



# The Cattle Kingdom

## Objectives

1. Explain how the cattle industry began.
2. Describe the life of a cowhand on the trail.
3. Discuss the myth of the Wild West.
4. Identify reasons for the end of the cattle boom.

## Prepare to Read

### Reading Skill

**Use Example Clues** Writers may offer clues to a word's meaning by giving examples. Consider this sentence: "Canines such as poodles and spaniels make good companions." The examples show that *canines* means "dogs." A writer may describe an example in depth or tell what something does to help you visualize the unfamiliar word. Look for the phrases *such as* and *for example*.

### Vocabulary Builder

#### High-Use Words

persist, p. 591

myth, p. 593

#### Key Terms

open range, p. 590

cattle drive, p. 590

vaquero, p. 592

cow town, p. 592

cattle kingdom, p. 593

**★ Background Knowledge** You have read how Native Americans were forced onto reservations. Now, you will learn how ranchers created a cattle industry that supplied beef to the nation.

## Main Idea

The coming of railroads gave western ranchers a way to get cattle to distant markets.



### Use Example Clues

What is an example of an open range? What does this term mean?

## The Rise of the Cattle Industry

For years, wild cattle wandered the open range, or unfenced land, of Texas. Called longhorns for their broad horns, they needed almost no care. They survived on prairie grass and watering holes.

**Means and Markets** The herds of cattle had grown from strays lost by Spanish ranchers. As American settlers moved in, they set up new ranches. But they did not bother to round up the stray herds because they had no means of getting the cattle to distant markets.

As railroads swept across the Plains in the 1860s, Texans at last saw a way to reach those markets. Protein-rich beef was in demand to feed city dwellers in the East and miners and soldiers in the West.

**The Long Drives** Ranchers began rounding up the cattle in the 1860s. They hired cowhands—skilled riders who know how to herd cattle—to move the cattle to rail lines in Kansas, Missouri, and Wyoming. Some rail lines were as far away as 1,000 miles.

Spring was an ideal time to begin a cattle drive—the herding and moving of cattle over long distances. Grass grew tall, and rivers flowed full from spring rains. The work was so demanding that cowhands brought a number of horses so that each day a fresh one would be available.

The long drives lasted two to three months. They followed well-worn trails. To the east lay the famous Chisholm Trail from San Antonio, Texas, to Abilene, Kansas. To the west, the Goodnight-Loving Trail led to rail towns in Wyoming. In just one year, as many as 600,000 cattle might be moved north.

**Checkpoint** Why did cattle drives cover long distances?

## Life on the Trail

Life on the trail was hard and dangerous. The long cattle drives tested the nerve and skill of every cowhand.

**A Risky Ride** Andy Adams had driven many herds north. Never before had he seen cattle going blind with thirst. All he could do was “let them pass.” When the crazed cattle finally sniffed out water and drank, their sight returned.

Cowhands such as Andy Adams kept the herds together as the cattle moved along the trails. The cowhands developed nerves of steel, staying calm even in times of extreme stress. Trip after trip, they persisted in performing their exciting but dangerous job.

Herding cattle was certainly risky. A lightning bolt could send a herd stampeding in all directions. Swift river currents sometimes carried the longhorns away, and cowhands would have to struggle to get the panicked animals back on solid ground. Cowhands also fought grass fires, pulled the cattle from swamps, and chased off thieves.

## Main Idea

Cowhands, working long hours for low pay, learned skills developed earlier by Spanish and Mexican vaqueros.

