

Summary: Cattle Ranchers

Texas Cattle

In the 1860s, millions of longhorn cattle lived in Texas. They were strong animals. They ate grass and they did not need a lot of water. Cowhands made sure the cows did not run away. They herded the cattle. Cowhands burned brands into the cattles' skin. The cowhands knew which cattle they owned by looking at these marks.

Cattle ranchers could not make much money selling their cattle in Texas. There was a big supply, or lots, of cattle. There were not many people to buy them. There was not a big demand. The price of cattle was low. The cattle ranchers herded their cattle onto trains. They sent the cattle to cities in the North and East. There were many people in the cities who wanted to buy beef and leather. The demand was high. The supply was low. This meant the cattle were worth more in the cities.

The Cattle Drives

Cattle ranchers needed to get their cattle to railheads. They were often hundreds of miles from the cattle ranches. Ranchers hired cowhands to take their cattle on cattle drives to the railheads. In a cattle drive, cowhands rode on horseback next to the herd of cattle to make them move. The cattle drives had to stay near rivers. This way the cattle had water to drink. The work was dirty, hard, and dangerous.

The cattle drives ended in the late 1880s for three reasons. First, there was the invention of barbed wire. This wire had sharp points on it. Settlers used barbed wire to make fences on their property. The fences blocked the cattle trails. Second, more railroads were built. Railheads were closer to the ranches. Ranchers did not need to send the cattle on long cattle drives. Third, by the mid-1880s, there was not enough grass to feed all the cattle. Sheep ranchers wanted the land for their flocks.



Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

demand *noun*, the amount of something that people want to buy at a certain price

supply *noun*, the amount of something that people want to sell at a certain price

railhead *noun*, a town where railroad tracks begin or end

barbed wire *noun*, wire with sharp points on it



After You Read

REVIEW Why did Texas cattle ranchers want to sell their animals in the East and North? Highlight the sentence that tells about selling cattle in cities.

REVIEW What led to the end of the big cattle drives? Circle three reasons why cattle drives ended.