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## History

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### The development of cattle ranching

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**Cowboys and cattle ranchers were the first group of European settlers to move permanently onto the Great Plains. They did so, to a degree, by adopting or copying many of the ways of the Native Americans. Why and how did cattle ranching develop on the Great Plains?**

#### Cattle ranching - a brief history

##### 1820-1865: Origins in Texas

Ranching first started in Texas, with ranches mostly manned by Mexican cowboys called **vaqueros**.

In 1836 Texan ranchers drove many Mexicans out, and claimed the cattle left behind.

The Civil War started in 1861, and Texans went off to fight. The cattle **roamed free** as huge herds grew up. On returning home, the Texans started rounding them up and driving them to sell in places such as New Orleans and California.



Cowboy driving cattle to market

##### 1865-1870: The 'long drives' - first 'open range' ranch

Realising that there was a great demand for beef in the north of the USA, the Texans drove their cattle north on a **long drive** to Sedalia in Missouri, where they were loaded onto trains for Chicago.

Two Texas ranchers, Charles Goodnight and Oliver Loving, pioneered a second trail, to Denver in Colorado, where they sold their cattle to gold miners.

In 1868, a rancher named John Iliff (the 'cattle-king of the northern plains') won the contract to supply beef to the Sioux, who had been forced onto a reservation in the Black Hills.

A safer drive (the Chisholm Trail) was established to Abilene. This was set up by Joseph McCoy as a 'cow-town', with railroad stockyards (and numerous saloons where the cowboys could spend their wages).

John Iliff was the first rancher to set up an 'open range' ranch - in Wyoming in 1867.



Map of the cattle trails

### 1870-1885: The 'open range'

There were huge areas of 'open range' - unfenced land which was free for anyone to use.

Charles Goodnight is reputed to have invented the *crazy quilt* (by buying small patches of land here and there over an area, he could effectively control all of it). Refrigeration cars on trains opened a world-wide market for beef.

By 1885, just 35 **cattle-barons** owned 8 million hectares of range, and owned perhaps 1.5 million cattle.



A Cowboy looks out onto the Plains

### 1885-1890: The end of the 'open range'

Ranchers had **over-grazed** the plains. Overstocking had also led to a fall in prices. In spring 1886 there was a drought, followed by a scorching hot summer (up to 43°C). This was followed by a winter storm in January 1887, in which the temperature dropped to -43°C. Half the cattle on the plains died in a single year.

More and more homesteaders were coming onto the plains, and fencing off their farms with barbed wire (patented in 1874).



Two cowboys construct a fence

### Crazy quilt

A system, used by cattle ranchers, of picking a number of choice pieces of land to buy within a larger area - which eventually means the buyer controls the whole area.