



HIT THE TRAIL

GRADE: 4-5

SUBJECT: U.S. History

NATIONAL STANDARD(S)

(3-4) HI: 8.9

(5-6) USH: 16.1, 16.3-4

THEME: Ranching

FOOD AND FIBER TOPIC: I-B,E; II-C,E

LEARNER OBJECTIVE

The student will draw three cattle trails that passed through Indian Territory, using a written description of the trails and will create a diary of trail life.

VOCABULARY

cattle drive—Moving cattle on foot from one place to another.

cattle trail—One of several routes on which cattle were driven for long distances in the US in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

longhorn—The descendants of cattle with long curving horns which the Spanish explorer Coronado originally brought to the North American continent.

open range—Extensive range area which has not been fenced into pastures.

right-of-way—Privilege to travel across a given piece of land which may be purchased or granted by a landowner.

BACKGROUND

The great cattle drives began in 1866, following the Civil War. Herds of longhorn cattle were driven north from Texas and Mexico to Nebraska, Kansas, the Dakotas, Wyoming and Montana. There the stock could be fattened on open range. The cattle were then driven to railroad towns in Kansas and shipped east to St. Louis, Chicago or Cincinnati. In some cases, cattlemen rented or leased the right-of-way across Indian land or ranches to safeguard their herds. Some Indians allowed passage; others did not.

Between 25 and 30 thousand cowboys took part in the cattle drives. Many really were just boys. Few were grown men. Usually the oldest people on any drive were the trail boss and the cook, whose average ages were 30. The cowboys worked an exhausting schedule—eighteen hours in the saddle, sleeping on the ground, with nothing more than a bed roll for comfort. They endured snake bites, wild river crossings, driving hail storms and deadly stampedes. Many young men were drawn to this lifestyle because they yearned for excitement and wanted to prove to their families that they could make it on their own. For many, working a trail drive brought in more money than they had ever seen in their lives—an average \$30 a month.

The range cattle industry lasted only a short period of time—about 23 years. Settlers began to put up barbed wire fences around their farms, making the movement of cattle difficult, and railroads in Oklahoma provided a safer and less expensive method of moving cattle. By 1889, there was little unfenced range left. Only scattered evidence remains today of these great trails.

STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

1. Ask students what come to mind when you say the terms “wild west” and “cattle drive.” List all reasonable responses on the chalkboard.
2. Share background material.
3. Hand out Student Worksheet A. Review the directions with students. Have students read the information about the trails shown and label them on the map. Hand out Student Worksheet B. Read the directions with your class. Have students complete the record books. Ask for volunteers to read aloud from the created trail records.

RELATED ACTIVITIES

1. Divide students into groups, and assign each a historical trail to research (Trail of Tears, Pony Express, Overland Mail, Santa Fe, Mormon, Oregon, etc.) Have the groups share the information they have gathered through class presentations. Groups may use maps showing the trail, recreate the period dress of the people who followed the trail or write short scripts and role-play events that may have taken place on the trail.
2. Invite a cattle broker, rancher or modern day cowboy to speak to the class. Ask the speaker to discuss his or her daily routine and compare it to the practices of yesteryear. Have students brainstorm questions to ask before the speaker arrives.
3. Read some poetry created by cowboy poets like Baxter Black and Waddie Mitchell. Make a list of terms used in the cowboy poetry that are not familiar to students. Assign different students to find the meanings of the terms and share them with the class.

RESOURCES

Student Books

- Freedman, R. (1985). Cowboys of the Wild West. Clarion.
Granfield, L. (1994). Cowboys. Ticknor and Fields.
Johnson, N. (1993). Jack Creek Cowboy. Dial.
Miller, R. (1991). Cowboys. Silver Burdett.

Teacher Resources

- Webb, Dave, and Phillip R. Buntin, *Adventures With the Santa Fe Trail*, Kansas Heritage Center, 1000 Second Ave., PO Box 1207, Dodge City, KS 67801-1207, 316-227-1616, FAX 316-227-1695 (76-page activity book which includes information and teaching suggestions, Stock No. 182, \$7.95, plus \$1.50 for shipping and handling).

Related Internet Websites

(see the Food & Fiber Systems website – links)

EVALUATION

An answer key is provided for Student Worksheet A.

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