

## The Long Drive: Will You Re-Up Next Year?

The glory days of the American cowboy were like a shooting star – bright, fast-moving, and short-lived. They began at the end of the Civil War in 1865 and ended, in part, with the introduction of barbed-wire fencing, which closed down the open range in the late 1880s.

At the heart of these glory days was an event known as the long drive. During the Civil War, many cattle ranches in south and central Texas went untended. With the young men away at war, domesticated **longhorn cattle** drifted into brush country, joined wild cattle, and got down to the business of making calves. By the end of the war, there were about five million longhorns, many unbranded and unclaimed. Texans returning from the war saw an opportunity. So, too, did a few thousand others – ex-soldiers from the South and North, ex-slaves, Mexican *vaqueros*, a few Englishmen, and some Native Americans. Ranchers with money hired **brushpoppers** who chased down the cattle and branded them. Herds were created and walked north to railroad towns in Kansas or to northern ranges for breeding and fattening. From the railroad towns, most cattle were shipped off to **packing houses** in Chicago, where they were slaughtered and butchered. Beef soon replaced pork as America's favorite meat dish.

To walk cattle from south Texas to Kansas or Wyoming generally took three to four months. A drive might have 2,000 longhorn cattle, ten cowboys, a wrangler to tend the horses, a cook, and a trail boss. The first day of the drive was usually a hard push. The cattle were

nervous about leaving familiar ground and were more likely to stray or be spooked into a stampede. After a day or two, the herd would settle and a rhythm could be established. At the head was a lead bull, often a veteran of earlier drives who, with guidance from the trail boss, marched slowly but dependably north. By 1870, the Chisholm and other trails had been walked by hundreds of thousands of cattle, and the paths were well-worn and easy to follow.

The end of the trail for many Texas cowboys was a Kansas **cow town** like Abilene, Ellsworth,

or Dodge City. There, the saloon business bustled and a number of painted ladies with names like Big Nose Kate and Squirrel Tooth Alice were ready to help celebrate an evening. Gunfights were few, but cautious trail bosses often allowed cowboys only a couple of hours in town to get a shower and a shave. Then it was back to the cows.

The documents in this Mini-Q give us a glimpse of the long-drive experience. It should be said at

the outset that the long drive did not become a regular event in the lives of most cowboys. For many, one trip was enough. Some found work on northern ranges and stayed there; others moved on to new adventures. In fact, only about a third of long-drive cowboys returned to Texas to do it all over again the next year. But this Mini-Q concerns you, a cowboy fresh from the trail. Examine the documents that follow and then answer the question: *The long drive: Will you re-up next year?*



## Background Essay Questions

1. About how many years did the glory days of the cowboy period last?
2. Explain how barbed wire could have ended the days of the long drive.
3. What part of what state was the original home of most of the longhorn cattle?
4. Why did many of the long drives end in Kansas?
5. Why was the first day of a cattle drive often the longest and the hardest?
6. About what fraction of trail cowboys signed up for a second long drive?

7. Define or explain each of these terms:

longhorn cattle

*vaquero*

brushpopper

packing house

cow town

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### Timeline

**1865** – Civil War ends.

**1867** – First large Texas longhorn herds arrive in Abilene, Kansas.

**1868** – Ice cream soda is invented and first sold in San Antonio.

**1873** – American Buffalo Soldiers first serve in Texas.

**1876** – First large panhandle cattle ranch is established by Charles Goodnight.

**1883** – Texas panhandle cowboys go on strike.

**1890** – Days of the long drive are about over.

## Understanding the Question and Pre-Bucketing

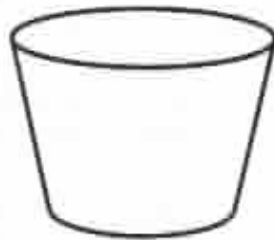
### Understanding the Question

1. What is the analytical question asked by this Mini-Q?
2. What word or words in the question need explanation or rephrasing?
3. Rewrite the question in your own words.

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### Pre-Bucketing

**Directions:** We suggest a two-step bucketing process. First, create two starter buckets that identify the opposing positions on the question. Then, pick the position you feel contains the strongest evidence and create three "reason" buckets for that position.

