

Guided Notes (Teacher)

Starting in the late 1870s, cattle arrived on the western grasslands of Dakota Territory. They came from **Texas** by the thousands, but they didn't get here on their own. Men on horses rode with the herds, guiding them to good grazing land. These men were cowboys of the open range. The open range meant miles and miles of **public** land for cattle to graze, without fences.

A cowboy's mornings and evenings would have been pretty sorry without the cook and his **chuck wagon**. The **chuck wagon** meant a kind of home for the cowboys. It carried all the supplies necessary for living with a few comforts—a hot, fresh-cooked meal and a blanket or two to keep warm. The cook had everything he needed in that wagon. He even had a table to roll out dough for biscuits.

Cowboys who drove cattle up from Texas followed the **Northern Trail**, which led them to Wyoming, Montana, and Dakota Territory. Why go to all the trouble of driving thousands of cattle hundreds of miles from Texas? Grass, water, and markets for beef. Dakota Territory had some of the best grass in the country for grazing cattle. Short grasses like wheat grass and grama were nutritious for cows, and helped fatten them. Cattlemen—the owners of cattle—knew they would get a better price at market for cows that grazed for two or three years in western Dakota Territory.

And cattlemen knew there were people who wanted beef right in South Dakota. Soldiers stationed at military posts in Dakota Territory, miners in the Black Hills, and residents in new towns springing up across the prairie all ate beef. American Indians on reservations were guaranteed food as part of **treaty** agreements. For bosses, as big as western Dakota was, there was a time when it didn't seem big enough. Cattlemen wanted more land so they could run even bigger herds. They pressured the government to break up the **Great Sioux** Reservation, and they didn't like sharing the land with buffalo or sheep.

As ranch hands, they began a great building project—fencing the western plains. Before the invention of barbed wire, it simply wasn't possible to put up much fencing on the Plains. There were not enough trees to build fences out of wood. All that changed in 1874 when **Joseph Glidden** developed a machine to produce barbed wire. Now ranchers could enclose many square miles.

But before fencing was completed, there was one last big roundup on the open range in **1902**. Roundups were when cowboys from different cattle companies worked together to find and gather up several thousand head of cattle from each company. On the roundup, a cowboy called the “nighthawk” was responsible for taking care of the cowboys' horses at night, and a “**wrangler**” cared for the horses during the day. Cowboys had to do so much riding that one horse wouldn't have been strong enough to endure it. Each cowboy had **6 to 10** horses. The nighthawk sometimes had to take care of over 200 horses.

The 1902 cowboys probably knew this was the last big roundup they would work. As the times changed, some cowboys decided to look for different jobs altogether. Whatever they did, though, the 1902 roundup cowboys never forgot who they were. They enjoyed reunions the rest of their lives. More than a hundred years later, we haven't forgotten them either—or any of the other cowboys of the open range.