



Cattle Drives versus Roundups Grades K-5

Contact Information – Grant-Kohrs Ranch NHS Education team grko_education@nps.gov

Feature Description - Lesson Overview

The Open Range Cattle Era helped to shape life in the American West during the late 19th century, lasting from about 1866-1900. Ranching activities are defined by the seasons of the year and the life cycles of the livestock. For cattle ranchers in the Open Range Cattle Era, two practices became routine for cowboys, the cattle drive and the roundup. In this lesson, students will learn about cattle drives and roundups, what they were and their importance to the Open Range Cattle Era.

Tags

Open Range, cattle, cowboys, livestock

Duration

60 minutes

Essential Questions

How does studying the past help us understand how the decisions and actions of individuals and groups in the past shape the ideas and actions of our world today?

Learning objectives

Students will be able to:

- Explain what a cattle drive and roundup were and their importance in the Open Range Cattle Era
- Describe the similarities and differences between these two seasonal ranching practices
- Understand the importance of individuals in a team with diverse skills and knowledge working together to achieve goals

Thinking Skills

Remembering, Analyzing, Evaluating

Background information needed for this lesson plan

The Open Range Cattle Era was a time of huge growth and development across the American West. Ranchers in Texas started moving the wild longhorns towards the cities in the north and the East Coast where beef was not as easy to obtain and was therefore sold at a higher price. If the Texas longhorns could get to those cities, the ranchers could make a profit. The problem was moving the cattle. In the early days of cattle ranching, the only choice was to move them by foot, walking from one place to the next. As the railroads inched their way west across the Great Plains, a new option developed for Texas ranchers: move the cattle north to Kansas and put them on a train. Finally, ranchers started moving their herds of cattle to

the northern plains where huge open ranges of vast public lands were available to let cattle graze for another year or two before they were sold. The movement of the cattle from one location to another was a cattle drive. They could last for a few weeks to several months, depending on where the cattle needed to be moved. For example, a drive from Texas to the Kansas railroads averaged about 2-3 months, while the drives to Montana took about six months to complete.

Roundups were another important part of ranching in the American West but differed from the cattle drives. Roundups were held within a specific rangeland area and were not used to move cattle from one point to another. Instead, roundups were the process of gathering and collecting all the cattle grazing in that specific area. Roundups took place twice a year, in the spring and in the fall. The spring roundup was the opportunity to gather all the calves together to get them branded and counted so a rancher knew an estimate of how many calves were born that year. The fall roundups were primarily used to determine which of the steers were ready to ship out to sell to the meat packing plants. The time it took to complete a roundup varied, depending on the acreage which needed to be ridden by the cowboys to find all the cattle. In the Open Range Cattle Era, there were no fences to keep livestock contained in a pasture, and they were free to roam for miles and miles. Cowboys had to ride all this land searching for the cattle on their horses, they had to know the land well, and where animals might be found or places where they might hide. Roundups could take a few weeks or a couple of months to complete.

Cowboys used a variety of tools and techniques which came from diverse cultural and social traditions. The roots of the Open Range technique of ranching comes from the Spanish in Mexico. The tools of the vaqueros, from lariats and saddles to the vocabulary cowboys used (chaps, lasso, corral, etc.), came to the United States from Mexico into Texas. Black cowboys, such as Nat Love, were former slaves who learned how to herd and manage livestock while they were slaves on plantations and ranches. American Indians knowledge of the plains, from the geography and weather of the plains to the movement of herds of animals and horses influenced the actions of the cowboys. The pooling of this diverse cultural knowledge and traditions came together in the Open Range cowboy, the language he used when speaking about his work and life, the tools he used and the techniques he used to do his job herding livestock.