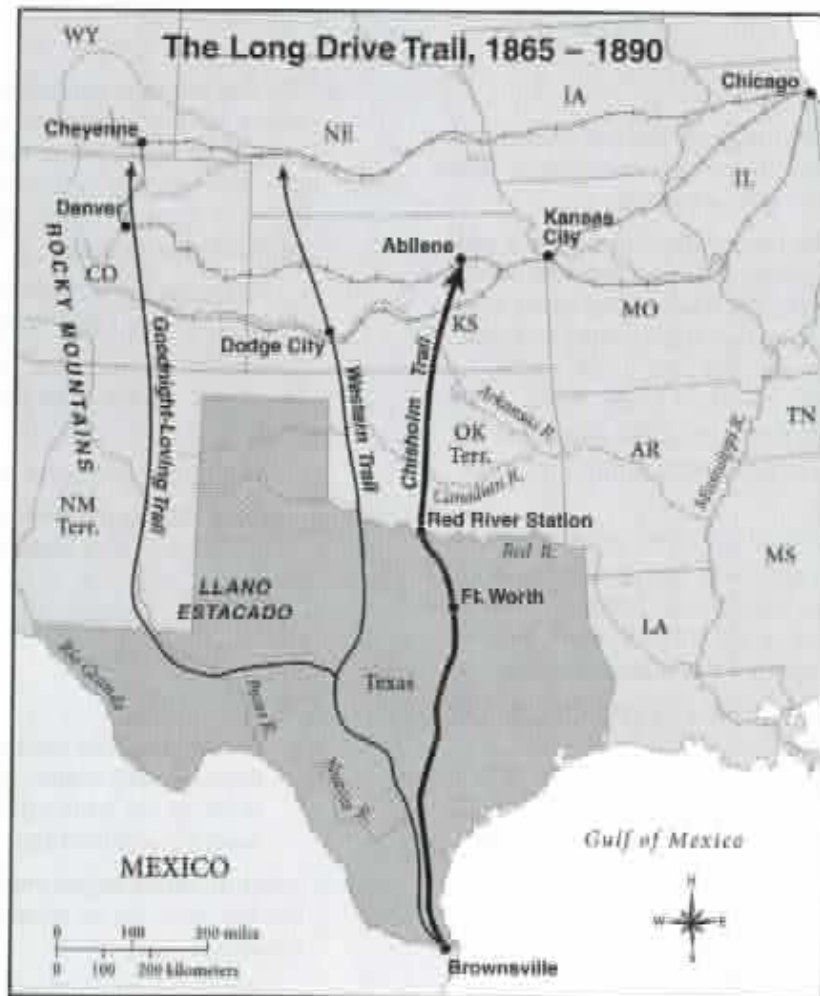


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## Document A

Source: Map created from various sources.



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### Document Analysis

1. From the Background Essay, why did the cattle trails tend to begin in south Texas?
2. A typical cattle drive covered about 15 miles per day. Figuring a six-day week (no work on the Sabbath) and no delays, how many weeks did it take to go from Brownsville to Abilene?
3. How did cattle get from Abilene or Dodge City to Chicago?
4. Using facts and inferences drawn from the map, what are some reasons a Texas cowboy might want to re-up for another cattle drive next year?
5. Using facts and inferences drawn from the map, what are some reasons a Texas cowboy might not want to re-up for another cattle drive next year?

## Document B

Source: Chart compiled from various sources.

## Cowboys by the Numbers

Estimated number of cowboys in early 1870s	40,000
Approximate US population in early 1870s	40,000,000
Number of cattle trailed north from Texas, 1867 to 1887	5,500,000
Average number of years a man worked as a cowboy	7
Fraction of cowboys who were Hispanic	1/9
Fraction of cowboys who were African American	2/9
Typical monthly pay for a Texas cowboy on a long drive	\$30
Typical monthly pay for a Texas teacher in 1870s	\$40 - \$50
Price of a new Stetson hat in Abilene, Kansas	\$10
Number of cattle on typical long drive out of Texas	2,000
Average number of cowboys per long drive	10
Hours of night watch per night on long drive	2
Number of gallons of water drunk per steer, per day	30
Pounds of a weight loss by one steer in hot night stampede	50
Price per steer for range cattle in south Texas in 1870s	\$8
Average market price per steer at Kansas railhead in 1870s	\$30
Average cost per steer to drive cattle north	\$2.50

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## Document Analysis

1. Out of every 1,000 Americans in the early 1870s, how many were cowboys?
2. What evidence is there that about one-third of cowboys were non-white?
3. Use the average numbers above. Let's say that in 1879 an owner drove 1,000 head of cattle from south Texas to market in Dodge City but lost 100 cattle to stampedes, drowning, and disease. What was his profit or loss for the entire venture?
4. What numbers might encourage a Texas cowboy to re-up for another cattle drive? Explain.
5. What numbers might discourage re-upping? Explain.

## Document C

**Source:** Baylis John Fletcher, *Up the Trail in '79*.

**Note:** Baylis Fletcher was born on July 4, 1859, and grew up in the ranch country around Lexington, Texas. He was 19 when he signed on to this cattle drive from the Corpus Christi area through Dodge City to Cheyenne, Wyoming.