## Vocabulary Builder

**persist** (per SIHST) v. to endure; to continue in the face of difficulty

## Cattle Trails in the West

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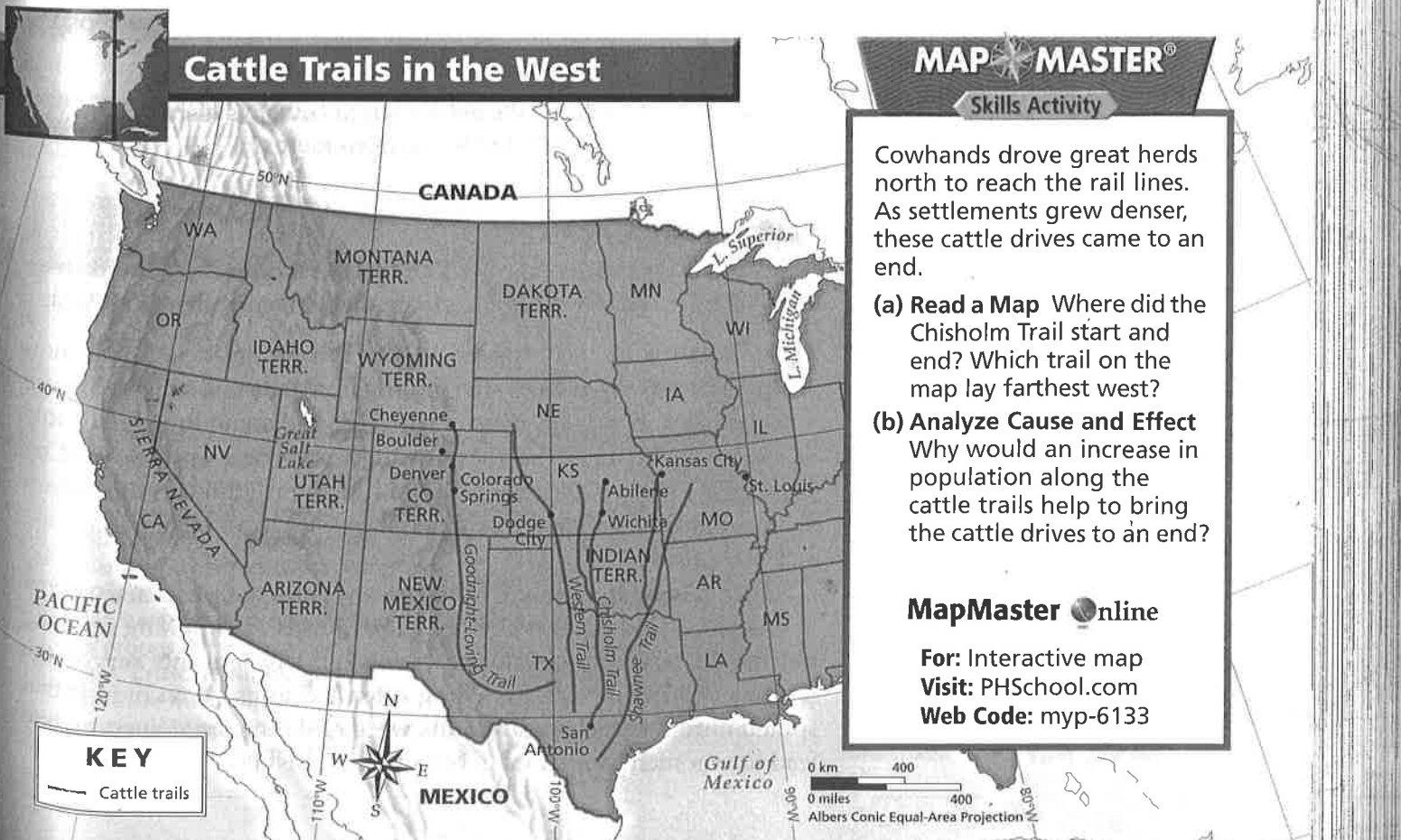
### Skills Activity

