

# Arizona

## Alliance Created State Giant Traveling Map Lesson

### The History of Arizona's Borders

To understand why Arizona has a distinctive shape, we have to go back in time nearly 200 years when Arizona was part of Mexico.

It all begins when the United States fought a war with the country of Mexico in the mid-1800s. The **Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo** ended the Mexican-American War in 1848. As a result of the treaty, the United States purchased land that is now California, Nevada, Utah, and a large part of Arizona and New Mexico. The United States spent about \$18 million for 525,000 square miles of land. Under the terms of this treaty, the border between Mexico and what was to be Arizona was the Gila River.

Next, Congress officially organized the newly purchased land from Mexico with a set of bills called **The Compromise of 1850**. One of things this compromise did was to establish the **New Mexico Territory** with the straight line of latitude at 37 degrees North as its northern border. This line of latitude remains the northern border of Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Arizona today.

Part of the western border of the New Mexico Territory was the Colorado River. The river was chosen as a border because it was thought to be an easily defined natural feature. However over time a river border can change a little bit from flooding. This constantly changing river became Arizona's western border.

The United States wanted to build a cross-country railroad to California so more land was needed south of the Gila River. At the same time, Mexico needed money. So Ambassador James Gadsden negotiated with the Mexicans to extend the U.S. territory to a port in the Gulf of Mexico. However, Mexico did not want to be split into two parts, so it refused the plan. Finally the two countries agreed on a simpler international border. In the **Gadsden Purchase** (1853) the U.S. paid \$10 million for 29,670 square miles of land.

The current slanted southern border of Arizona was created by the Gadsden Purchase. People had been using inaccurate maps for years and this resulted in disagreements between locals and government officials. This was solved with lines agreed upon by both the U.S. and Mexican governments. The new border

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started at the Rio Grande River at 37 degrees North and went west. It jogged south in the New Mexico Territory to 31 degrees North latitude and continued to 111 degrees West longitude. There the border turns to the northwest ending twenty miles south of the point where the Colorado and Gila rivers meet.

The next step in forming Arizona's borders was when the U.S. Congress introduced a bill in 1862 to separate the Arizona Territory from the New Mexico Territory using the vertical line of longitude near 109 degrees West. President Lincoln signed the **Arizona Territory** into law in 1863. The United States agreed to govern this territory. However until it was a state, it would not have full rights.

In 1866, the United States Congress approved taking part of Arizona's territory and giving it to the state of Nevada. Therefore, the area west of the Colorado River and near 114 degrees West longitude became part of Nevada. This was the final step in creating Arizona's borders.

On February 14, 1912, the state of **Arizona** was admitted to the Union.

