

About the Pine Ridge Reservation

GEOGRAPHY

The Pine Ridge Indian Reservation is located in the Southwest corner of South Dakota. It shares a border with Nebraska and is only 60 miles from the Black Hills. The Badlands are to the North and are part of the Reservation. There are approximately 5,000 sq miles that make up Pine Ridge.

WEATHER

Pine Ridge weather can change at a moments notice. In the last 11 years we have seen temps as low as negative 50 degrees Fahrenheit and as high as 120 in the middle part of summer. Our summers can range from 50s to 120 during the summer. It is a dry heat so most do not really believe it is hot. But know that 120 is still hot with or without humidity. Drink lots of water as the dry weather evaporates the sweat so you do not feel you are losing fluids.

It is important to bring a light jacket if you are here during the summer months.

SOCIOLOGY

Pine Ridge is one the largest reservations in the country. We are the Oglala Lakota people, and we have nearly 50 thousand enrolled members living around the country. We have about 35-40 thousand actually living on the Reservation. We are the descendants of Red Cloud, Crazy Horse, Red Shirt, Young Man Afraid of Horses, Bull Bear, and many other great Chiefs. The term Oglala means "they scatter their own," because the Oglala are the largest band of the Lakota which is comprised of six other bands.

The Reservation was established in 1878 after gold was discovered in the Black Hills. The treaty of 1868 made Western South Dakota as well as parts of North Dakota, Wyoming, and Nebraska into the originally reserved lands of the Great Sioux Nation. But, when the gold was discovered, the rules changed again, and the Lakota people were forced onto smaller reservations. South Dakota has nine reservations, with each tribe struggling to keep its own land base.

Poverty is a reality on Pine Ridge. The American Indian Relief Council reports that 69% of the population of Pine Ridge lives under the poverty line. There is a 60-80%

unemployment rate in Pine Ridge. Robert Grey Eagle, an Oglala lawyer, once stated that he believed the Oglala behave fairly well considering their situation. Imagine the Rapid City area operating with an 80% unemployment rate.

Lack of housing, jobs, and things for people to do cause hopelessness, and this drives people to drink and use drugs.

HISTORICAL EVENTS

Pine Ridge is home to Wound Knee, where there were two important events. One was the massacre of 1890, and the second was the American Indian Movement's stand against the unjust treatment of American Indians in the early 1970's. These two events are important to understand because they changed the history of America regarding the treatment of American Indians. During your stay, we hope to share the stories of these two events from a Lakota-Christian perspective.

RELIGION

There are numerous churches operating on the Pine Ridge Reservation. These churches are doing their best to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. There are different church organizations seeking to develop indigenous ministry, and some are further along than others. The Gospel Fellowship is an indigenous-led church where Lakota believers are seeking to make their own decisions.

There are over 50 Sundances held across the Pine Ridge due to a resurgence of the Lakota traditional ways of life. There are numerous other ceremonies taking place across the Reservation at different times during the year. Lakota beliefs center around the *Canumpa* or Pipe, and you may be able to see different ceremonies centering around the Pipe. We know that you will not be able to learn all of the ways of the Lakota people, but we hope that you can come with an attitude of respect. This is the only context in which we will be able to help each other learn more. Our goal is to help you know how you can assist the people of Pine Ridge, and these facts are meant to be a starter for the knowledge that you will gain when you come to the home of the Oglala people.