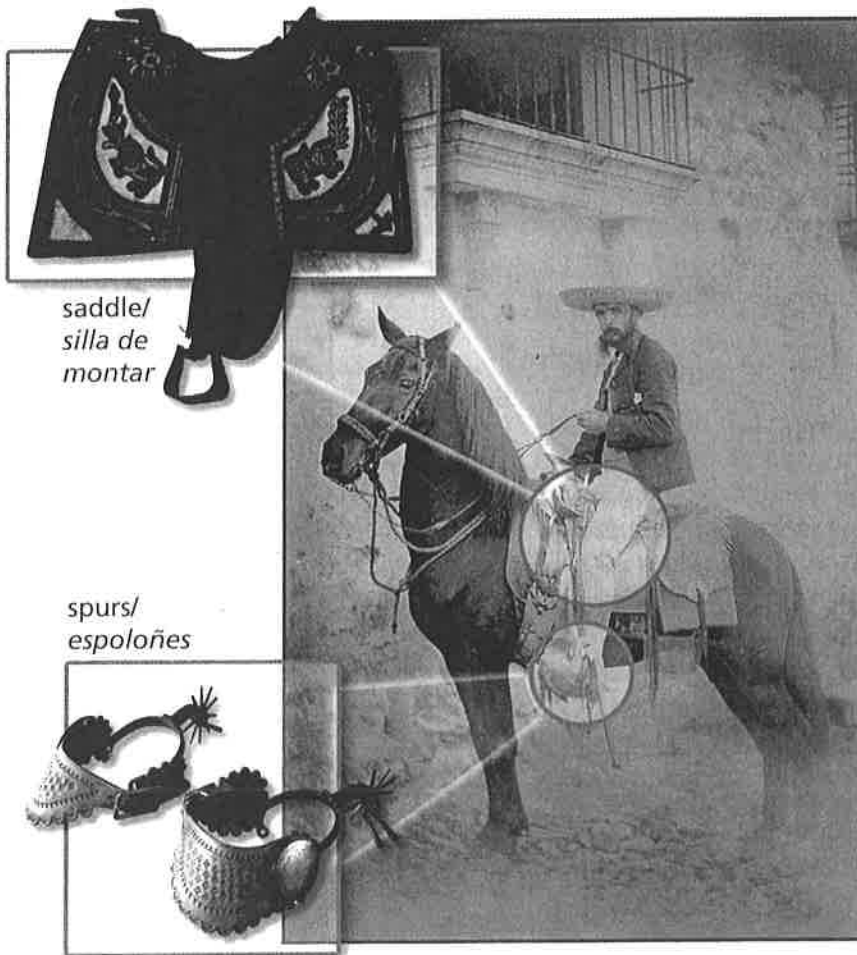
Cowhands drove great herds north to reach the rail lines. As settlements grew denser, these cattle drives came to an end.

- Read a Map** Where did the Chisholm Trail start and end? Which trail on the map lay farthest west?
- Analyze Cause and Effect** Why would an increase in population along the cattle trails help to bring the cattle drives to an end?

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saddle/  
silla de  
montar

spurs/  
espolones

### Outfitting a Vaquero

Cowhands borrowed much from early Spanish and Mexican vaqueros. The labels provide the English and Spanish names of the gear shown. **Critical Thinking: Frame Questions** What question would you want to ask a vaquero about the objects pictured here?

### Main Idea

The West gained an exaggerated reputation for lawlessness and violence.

On the hot, dusty trails, cowhands could spend 18 hours a day in the saddle. Yet, for all their efforts, they earned wages of less than \$1 a day. Like mining, cattle ranching relied on a workforce of low-paid laborers.

**Spanish Roots** The cowhands driving herds north owed much to Spanish and Mexican vaqueros (vah KAYR os). **Vaquero** (from *vaca*, meaning “cow”) is the Spanish word for cowhand, or cowboy. Vaqueros tended cattle on ranches in Mexico, California, and the Southwest.

When Americans started to herd cattle, they learned from vaqueros how to ride, rope, and brand. Cowboys wore Mexican spurs and leather chaps that kept their legs safe from thorny shrubs. The broad-brimmed cowboy hat came from the Mexican *sombrero*, or “hat that provides shade.” Cowboys used a leather lariat, or lasso (from the Spanish word *lazo*), to catch cattle and horses.

Approximately one third of all western cowhands were Mexican. Many others were African American and white veterans of the Civil War.

**Checkpoint** What skills did American cowboys learn from Spanish and Mexican vaqueros?

## The Wild West

Cattle drives ended at towns along railroad lines. These towns—often unruly places—helped to create the fantasy of the Wild West.

**Cow Towns** In 1867, Joseph McCoy hit on an idea. The Illinois businessman figured that after months on the trail, cowboys were ready for a bath, a good meal, a soft bed, and some fun. Also, cattle needed to be penned as they awaited shipment east. So McCoy founded Abilene, Kansas, where the Chisholm Trail met the Kansas Pacific Railroad. Abilene was the first **cow town**, or settlement at the end of a cattle trail.

With money to be made from cowboys and their herds, rival cow towns such as Wichita and Dodge City, Kansas, soon sprang up along rail lines. Dance halls, saloons, hotels, and restaurants served the cowboys. Drinking and gambling often led to barroom brawls that spilled onto the streets. Gunfights were rare but common enough to lead towns such as Wichita to ban carrying pistols.

**The Myth of the West** Rough-and-tumble life in cow towns helped to spread the myth of the West as a place of violence, adventure, and endless opportunity. Easterners called it the Wild West.

