

## **Nature Adventures Module: What is a butte?**

(Highlighted words are found in the Glossary List)

Todd: When I was a little boy, my parents would take me on hikes, just down the road from where I lived, to the **buttes** to explore.

Terri: I grew up in southwestern Minnesota, and we didn't have buttes where I lived, just farmland. So when Todd would tell me stories about things he did as a child while exploring the buttes, it made me very curious, as to what exactly a butte was and why it was so fun to explore them!

Todd: A butte is an isolated hill, which means that often times, the land around it is flat. Buttes have steep sides and a small, flat top, perfect for exploring and perfect for a wide variety of wildlife to call home. Think of a butte as a sort of oasis in the middle of a prairie, that is often times home to critters you wouldn't find at the bottom of the butte, such as the short horned lizard and northern scorpions. Those creatures thrive there because they have adequate food sources, many places to hide, and they enjoy not being disturbed by a lot of people or cars. The top of the buttes are a whole new ecosystem to explore.

Terri: And how this **ecosystem** formed is fascinating. Buttes are formed by erosion when a cap of hard rock, often of volcanic origin, called cap rock, covers a layer of softer rock that is easily worn away. The hard rock doesn't erode but the soft rock around it wears down.

Todd: The word "butte" comes from a French word meaning "small hill". A butte is essentially a mountain that stands alone by itself without any other mountains connected to it. Think about a big mountain sitting in the middle of a giant field; that is a butte.

Terri: Buttes are fascinating natural masterpieces that are sure fun to explore.