

Section

5

The Mountains and Basins

Main Ideas

1. The Mountains and Basins region is characterized by its dramatic landscape and dry desert climate.
2. The natural features of this region affect human activity there.

Why It Matters Today

Big Bend National Park is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the region and the state. Use current events sources to find information about national parks.

Key Terms and Places

- basins
- Guadalupe Peak
- tourism
- Big Bend National Park

The Geographer's World

The high mountains, deep canyons, and desert views of West Texas have excited the imaginations of Texans for years. According to one old story, a West Texas cowboy gave some strange directions to eastern visitors. “Go south from Fort Davis until you come to the place where rainbows wait for rain, and the big river is kept in a stone box, and water runs uphill.” Despite the cowboy’s directions, the confused visitors probably found their way and discovered the magical landscape of West Texas.



TEKS: 8A, 9A, 9B,
10A, 10B, 13C, 21A,
21B, 21C, 22A, 22D

myNotebook

Use the annotation tools in your eBook to take notes on the features of the Mountains and Basins region.



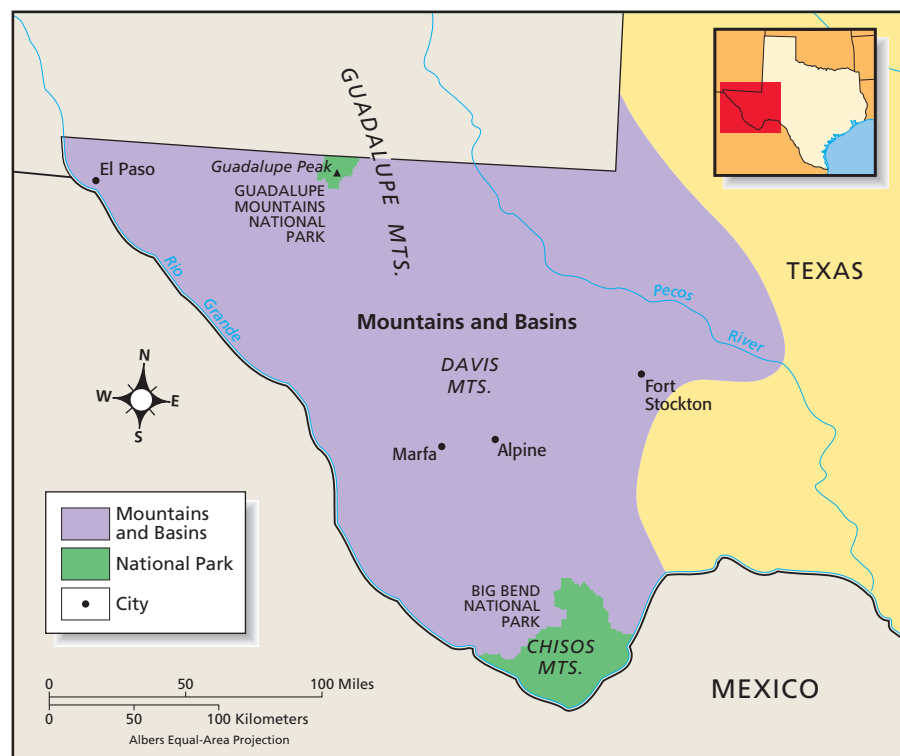
Mountains and Basins

The Mountains and Basins region dominates the landscape of far West Texas. Mountains, plateaus, **basins**, and canyons form the landscape of the subregion. A basin is a lowland surrounded by higher land. With its high mountains and low basins, the area’s elevation varies greatly. The lowest point is in a canyon cut by the Rio Grande. The bottom of this canyon sits 1,700 feet above sea level. The highest point in this subregion and in Texas is **Guadalupe Peak**, which reaches 8,749 feet above sea level. The peak is part of the Guadalupe Mountains near the New Mexico border. The Davis Mountains rise in the central area of the region. Several peaks in the Davis Mountains reach more than 7,000 feet. The Chisos Mountains are near the Rio Grande.

The Mountains and Basins Region

Interpreting Maps This region is characterized by little rainfall and a dramatic desert landscape.

