

Section

2

Texas Cattle Trails

Main Ideas

1. The growing market for beef was profitable for many Texas ranchers.
2. Some of the most well-traveled trails included the Sedalia, Chisholm, Western, and Goodnight-Loving trails.
3. Life on the trail was difficult and often dangerous.

Why It Matters Today

Texas cattle drivers had an on-the-move occupation. Use current events sources to learn more about jobs that involve travel today.

Key Terms and People

- stockyards
- open range
- Sedalia Trail
- Chisholm Trail
- Western Trail
- Charles Goodnight
- remuda
- wrangler

The Story Continues

Abilene was just a dusty Kansas town until a businessman named Joseph McCoy decided to build a cattle market there. He formed a giant Wild West show that traveled by train to advertise his operations. The show featured trick riders and ropers as well as a 2,300-pound buffalo. Every time the train stopped, the performers and animals went into action. The show thrilled spectators. As word spread, many cattle buyers from the northeastern United States came to Abilene.



TEKS: 6A, 6B, 6C,
8A, 13A, 21A, 21B, 21C,
21D, 22A, 22C, 22D

myNotebook

Use the annotation tools in your eBook to take notes on Texas cattle trails and the expansion of the beef industry in Texas.



The Cattle Drives

Demand for beef outpaced supply in the Northeast. The region had a large population, and its cattle supply had been greatly reduced by the Civil War. But in Texas the supply of cattle was greater than the demand for beef. As a result, cattle that sold for \$3 or \$6 a head in Texas sold for \$38 in Kansas or \$80 in New York.

Such high prices convinced Texas ranchers that they could make large profits by raising more cattle. However, ranchers could not drive longhorns to eastern markets because of the distance and the many populated farm areas the herds would have to cross. By 1865, **stockyards**, or huge holding pens, and packing houses were opening in Chicago.



VIDEO

Cowboys

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Longhorns could endure heat and cold and were resistant to diseases such as Texas fever, making the breed well suited to life in Texas and on the trail.



Soon, more beef-processing plants were built farther west, in St. Louis and Kansas City. These plants were built to prepare the beef for shipment to cities in the North and East. Railroads connected cities in midwestern states such as Missouri with the larger cities in the Northeast. To reach these additional markets, Texas ranchers needed a way to get their cattle to the nearest railroad lines.

Cattle drives provided the answer. During the fall and winter, cattle grazed on the **open range**, or unfenced lands, of Texas. One rancher wrote, “Cattle are permitted to range . . . over a large surface of the country, thirty, forty, and even fifty miles in extent [size].” As spring approached, cowboys gathered cattle together in a roundup. Cowboys caught as many mavericks as possible and branded them to establish ownership of the animals. When the grass turned green in the spring, cowboys drove the cattle north. Along the way, the cattle grazed on the open range.

During one large cattle drive in 1866, cowboys moved about 260,000 cattle north over the **Sedalia Trail**, which became known as the Shawnee Trail. This trail led from South Texas through Indian Territory to Sedalia, Missouri. Toward the end of the trail, problems arose. In Missouri and eastern Kansas, there was little open range left—much of the land was farmed. As the huge herds passed through, farmers’ crops were sometimes trampled. The longhorns also infected many other cattle by giving them ticks that carried Texas fever. Farmers became angry as their cattle died. Kansas and Missouri had already passed laws in an attempt to stop the cattle drives, and farmers began to turn back the Texas herds. The future of Texas cattle drives seemed uncertain.

Reading Check Identifying Cause and Effect Why was there a national market for beef, and how did demand affect the Texas cattle industry?



VIDEO

Wild West:
Cattle Drive

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Image Credit: ©Michael Flippo/fotolia

★ The Chisholm and Western Trails

Entrepreneur Joseph McCoy stepped in with a solution. McCoy knew that rail lines were moving farther west—by early 1867 tracks were being built in Kansas. State legislators there passed a law allowing cattle drives west of farm areas. McCoy arranged for the building of a cattle market complete with holding pens and loading chutes in Abilene, Kansas. McCoy made many improvements to the small town. Before he began, Abilene was, in McCoy's words, "a very small dead place, consisting of about one dozen log huts." McCoy even bargained with the Kansas Pacific Railroad to get special rates for shipping cattle to Chicago. To drum up business, McCoy sent scouts southward to urge Texas ranchers to bring their cattle to Abilene.

