of its water and clay banks, and is the second largest river basin in the southern Great Plains.

The river's journey begins from the merger of two forks in the Texas panhandle and flows east approximately 1,290 miles, forming the border between Oklahoma and Texas, as well as part of the border between Texas and Arkansas. In southwestern Arkansas near Fulton, the Red River takes a southern turn, where it flows southeasterly until emptying into the Mississippi River. The river played a significant role in European settlement of the south.

Although the Red River was mentioned by Spanish explorers in 1542, no European settlement occurred in the area until 1687 when the French established trading posts along the river. The French shared the land with the native Caddo Indians, but sharing may not be the most appropriate word. The French began to dominate the area, which greatly disrupted the Caddo way of life. In 1790, the Caddo people moved further down the river, to escape the European domination. Only a few decades later, the United States Government purchased the remaining land along the river that the Caddo tribe was living on and they were forced to move away from their river homes to a reservation in Oklahoma.

At this time in history, the Red River's function as a transportation strip between the Mississippi River and western points was crucial to the way of life. Steamboats were able to transport goods to and from the surrounding states. However, this mode of transportation would be impeded in the early 1800s by the Great Raft. The Great Raft was a name given to an enormous log jam that clogged the lower part of the river. At one point the jam extended to more than 130 miles. In 1828, the U.S. Congress set aside \$25,000 for the raft's removal and finally, in 1838, the task was complete...so they thought. What actually happened was the re-formation of the logjam farther up the river. Many members of Congress were not willing to set aside more money for the clearance because it appeared to be a lost cause. However in 1873, the second Red River Raft was removed. This time dams were placed along bayous that emptied into the river to prevent a raft from re-forming.

The Red River has been central to the settlement and history of our nation's southeastern region. The wooded banks and reddish waters may look placid now, but the Red River Valley holds a unique tale of heritage and survival.

## Source(s):

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Wikipedia. (2011). Red River. Retrieved January 24, 2011 from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red\\_River\\_](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_River_)

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