

GEOGRAPHY OF THE MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST

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AN ABSTRACT

The Coastal Plain of Mississippi, underlain with sand, clay and loam sediments of Pleistocene and recent age, descends gradually from the low hills of the Pine Hills Physiographic region to the Gulf, and continues beyond to form the Continental Shelf. Several low sand ridges have emerged and become fixed with vegetation, thus breaking the monotonous plain. Swamps and marshes are common near the coast and along the stream valleys. The mixture of pine forests and grassland vegetation has often caused this region to be called the Coastal Pine Meadows; however it is more preferably called the "Coastal Terraces." The terrace character of the topography is noticed only after more careful study and mapping.

The Mississippi Gulf Coast is well known as a healthful resort. Harrison

County, in which Gulfport is located, has been declared by the United States Public Health Service as one of the healthiest counties in the United States. The formation of the rocks has made possible numerous artesian wells from which the cities are supplied with the purest artesian water, delicious to drink and so soft that the mildest soaps foam into rich suds. Other health producing factors are the long hours of sunshine, and temperatures that make outdoor activities possible all the year. The mean average annual temperature of the coast is approximately 68° F. The average annual precipitation is approximately 62 inches.

After two years under the administration of the Mississippi "balance agriculture with industry" program, the state has the promise of added industrial payrolls approaching two million dollars to

be paid to nearly three thousand new workers in nine new enterprises. Two of these, a woolen mill and a plywood factory, are in Jackson county. These and previous garment factories and other plants begun under this program have given employment to a large number of the people, and have also utilized large amounts of the raw materials of the region.

None of the cities of the Coast are so very large, but they are all important as shipping and fishing centers, and especially as resorts. Gulfport, the largest, has a splendid new \$425,000 small craft harbor, a ship canal, a deep water harbor, a recently completed \$1,250,000 municipal dock and ware houses, the latest equipment for loading and unloading ocean-going steamers plying to all foreign ports, and numerous smaller factories and canning plants. Biloxi, the first permanent white settlement in the Mississippi Valley, was once capital of the region that stretched from what is now Yellowstone Park to the present site of Pittsburg—the American domain of Louis XIV of France. Today the Old Historic Light-house, over which seven different flags have flown, still watches over the five hundred fishing craft which supply the seafood canning plants of Biloxi. Pascagoula, another important fishing and lumbering city, has recently accepted a shipbuilding contract with the government. Moss Point, the easternmost city on the Mississippi Coast, was the site of one of the south's first paper mills. The Moss Point Paper Mill is at present an important producer of paper which is made from local pine timber. It is also of interest to note that even though little, if any, oil has been found on the Mississippi Gulf Coast as yet, oil companies have recently leased much of the land. They have good prospects of finding oil in the region.

The Gulf Highway follows the Old Spanish Trail and is sometimes called the seawall boulevard because for miles on either side of Gulfport the world's longest seawall, 40 miles in length, protects the highway from the Gulf. By the end of March the waters of the Mississippi Sound are warm enough for swimming and this seawall becomes a playground for sunbathers. Spring comes early in Mississippi. On the coast the camelia japonica and wisteria bloom in February. The wooded hills, where pine and live oaks are green the year round, usher in spring with dogwood, redbud, and yellow jessamine. Traveling the Coast's "Azalea Trail" is really an unforgettable experience. The azaleas are in bloom by the latter part of February, and the "Trail" extends from New Orleans, through Gulfport, and on to Mobile. Thus one can see why the tourist trade begins so early in these cities.

Thus we might summarize the Coastal Terraces as a whole as a region of forest and forest industry, since only scattered areas have been cleared for part time and subsistence agriculture. On the higher and better drained portions, particularly near the northern border, conditions favor the expansion of subtropical plantation crops. Notable beginnings have already been made in the production of pecans, satsumas, oranges, and tung oil. South Mississippi is now recognized as the ideal place in the United States for the production of this oil which until only recently was almost exclusively imported from China. The coast cities depend largely upon the tourist industry, fishing, and shipping. In addition the region is rapidly changing toward the "balance industry with agriculture" program. Thus we conclude that in the near future these cities will also depend more largely upon manufacturing.