No one did more to promote this fantasy than William “Buffalo Bill” Cody. A former buffalo hunter, Cody created a traveling Wild West show in 1883. Gun-slinging cowboys and Native Americans performed daring feats of sharp shooting and horseback riding. They staged performances depicting frontier events, including Custer’s Last Stand. Annie Oakley broke the stereotype of the dainty woman with shooting as precise as any man’s.

The myth of the Wild West had some basis in fact. But, as you have read, the West was also being transformed. Native Americans were being forced onto reservations. Mining and ranching were big businesses. Independent miners were becoming wage earners, like cowboys. Even wild cow towns were being quieted down by settlers and ministers who wanted peaceful communities for their families and their faiths.

**Checkpoint** How true was the myth of the Wild West?

## Boom and Bust in the Cattle Kingdom

The cattle boom lasted from the 1860s to the 1880s. The region dominated by the cattle industry and its ranches, trails, and cow towns came to be called the **cattle kingdom**. Ranchers made large profits as herds and markets grew. But then the cattle industry collapsed.

**The Cattle Boom** At the height of the cattle boom, ranchers could buy a young calf for \$5 and sell a mature steer for \$60. Even after the expense of a cattle drive, profits were extremely high.

### Vocabulary Builder

**myth** (mihth) *n.* story or legend; imaginary object; invented story

### Main Idea

Overstocking and a spell of bad weather eventually put an end to the cattle boom.

## Links to Art

### *Cold Morning on the Range, 1904*

by Frederic Remington

Frederic Remington was a Yale-educated easterner who became a famous painter and sculptor of western scenes. His work highlighted such themes as self-reliance and mastery over nature. In *Cold Morning on the Range* (seen here), he portrays a rider in the process of taming a wild horse.

#### **Critical Thinking:**

**Evaluate Information** How do you think Remington’s work added to the myth of the Wild West?





### Texas Longhorn

The horns of longhorn cattle can be six feet wide or more. The cattle use them for both attack and defense.

Profits rose still higher with the introduction of new breeds of cattle. These breeds caught fewer diseases and had more meat than longhorns. As a result, backers from the East and Europe invested millions in huge cattle companies. The ranches of one company alone covered almost 800 square miles in three states.

**The Boom Ends** By the mid-1880s, more than 7 million cattle roamed the open range. That was more than the land could feed. Then, beginning in 1886 and 1887, a cycle of scorching summers and frigid winters killed millions of cattle. Meanwhile, an economic depression threw many city dwellers out of work. Demand for beef dropped.

To make things worse, sheep began competing with cattle for prairie grasses across the Plains. Farmers fenced in the open range to keep cattle away from crops. Without free grazing for their herds, ranchers had to buy expensive feed.

Giant cattle ranches slowly gave way to smaller spreads that grew their own feed. As railroads expanded, their lines moved closer to the ranches. Large roundups and long cattle drives vanished. The cattle boom was over.

**✓Checkpoint** What factors ended the cattle boom?

**★ Looking Back and Ahead** As railroads pushed across the West, the cattle industry boomed. Cowhands moved herds north on long drives to meet trains that took the cattle east. The cattle boom lasted into the 1880s. In the next section, you will read how farming changed the West.

## Section 3 | Check Your Progress

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### Comprehension and Critical Thinking

- (a) Describe** What dangers did cowhands face on cattle drives?  
**(b) Draw Conclusions** Why do you think cowhands took these risks?
- (a) Recall** How did the expansion of railroads help to create a cattle boom?  
**(b) Identify Economic Benefits** How did the cattle boom lead to economic prosperity for many new towns in the West?

### Reading Skill

- 3. Use Example Clues** Reread the text following the subheading "Cow Towns." How do example and description help you understand the term *cow town*? What is a cow town?

### Vocabulary Builder

- Complete each of the following sentences so that the second part further explains the first and clearly shows your understanding of the key term.
- 4. Cattle drives** brought thousands of cattle to rail lines; \_\_\_\_\_.

- 5. Vaqueros** tended cattle herds; \_\_\_\_\_.

- 6. The cattle kingdom** supplied meat to a growing nation; \_\_\_\_\_.

### Writing

- 7. Based on what you have read** in this section about the Wild West myth, write an opinion about the effects of this myth on American life. Back up your opinion with reasons and examples from the section and from your own knowledge.