

# The Border



*“Power ... resides in the moment of transition from a past to a new state”  
(Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance,” 1841)*

Solitary Traveler, in a barren land, plots a course for tomorrow’s journey. Across days and borders, he has come north with spring, toward home. Tomorrow will be mostly Texas—San Antonio, Austin, Waco, the Dallas beltway, a wide curving route to the east towards Memphis. A possible objective for tomorrow night, Memphis, a stretching goal, past Texarkana first, and Little Rock, across Arkansas. Texarkana.

*Tex-* for Texas, *-ark-* for Arkansas, inconveniently divided by the border. Mexicali comes to mind, and maybe a gambling place called Cal-Neva, near Lake Tahoe. In an idle evening of paging through the atlas, fine print around the edges reveals some twenty more.

On such moments do our futures turn, on a single crux move, on a knife-edge of change.

After plundering place-name literature, post office histories, railroad timetables, Geological Survey records, state archives, historical societies, a hundred libraries, uncounted maps, and the backroads of the continent, the list of such places contains more than eighty—North American places at the boundaries of states, provinces, or nations, with names spliced together from the names of the two (or sometimes three) entities bounded. Call them Border-Name Places.

From this eccentric but essentially harmless obsession came explorations of physical and conceptual borders, edges, boundaries, frontiers, margins; inquiries into place names and their confection; discoveries about local histories and how borders have affected them; and experiences of travel to places untouristed and even vanished from living memory.