We had collected about two thousand cattle and were ready to hit the trail. Before starting out on our long journey, however, we must road-brand our cattle. Our road brand was TL, connected. To burn these letters on the sides of two thousand cattle, we must first drive them into the customary chute, or narrow lane, just wide enough for one cow to squeeze through and long enough to hold about twenty-five animals. After we had branded the imprisoned cattle by poking the red-hot branding iron through the fence of the chute, we cropped their tails as an additional mark ... that they were trail cattle....

The branding took two days of hard work.... Then ... we were ready to start north. ... On or about the first day of June [1879] we came in sight of the Red River Valley,

beyond which we could see the Indian Territory. The country ahead was then a wilderness, without a human habitation in view of the Chisholm Trail to the line of Kansas, nearly three hundred miles away by the meanderings of our route.

... We were not alone on the trail. The big drive northward was at its height, and that spring there were probably 500,000 cattle and horses moving up the ... trail from south Texas. Often [in northern Texas] we had been driven by angry men, with ferocious dogs, from tract to tract of grazing land, but ... the cattle got enough to live upon. The Indian Territory was the cow-puncher's paradise. Now we would have ... no more obstructing fences, but one grand expanse of free grass. It was a delightful situation to contemplate.

### Document Analysis

1. Why were trail cattle branded?
2. Was Fletcher nervous about entering Indian Territory? What is your evidence?
3. What were the "angry men" in north Texas probably angry about?
4. What evidence in Fletcher's account makes you more likely to re-up for another drive?
5. What evidence in this account makes you more likely not to re-up?

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## Document D

**Source:** Photo by Erwin Smith, who chronicled many aspects of life in the Old West.



A herd crosses a stream near Roaring Springs, Texas, early 1900s.

### Document Analysis

1. What evidence is there in the photo that the cattle are thirsty?
2. About how many cattle do you think are in this drive? On what do you base your estimate?
3. Cattle can smell water up to ten miles away. For cowboys in charge of the cattle, is this a good thing or a bad thing?
4. Is there anything about this document that makes you more likely to sign up for the drive next year?
5. Is there anything about this document that makes you less likely to sign up for a drive next year?

## Document E

**Source:** James H. Cook, *Longhorn Cowboy*, G. P. Putnam, 1942.

**Note:** James Cook was born in 1857 in Michigan. The son of a sailor, Cook left home when his mother died and, at age 15, soon found himself catching wild cattle in the thorny brush country in south Texas. Riding mostly with Indian and Mexican *vaqueros*, Cook took well to this dangerous work, known as brushpopping.

(T)he time had come for the drive to begin.... For months the cow catchers in their various camps had worked gathering cattle over a large area.... It was not an easy task to round up such a herd ... but with our large outfit of skilled riders, we soon had a herd of 2,500 thrown together....

During the first year I was on the trail, every river from the Red to the Arkansas was "big swimming." We were fortunate in having no serious accidents to our men while crossing swollen streams, but we lost a number of cattle and horses by drowning.

Bad thunder and hail storms added difficulty. At times we went for days with scarcely a wink of sleep because of winds and rain which made the cattle hard to control. In some places on the trail the ground was boggy from long spells of rain, and we had to ... snatch a little sleep as opportunity permitted. When three riders were free at a time, they would go a little distance from the cattle, dismount, and lie down in the form of a triangle, each man using his neighbor's ankles for a pillow to keep his head out of the mud and water.

... It was easy to drift into sleep, jogging around the herd. My method of combating sleepiness was to mix chewing tobacco with saliva and rub it on my eyelids.... Above all else in the mind of the cowboy ran the thought, "Stay with the cattle; hold the herd."

When weather was bad we scarcely had enough to eat. Buffalo chips, our only fuel on the prairie, would become so soaked with rain during days of storm that we could not get enough dry ones to make a little coffee, let alone bake bread.

Before clear days came we had an experience with a tornado which I wouldn't care to repeat. Arriving at the Canadian River in Indian Territory ... I seen such queer-looking clouds.... I was on herd with the horses. Everybody but the cook and me went with the cattle. We were as nearly ready as we could make ourselves for the oncoming storm when hailstones began to strike all about us.... The stones were hammering my head so fiercely that it seemed to be on fire....

Suddenly I came to a gulch fifteen feet deep.... I could neither turn my horse nor stop him. Over we went, with one hundred badly frightened horses at our heels.... Water was pouring down the little gulch where I lay. I had to get out of the way quickly or be drowned, for the water soon rose to seven or eight feet. I crawled to the top of the bank and drifted with the storm, the hailstones raising blood blisters on my face and hands.... Any minute I knew I could expect some huge hailstone to knock me senseless; if it did, I would drown in the icy lake at my feet. [I was] praying one minute for the Lord to save me, and wondering the next if my body would ever be found.

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### Document Analysis

1. List five challenges James Cook faced on his drive north.
2. Is there any evidence in the document that Cook re-upped for another drive?
3. What in Cook's account would most make you want to re-up?
4. What in Cook's account would cause you not to re-up?