In 1867, Texas cowboys herded about 35,000 longhorns over the **Chisholm Trail**. The route to Abilene was named after Jesse Chisholm, a fur trader. The child of a Cherokee woman, Chisholm blazed the original trail in the mid-1860s to trade with American Indians. His trail went through Indian Territory to Kansas. The Chisholm Trail was an ideal route for the Texas cattle drives because it was not near farms. Over the next few years, even more cowboys used this trail to move their herds to Abilene.



The Cattle Kingdom of Texas, 1865–1890

Interpreting Maps The use of cattle trails and railroads allowed Texas ranchers to sell their livestock in national markets.

Human Systems How did railroad technology and cattle drives encourage an interdependence between Texas ranching and out-of-state cattle markets?



Interpreting Visuals

Driving cattle. Cattle need plenty of grass and fresh water to survive. **How do you think cowboys addressed these needs on long cattle drives?**

In 1871 some 600,000 to 700,000 longhorns arrived in the cow town. At the end of the drive, most ranchers sold the animals for a good profit and paid the cowboys in cash. Weary cowboys spent their hard-earned money on hot baths, clean clothes, and good food. The large number of rowdy cowboys sometimes made cattle towns violent—at least until regular governments could be set up. Law-enforcement officials worked hard to keep the peace in the rough cattle towns. Cowboy Andy Adams warned that the Kansas cow town of Dodge City had strict law enforcement. “You can wear your six-shooters into town, but you’d better leave them at the first place you stop.”

Farms and towns eventually sprang up along the Chisholm Trail as Texas Indians were pushed farther west. Texas ranchers soon needed a new trail across the open range to the west of settled territory. The **Western Trail** was forged in 1874. The route ran north from Kerrville to Fort Griffin—well to the west of the new settlements.

The Western Trail crossed the Red River and continued through Indian Territory, ending at Dodge City in southwestern Kansas. By 1879 the Western Trail was the primary route for Texas cattle being moved north. This trail was very successful and was used until the closing of the open range.

Reading Check Analyzing Information Why did Texas ranchers stop using the Chisholm Trail and begin using the Western Trail?

★ The Goodnight-Loving Trail

Not all of the cattle drives ended at railroad stockyards in Kansas. Ranchers also saw opportunities to profit by supplying cattle to military posts, mining camps, and American Indian reservations. **Charles Goodnight** and Oliver Loving were two cattlemen who looked beyond the eastern markets. In 1866 Goodnight and Loving combined their herds and set out for Fort Sumner, New Mexico. Their route became known as the Goodnight-Loving Trail. The trail ran from Young County west of Fort Worth, through San Angelo, across West Texas, north through New Mexico, and into Colorado.

Over time, this trail became one of the most-traveled routes in the Southwest. Ranchers stopped using the trail when railroads came to Texas and eliminated the need for long cattle drives to rail lines. Cowboy H. P. Cook participated in many drives to American Indian reservations in the West. He described his experiences on one trip:

TEXAS VOICES

“The trip must have taken about six weeks going and returning. It was really tough, sleeping on the ground this trip, it was so wet and cold. I had just a couple of cotton quilts, and by morning there wasn’t a dry thread in them, it was so wet. I used my saddle for a pillow. We would move the fire over and flop down on the ground where the fire had been, which would stay warm for a while.”

—H. P. Cook, quoted in *Texas Cowboys*, edited by Jim Lanning

Reading Check Finding the Main Idea Why did Goodnight and Loving blaze a cattle trail?

★ Life on the Trail

A typical cattle drive had 8 to 12 cowboys to care for 2,000 to 3,000 cattle. Mary Bunton, one of the few women to go on a trail drive, remembered the sight of so many cattle on the move. “I would turn in my saddle and look back, and it would look as if the entire face of the earth was just a moving mass of heads and horns.”

All those cattle did not belong to just one rancher. Cowboys usually represented many ranchers and supervised many herds on each cattle drive. Some ranchers drove their own cattle, but most hired a drover, or a cattle drive operator. John Henry Stephens, a well-known drover, made large sums of money herding other people’s cattle to market. Cattle-herding outfits also included a trail boss, or a drive leader.

