

Basic Physical and Cultural Geography of Wisconsin Background for Naming Artisanal Dairy Products

Below is a very brief background on the geological history and formation of Wisconsin and the basic physical and cultural geographical characteristics of the state.

Origins and characteristics of physical features. Wisconsin has experienced a variety of geological changes over time resulting in its unique physical and topographical features that we see today. Wisconsin was once a mountainous region, not unlike the European Alps. Over millions of years, the land was eroded down to a plain with scattered hills remaining. Later, the region was submerged under a sea. With time, the sea drained to reveal dry land again. Then most of the land was thrust under a mile-thick glacier that finally receded, scraping the land and simultaneously dumping piles of sand, gravel, rocks and boulders, which left new land formations, thousands of lakes, rivers and streams, big and small. Erosion has continued—forming river valleys and ravines, and depositing material, leaving us the distinctive geographical mosaic of land and water that we know today as Wisconsin.

The state of Wisconsin is located in a continental region known as the Middle West or Midwest. Its northern location puts it in the region of the Upper Midwest. The state is bound on the north and east by the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River.

The state is divided into two major watersheds. Some of the state's streams and rivers flow eastward into Lakes Michigan and Superior and eventually into the Atlantic Ocean. However, the greater volume of water from the state flows from streams and rivers westward into the Mississippi River and then makes its way to the Gulf of Mexico. The major Wisconsin rivers that flow into the Mississippi are the St. Croix, Chippewa, Black and Wisconsin Rivers. The major rivers that flow into Lake Michigan include the Manitowoc, Sheboygan and Milwaukee. Northern rivers within the Atlantic Ocean watershed include the Fox, Wolf and Menominee Rivers.

Lake Superior and Lake Michigan give Wisconsin over 500 miles of lakeshore. Wisconsin also has 3,824 mapped inland lakes and many that remain unmapped. Wisconsin's ports are located at Milwaukee, Racine, Sheboygan, Kenosha, Manitowoc, Kewaunee, Algome, Two Rivers, Green Bay, Marinette and Port Washington, Superior, Washburn and Ashland.

Cultural history. Wisconsin's history of native peoples includes established communities of Menominee, Kickapoo, Dakota, Winnebago, Dakota, Miami. Later, in the 17th Century as lands to the east of Wisconsin were occupied by growing numbers of European settlers, Ojibwa, Fox, Potawatomi and Sac people moved west to Wisconsin to resettle.

Jean Nicolet was the first white man to arrive to Wisconsin in 1634. Nicolet was sent to Wisconsin by Champlain, the governor of New France, who hoped to find a Northwest passage to China. Nicolet established contact with indigenous Americans in

the Green Bay area and his expedition returned to New France with word of a rich bounty of animal furs. Nicolet's travels opened up the Great Lakes passage to Wisconsin which led to further exploration and exploitation of the region by French Canadian fur traders. Trading posts were established in northern Wisconsin by French Canadian *voyageurs* in Ashland and Madeleine Island. The French later lost control of Wisconsin to the British during the French and Indian War. British political influence on Wisconsin ended in 1783 after the U.S. Revolution.

There were several waves of settlers to Wisconsin. Among the earliest groups of settlers to the region were lead miners who came to Northern Illinois and Wisconsin in the 1820s. When the Erie Canal was completed in 1825, a new wave of Europeans and settlers from the eastern part of North America made their way to settle in Wisconsin. Word of good farmland and the formation of the Wisconsin Territory in 1836 stimulated yet another wave of settlers to travel west to Wisconsin. Settlers came to Wisconsin from many European countries in these early years including: Switzerland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Germany, Italy, Great Britain, Ireland, Wales, Scotland, Iceland, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg. Later waves of migration brought settlers to Wisconsin from other regions of the world.

Wisconsin place names and living cultures today reflect this multicultural mix and the influences these Europeans and indigenous cultures and their activities had on the land and waters of the state.

Geographical provinces of the state. In 1916, Lawrence Marten published a book called *The Physical Geography of Wisconsin* that describes five geographical provinces in the state of Wisconsin. The provinces are based on geological and physical geographical characteristics such as glaciation and topographic features (plateaus, plains and the ancient and eroded mountains). Marten's geographical description of the state and the five provinces he described nearly a century ago are still widely accepted today by state geographers as the way to classify regions within the state.

Lake Superior Lowland. The Lake Superior Lowland is the smallest geographical province. It occupies lowland portions of the coast of Lake Superior. The lowland area was formed by an ancient fault or rift in the earth's crust that dropped to create Lake Superior's coastline. Subsequent glacial action, sedimentation and erosion have also contributed to its current form.

Northern Highland. The Northern Highland province is also referred to as the province of 'Lost Mountains'. This region was once a tall mountain range that was later eroded, then covered by sea and eventually filled in by sedimentation of sandstone and limestone to form a peneplain (a peneplain is a plain with irregular hills). Today only remnants remain of the region's once tall mountains. These remnants are visible in the form of occasional hills cut through by rivers and streams. These hills or ridges that break up the peneplain include Rib Mountain, the Mosinee Hills, and the Penokee Range, among others. The area is characterized by soils that were deposited by glaciers, in some

places 75-100 feet deep. Portions of the Northern Highland that were glaciated are abundant in lakes and wetlands.

Central Plain. The Central Plain is a crescent-shaped province. At the surface it is flat or with irregular hills marked by buttes, cliffs and irregular bluffs. The region's substrate is principally sandstone. Glacial action left deposits of soil and rock and also scoured basins forming lakes of which the most prominent is Green Lake.

Eastern Ridges and Lowlands. This region covers the entire Lake Michigan shoreline and extends toward the west. The province is covered by a variety of limestone layers with varying degrees of resistance to erosion. These layers run generally north and south, parallel to the Lake Michigan shoreline. Glaciers contributed to the current topography and character of the province by depositing sand, gravel, clay, rock and even mineral deposits (such as copper in the northern part of the province).

Western Upland. This is an upland region that has been dissected by erosion from rivers and streams. The Mississippi and Wisconsin Rivers have formed the largest gorges and river valleys within the region. The Baraboo Hills and Military Ridge are among the raised features of this region, as are the mounds of Blue Mounds, Sinsinawa and Platte areas. Most of the Driftless area of Wisconsin is within the Western Upland province. The Driftless area is a 15,000 square mile areas of southwest Wisconsin that was not glaciated in the last glacier, but is surrounded, on all sides, by glaciated land.

State Symbols

Coat of Arms: Diversity, wealth and abundance of natural resources.

Motto: 'Forward.'

Song: 'On Wisconsin'.

Flower: Wood violet.

Bird: Robin.

Tree: Sugar Maple.

Fish: Muskellunge (Musky).

Animal: Badger.

Wildlife Animal: White-tailed deer.

Domesticated Animal: Dairy cow.

Mineral: Galena (Lead sulfide).

Rock: Red Granite.

Symbol of Peace: Mourning Dove.

Insect: Honeybee.

Soil: Antigo Silt Loam.

Fossil: Trilobite.

Dog: American Water Spaniel.

Beverage: Milk.

Grain: Corn.

Dance: Polka.