- 1. Locate** Where is this Texas subregion located?
- 2. Drawing Inferences and Conclusions** How do you think the environment has affected city growth in this subregion?



That's Interesting!

Vast Western Spaces

The Mountains and Basins region extends from the Rio Grande east to the Pecos River. Because most of the region lies west of the Pecos River, it is sometimes called the Trans-Pecos area. *Trans* means “across” or “beyond.”

The climate of the region is also extreme. Summers are very hot, and winters can be cold. Whatever the temperature, this region is almost always dry. In the western areas of the region the average rainfall is less than 9 inches a year. The desert climate and landscape have limited the plant life in the area. Desert grasses, shrubs, mesquite trees, and cacti grow in the dry rocky soil.

The desert climate has also limited farming and ranching. Local ranches must be large because the desert grasses and plants offer a limited food source for cattle, sheep, and goats. Some Texans have managed to farm in the region by using irrigation. These farmers grow alfalfa, cotton, pecans, and vegetables. The region’s economy has also been boosted by discoveries of oil, sulfur, and silver. The dramatic landscape has made **tourism** a large part of the economy. Tourism is the business of attracting visitors to a region or place.

The region has a small population and only a few small towns. The exception is El Paso, one of the largest cities in Texas. It sits along the Rio Grande in the westernmost corner of the state. Military bases and trade with Mexico have boosted the city’s economy. In addition, Interstate 10—one of the most important U.S. highways—runs through El Paso. This major east–west shipping route has increased trade in the region.

Reading Check Evaluating How have Texans adapted to the geography and climate in the subregion?

★ Texas National Parks

Many businesses in El Paso have prospered by offering services to tourists. The beauty of the landscape also provides towns such as Alpine and Marfa with a major source of income. These towns serve as entrance points to one of the most popular tourist areas in Texas—**Big Bend National Park**. The park, which was named after its location in the bend of the Rio Grande, covers some 800,000 acres. Big Bend protects a wide variety of plants and animals, including the endangered peregrine falcon and the Mexican long-nosed bat.

Guadalupe Mountains National Park and Big Bend National Park offer many recreational activities, including bird-watching, camping, hiking, and river rafting. The National Park Service describes Big Bend as “the [most] outstanding scenic area of Texas.” It has a dramatic landscape of towering peaks and deep river canyons. In 1899 geologist Robert T. Hill described one canyon there.

TEXAS VOICES

“The scene within this canyon is of unusual beauty. . . . The austerity [severeness] of the cliffs is softened by colors which camera or pen cannot reproduce. These rich tints are like the yellow marble of Portugal and Algiers, warmed by reddening tones which become golden in the sunlight.”

—Robert T. Hill, quoted in *The Story of Big Bend National Park*, by John Jameson

Reading Check Summarizing How have the landforms of the Mountains and Basins subregion affected the area’s economy?



Interpreting Visuals

Big Bend National Park. A variety of plant life exists within the park. What types of vegetation can you identify?

Analyzing Primary Sources

Finding the Main Idea
According to Hill, what attractions does Big Bend offer?



Section 5 Review



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ONLINE QUIZ

1. Define and explain:

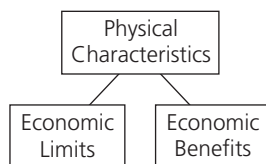
- basins
- tourism

2. Locate on a map:

- Mountains and Basins region
- Guadalupe Peak
- El Paso
- Big Bend National Park

3. Identifying Cause and Effect

Copy the graphic organizer below. Use it to identify how the physical features of the subregion limit some economic activities and support others.



4. Finding the Main Idea

- What are the physical features of the region?
- Why are tourism and national parks important to the Mountains and Basins subregion?

5. Writing and Critical Thinking

myWriteSmart

Drawing Inferences and Conclusions Imagine that you are writing a story about the history of El Paso. Write a short paragraph describing why the population is limited in the region and why El Paso has grown. Consider the following:

- how geography limited the region’s population
- the industries and other economic factors that have led to El Paso’s growth