Each cowboy used several horses in relays of two or three, so that a fresh mount was always available when needed. The herd of these animals was known as the **remuda**, the Spanish word for “remount.” A professional horse handler called a **wrangler** cared for the crew’s horses.



BIOGRAPHY

Charles Goodnight (1836–1929) Born in Illinois, Charles Goodnight moved with his family to Texas at age nine. As a young man, Goodnight entered the cattle business, managing a herd of wild cattle. In 1860 he served as a scout for the Texas Rangers. During the Civil War, he served in the Frontier Regiment, patrolling the Texas Panhandle. The knowledge he gained about the region was useful when he helped establish the JA Ranch. Goodnight soon became one of the most successful ranchers in Texas. **How did Goodnight’s experiences help his ranching career?**

Literature

**Andy Adams and
Cowboy Stories**

Some cowboys wrote about their adventures on cattle drives. Andy Adams wrote *The Log of a Cowboy*, in which he recalled a common but dangerous event—a stampede. “The cattle jumped from the bed ground and were off like a shot.” The cowboys managed to calm the cattle, but their horses were a different matter. “The horses . . . gave us a long, hard run.”

What does *The Log of a Cowboy* reveal about the cowboys’ way of life?

The camp cook was another important member of the drive crew. Good food meant happy cowboys. The cook traveled ahead of the herd and had meals prepared when the rest of the outfit arrived. The cook’s supplies were carried in the chuck wagon, or the covered supply wagon. A day on the trail began before sunrise. After a hot breakfast of bacon, beans, and biscuits, the cowboys would choose their horses from the remuda and start to move the cattle.

Two highly experienced cowboys called point men guided the herd, while other cowboys rode on the sides of the herd. Drag men traveled behind the herd. This was the drive’s worst position because drag men “ate” dust the whole trip.

On a good day, the herd would move 15 to 18 miles. After hours in the saddle—about 5:00 P.M. or later—the crew stopped for the night. The dinner menu was usually beef or pork, but sometimes included “son-of-a-gun” stew. This thick soup was made from cow brain, heart, kidneys, liver, and tongue.

Trail drives were difficult and often dangerous. The sunshine was hot, and water was sometimes in short supply. Prairie fires swept across the plains, sometimes moving fast enough to overtake a cowboy on a galloping horse. Cowboys encountered bad weather, and rustlers tried to steal the livestock. In his diary, one cowboy described an unpleasant cattle drive.

TEXAS VOICES

“Awful night . . . not having a bit to eat for 60 hours . . . Tired. . . Oh! what a night—Thunder Lightning & rain—we followed our Beeves [cattle] all night as they wandered about. . . We Hauled cattle out of the Mud with oxen half the day. . . My back is Blistered bad. . . Found a Human skeleton on the Prairie to day.”

—George Duffield, quoted in *The Cowboys*, by William H. Forbis

Reading Check Categorizing Who made up a typical cattle-driving crew, and what were their responsibilities?

Analyzing Primary Sources**Making Generalizations**

and Predictions Why might cowboys like George Duffield have continued to go on cattle drives despite the hardships?

**Section 2 Review**

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ONLINE QUIZ

1. Define and explain:

- stockyards
- open range
- remuda
- wrangler

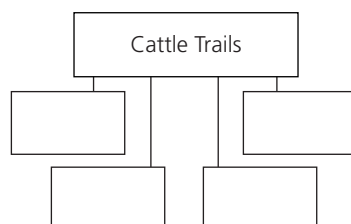
2. Identify and explain

the historical significance of:

- Sedalia Trail
- Chisholm Trail
- Western Trail
- Charles Goodnight

3. Categorizing

Use a graphic organizer like the one below to show the four main trails and where they began and ended.

**4. Finding the Main Idea**

- How did national demand for beef affect the cattle industry in Texas?
- Explain how expansion on the frontier and railroads affected the different cattle trails.

5. Writing and Critical Thinking

myWriteSmart

Summarizing Imagine that you are a cowboy on a cattle drive. Write a letter to a friend describing the realities of life on the trail.

Consider the following:

- your daily routine
- the many dangers on the trail