Vocabulary

Merriam-Webster Dictionary definitions

- Cowboy – one who tends cattle or horses
- Trail Boss – one in charge of a trail herd
- Wrangler – a ranch hand who takes care of the saddle horses
- Chuck wagon – a wagon carrying supplies and provisions for cooking (as on a ranch)
- Cattle Drive – the process of moving a large herd of cattle from one location to another more distant location (example – from Texas to Kansas)
- Roundup – the act or process of collecting animals (such as cattle) by riding around them and driving them in
- Stampede – a wild headlong rush or flight of frightened animals

Standards

NCSS Standard 2.C. Identify and describe selected historical periods and patterns of change within and

across cultures

NCSS Standard 4.A. Articulate personal connections to time, place, and social/cultural systems

NCSS Standard 4.B. Identify, describe, and express appreciation for the influences of various historical and contemporary cultures on an individual's daily life

Common Core Standard CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-12.1 Write arguments focused on *discipline-specific content*

Common Core Standard CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-12.2 Write informative/explanatory text, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/experiments, or technical processes

Materials Needed

- The Chuckwagon Virtual Field Trip video on the Grant-Kohrs Ranch NHS Education website
- Copies of the student worksheet – Cattle Drives versus Roundups

Procedures

Lesson Hook/ Introduction 5 minutes

Activate student's prior knowledge by asking them if they have ever herded some animals. Maybe they have more than one pet and they have had to help get their pets to come to the same room. Have students ever heard someone say that a job or task was "like trying to herd cats?" This phrase is often said about a job that is very hard to do since cats love to do what they want and not what people want them to do. Herding animals can be very challenging and was a critical skill for cowboys to learn.

Discussion 10 minutes

Cowboys used different techniques to herd animals depending on whether they were moving cattle in a drive or whether they were rounding up the livestock. How did the cowboys learn these techniques and to use these tools? How would their tools and techniques of herding animals have changed from doing a cattle drive to a roundup? What changes might have developed over the course of the Open Range Cattle Era in their tools and techniques to herd animals?

The techniques and practices they used came from a variety of cultural traditions which reflected the diversity of the cowboy's themselves. Some of these include the knowledge and practices of the Mexican vaqueros and the American Indians. What techniques and tools used by cowboys have roots in diverse cultural traditions? Example: lariats and certain types of saddles come from the Mexican vaqueros, as well as some of the vocabulary used by cowboys. American Indians knowledge of the land and where herds would graze helped cowboys learn how to ride the range, and management of livestock and horses.

Video 12 minutes

Watch the Chuck wagon Virtual Field Trip video found on the Grant-Kohrs Ranch NHS Education website. This video is approximately 12 minutes long.

Discussion 5 minutes

Review and discuss the information presented in the video, including what a drive and a roundup was, their purposes and importance to the Open Range Cattle Era. Why was it important for the individual cowboys to work together? What would have happened if one of the cowboys was seriously injured and could not do their job or if they quit and left their job? How would this have impacted the outfit or ranch?

Student Activity 20 minutes

Students will complete a worksheet with a Venn Diagram comparing and contrasting the cattle drives and the roundups. Next, they will look at some historic quotes and photographs and determine which ones are about cattle drives and which ones are about roundups. For the historic photos, looking at the key details in the photographs will be essential to identifying them. If the chuckwagon cook is making pies or foods that would take a long time to make, then it is likely a roundup, since the chuck wagon didn't move every day. This is just one example of the type of detail in the photo which might help show what the activity is.

Concluding Discussion

Where in our society today can we see or experience the influence of cowboys? Clothing? Music? Vocabulary words/terms we use today? Are any of their techniques or tools still used today?

Assessment

Student worksheets can be used for assessment. The accuracy of the historical facts and details students include in their Venn Diagrams, and correctly identifying the historical sources as drives or roundups can be used to gauge student's learning. An answer key is included with this lesson plan.

For More Information

Abbott, E. C. "Teddy Blue" and Helena Huntington Smith. *We Pointed Them North: Recollections of a Cowpuncher*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. 1939.

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Adams, Ramon F. *Come an' Get It: The Story of the Old Cowboy Cook*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press. 1952.

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Dary, David. *Cowboy Culture: A Saga of Five Centuries*. Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas. 1989.

Dykstra, Robert R. *The Cattle Towns*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. 1968.

Kohrs, Conrad. *Conrad Kohrs: An Autobiography*. Edited by Conrad Kohrs Warren. Deer Lodge, Montana: Platen Press. 1977.

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