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Hill Country

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HILL COUNTRY. "Hill Country" is a vernacular term applied to a region including all or part of twenty-five counties near the geographical center of Texas. In the geomorphological sense, the Hill Country represents in large part a dissected plateau surface. It is bordered on the east and south by the [Balcones Escarpment](#), on the west by the relatively undissected [Edwards Plateau](#), and on the north by rolling plains and prairies. The elevations range from less than 1000 feet in the south and eastern areas of the Hill Country and generally rise toward the north and west to reach more than 2500 feet in Schleicher and Kerr counties, with most areas ranging between 1400 and 2200 feet. Lying in the transition zone between humid and semiarid climates, the Hill Country experiences both wet and dry years; at Fredericksburg eleven inches of precipitation was recorded in 1956 and forty-one inches the next year. The vegetation originally consisted of a parklike, open forest dominated by several types of oak, giving way in places to expanses of shinnery, to prairie, or to dense juniper (colloquially called cedar) brakes. Both mesquites and junipers have expanded as the environment has been disturbed. In the cultural sense the Hill Country has been a meeting ground of Indian, Spaniard, Mexican, hill southern Anglo, and northern European. The Apaches and their successors, the Comanches, left little imprint but did retard Spanish colonial activities in the region. As early as 1860 the partition of the Hill Country between the two groups that were to dominate it—hill southern Anglos and Germans—had been accomplished.

Between 1840 and 1850 significant numbers of settlers, mostly southern mountaineers, had been attracted to the Hill Country, particularly to Williamson, Hays, Comal, and Gillespie counties. Settlers from the mountain states of Tennessee, Arkansas, and Missouri composed the largest nativity groups within the rural, immigrant, Anglo-American population of these counties. The initial settlement of the remaining Hill Country counties occurred in the decade before the outbreak of the [Civil War](#), as migration into the hills continued on a larger scale. According to a count of the 1860 manuscript census the leading states of origin for the Anglo-American population were still Arkansas and Tennessee. In the 1880 census the trend remained the same, supporting the claim that migration from the Ozark, Ouachita, and Appalachian states was largely responsible for the settlement of the Hill Country.

But the southern mountaineers were not solely responsible for the peopling of the Hill Country. Germans, mainly hill Hessians and Lower Saxons, introduced in the middle 1840s by the Society of Nobles (see [ADELSVEREIN](#)), occupied a corridor stretching 100 miles northwestward from New Braunfels and San Antonio through Fredericksburg as far as Mason, along the axis of an old Indian route known as the [Pinta Trail](#), later called the Upper Emigrant Road. The towns of Fredericksburg, Comfort, Boerne, and Mason all bear a strong German cultural imprint, as do numerous neighboring hamlets and farms. By 1870 the population of Gillespie County was 86 percent German, Comal 79 percent, Kendall 62 percent, and Mason 56 percent. Each river valley in the German-settled portion of the Hill Country developed its own distinctive subculture, particularly in the religious sense. The Pedernales valley in Gillespie County is a Lutheran-Catholic enclave abounding in dance halls and ethnic clubs; the Llano valley in Mason and western Llano counties is dominated by German Methodists, who avoid dancing, drinking, and card playing; and the Guadalupe valley of Kendall County is the domain of freethinkers who maintain the only rural stronghold of agnosticism in Texas. Other European groups in the Hill Country include Silesian Poles, who settled at Bandera in the 1850s; Alsatians, who spread up from the Castroville area, following streams such as Hondo Creek; and Britishers, who came as sheepraisers to Kerr and Kendall counties. Blacks are largely absent in the Hill Country, though a few tiny freedmen colonies, such as Payton Colony in Blanco County, occur. Hispanics form a relatively small minority throughout the Hill Country.

In the late 1970s a study was made to determine the extent and intensity of the Hill Country as a perceptual region. Almost three-quarters of the people in the region so designated identified "Hill Country" as the popular name for the area. See also [ALSATIANS](#), [ENGLISH](#), [GERMANS](#), [POLES](#).

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Bibliography	Categories	Citation	Published
Terry G. Jordan, "Perceptual Regions in Texas," <i>Geographical Review</i> 68 (July 1978). Terry G. Jordan, "The Texan Appalachia," <i>Annals of the Association of American Geographers</i> 60 (September 1970).			



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