

The Long Drive

Many years ago, ranch owners needed to send their cattle hundreds of miles to 'cow towns' where they would be sold. Every year it was the cowboys' job to round up all the cattle and take them in large herds to the cow town. This was known as 'the long drive'.

The drive was a challenge for all cowboys. Their day began at 4.00am and ended after dark. Even then some had to stand on guard during the night.

The average herd was made up of about 3000 cattle and the cowboys were responsible for keeping them safe all the way.

The cowboys worked as a team but each had his own job to do (see diagram).

Difficulties and Dangers

Rounding up the cattle was very dangerous and the cowboys needed to be agile riders. On the long drive, there were many risks.

Rivers

Crossing rivers was often dangerous, especially if they were swollen by rain or there were quicksands.

Stampedes

A sudden noise might make the whole herd of cattle stampede, rushing along out of control. Stopping a stampede was dangerous work – cowboys tried to drive the cattle into a circle to slow them down.

Weather

Blistering hot winds or torrential rain and hailstones often made the conditions unpleasant.

Rustlers

These were people who set out to steal the cattle.



The **trail boss** was in charge. He gave orders, checked the herd and then rode ahead to find water. He decided where the camp would be made and generally took care of the men. He rode at the front of the herd.



The **pointers** were also experienced riders. They led the herd when the trail boss went ahead to look for water or a camp.



The **swing** and **flank** men rode at the side to keep the herd together.



The **drag** men were at the back. This was the worst job because they were covered in dust from the herd in front.



The **wranglers** were the youngest and most inexperienced cowboys on the drive. They carried messages up and down the line and looked after the **remuda**, the spare horses.



The **cook** drove the **chuck wagon** and produced the food for the cowboys wherever they camped.

wrangler



remuda

flank



swing



cook



chuck wagon

pointer



drag



drag



drag



flank



swing



pointer



trail boss