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State Features Scenic Wonders

WE Oklahomans are a highly mobile people, and few there are who haven't traveled to distant states for business or pleasure. Yet, it is amazing how many Oklahomans, native and adopted, have not really seen the scenic wonders of our own state.

The interstate highways and state turnpikes do not pass through all of the interesting areas, but good roads go everywhere.

Start in any direction for an enjoyable look at Oklahoma, but return home by another route so you can see more. Plan a leisurely trip, turn onto side roads, stop, look and visit with folks.

The state has been divided into six "countries," which area groups promote with maps featuring points of interest, scenic, historic and economic. Maps are obtainable from chambers of commerce, many service stations and restaurants.

Central Oklahoma is Frontier Country. The northeast section is Green Country, northwest is Red Carpet Country, and southwestern counties are Great Plains Country. The south central section that includes Lake Texoma is called Fun Country, and the mountainous southeastern counties could be nothing but Kiamichi Country.

Every person may have a favorite type of scenery or recreation to look for on trips. Here are seven of the best, not listed in order, because they change with the seasons:

The Panhandle area has the lowest unemployment, the highest per capita income and the longest straight stretch of highway in the state. Its hardy citizens converted this one-time "No Man's Land" from the famous "dust bowl" of the 1930s into productive uses, now growing most of the state's grain sorghum and corn.

Beautiful lakes and streams decorate Green Country, and many people think that northeastern Oklahoma's Illinois River is tops. They welcome tourists, sportsmen and visitors, but hate polluters.

Talamena Drive from Talihina, Okla., to Mena, Ark., is a surprise to everyone who thinks our entire state is flat and treeless. The mountains aren't tall and snowcapped, but they're spectacular, and the forests of the Kiamichi Country are valuable.

For many people, the Arbuckle mountains are just a rise they pass over on the way to Dallas, but they are a geologic wonderland. Those who take the time to look may see samples of rock formations from every prehistoric geologic age, brought to the surface by an upheaval that left layers of rock on "tilt."

The Wichita mountains probably are just as old, with huge granite boulders rising abruptly from flat prairies in Great Plains Country. Mount Scott, near Lawton, is the state's highest mountain, and at the adjacent Wichita Mountain Wildlife Preserve, you may see the buffalo roaming and deer at play.

Agriculture is Oklahoma's biggest industry, and wheat is the principal crop. Planted in the fall and harvested in the spring, green wheat is a sight to see poking through the snow.

Most people are impressed by the oil rigs pumping wealth from the ground, but they usually overestimate their output and underestimate the production of six million cattle that graze among them. Many exotic breeds are now grown here.

Oklahoma has a wealth of sights to see, and before you plan another vacation, consider a tour of the world you live in.