

# REVISION NOTES: THE WILD WEST

## The Plains Indians

- a. As European people moved into America they arrived on the east coast. The first European settlers did not move west; they remained in the 13 Founder States in the east.
- b. They believed that the area in the middle of America was a desert where nothing could be cultivated and where no one could live – so there was no point in settling it. They believed this for two reasons:
  - The Mississippi River and Appalachian Mountains stopped them exploring further west.
  - The climate and environment on the Plains were not the same as in the east (or Europe): there were few trees, the only vegetation was tough native grass and it was difficult (though not impossible) to cultivate.
- c. This meant that the Indians who lived on the Plains were among the last to have contact with white people.
- d. Plains Indians' tribes included: Apache, Arapaho, Cheyenne, Comanche, Crow and Sioux.

## 1. How were the Plains Indians able to live on the Great Plains

- a. **Plains Indians had adapted their way of life to the Plains climate and environment:**
  - They were nomadic hunter-gatherers (they hunted their food – primarily the buffalo – gathered other food like nuts and berries and moved around to do so).
  - There were millions of buffalo on the Plains in the early nineteenth century.
  - The buffalo hunt was a very important event, which involved great skill and danger. Men hunted the buffalo. When the buffalo were killed a great delicacy was to eat the raw and still-warm heart, liver and kidneys.
  - After this the women would prepare the different parts of the buffalo for use by the band.
  - The hunt was dangerous so men often died young. A good hunter would need more than one wife to prepare the many buffalo he killed. Most tribes therefore allowed polygamy (having more than one wife). Marriage (with a dowry of horses) and divorce was easy.
  - A Plains Indian's status was measured by how many horses he owned and warfare between the tribes was mainly about horse stealing. Horses were used as currency.
- b. **The Plains Indians had based their way of life almost wholly on the buffalo**, so they needed to move round the Plains to follow the migrating buffalo herds (this affected their attitude to the land).
  - They lived in tipi made of buffalo skin and supported by wooden poles to form a tent (easily assembled and dismantled). When it was time to move, the women would use the poles to make a travois, which was pulled by horses, dogs or people; the contents of the tipi were wrapped in parflèches (buffalo skin bags) and attached to the poles.
  - Plains Indians travelled together in family groups called bands. This allowed them to hunt as many buffalo as they needed to survive, but move quickly if necessary.
  - Working together allowed all to survive, but if someone in the band could not keep up (too old or ill) they chose to stay behind (and die) so the rest of the band could move and survive; this was called 'exposure'.
  - The buffalo supplied their food, clothes, bags, bow-strings, glue, thread, tipi covers, saddles, boots, bowls, decorations. They did not need to farm.
  - Men hunted the buffalo. When they were not hunting they preserved their energy.
  - Indian sports were about honing the skills needed (e.g. horse-riding, firing arrows) for the buffalo hunt and warfare; women's leisure activities mostly involved decorating buffalo skins.
- c. **Organisation**
  - Tribes were led by Chiefs who were elected by the men of the tribe; sometimes there was more than one chief, one for war and one for peace.
  - Decisions were reached by the Council of the tribe; important decisions had to be agreed by **all** the men in a band or tribe. If a man did not want to follow the orders of the Chief he did not need to.
  - A pipe would be smoked during the discussions to make sure what they were saying reached the spirits.
  - There were no laws or prisons; the worst punishment was banishment.

## 3. What were the beliefs of the Plains Indians?

- a. **Religion**
  - Belief in spirits – with a Great Spirit (Waken Tanka), which continually needed to be placated.
  - Plains Indians believed in spirits; they continually performed small ceremonies and said prayers in their honour.
  - Ceremonies to bring the buffalo or rain.

**b. Land and Nature**

- Land could not be bought or sold; it belonged to all (imagine someone trying to sell you the wind or the air).
- Plains Indians connected their lives to nature; they accepted they were part of nature and needed to fit in.
- They would ask permission of the vegetable before digging it up.
- Circles were very important to the Plains Indians, who saw life as a circle and would put their camps in a circle to remain close to the spirits. Their tipi was a circle and the migrating buffalo moved in circles.
- They saw a fixed home as a cage.

**c. Visions**

- When young men got to adolescence they would fast and use a sweat lodge to gain a vision.
- This vision would be interpreted by the medicine man of the tribe. Pictures of visions were drawn on the tipis.
- After this, the young man would know his future and gain his adult name, e.g. Crazy Horse.
- Visions were important in later life. Sitting Bull removed strips of skin from his body before the Battle of Little Bighorn and the vision that he had of men in blue uniforms falling was a reason why the Indians believed that they would win the battle, and they did.

**d. Dancing**

- Plains Indians believed that they could get closer to the spirits by dancing.
- This involved bringing themselves closer to the spirits by meditation, fasting or enduring pain.
- The most famous dance was the Sun Dance: men fasted and meditated and warriors were then suspended from the roof supported by skewers through holes in their pectoral muscles.
- Dances happened before battles or raids and before and after a buffalo hunt in order for them to get close to the spirits.

**4. Warfare**

- The most common reason for war between tribes and nations was to get horses: a warrior was judged by the number of horses that he owned so many tribes raided each other and were raided back in revenge.
- The Plains Indians thought that fighting to the death was stupid because men were so valuable in the buffalo hunt.
- ‘Counting coup’ was considered brave. This involved the warrior touching his enemy with a coup stick. This meant that he was skilful enough to get close to his enemy but did not value him enough to kill him. Indian battle dress often showed how many times the warrior had counted coup.
- Plains Indian battles were short, often involving quick raids, and a brave Indian lived to fight another day.
- Warrior societies such as the Dog Soldiers of the Cheyenne were skilled fighting groups, which would help the Chief and elders in their war planning.
- Indians used tomahawks and bows and arrows in their hunting and warfare.
- When they died, Plains Indians believed that they would go to the Happy Hunting Ground; there was no Heaven or Hell but they would meet everyone they’d met in life in the Happy Hunting Ground.
- Plains Indians would try to prevent their enemies from being whole in the Happy Hunting Ground; this meant that if they did kill anyone they would scalp them or cut their ankle or wrist tendons so that they could not run or fire arrows in the Happy Hunting Ground.

**The Settlers**

- Before 1840, the idea of white Europeans settling anywhere other than on the east coast of North America was unthinkable. This was because it was very difficult to explore or travel across the continent and people did not believe that it was possible to live in the Great American Desert.
- It took 45 years for European settlers to settle the whole of North America.
- The first pioneer families travelled west in the 1840s, to settle on the west coast in the states of California and Oregon.
- In the 1840s, thousands of people from the east coast of North America wanted to move to the west coast:

<b>Pull factors (pulled people west)</b>	<b>Push factors (pushed people out of the east)</b>
Gold was discovered in California in 1848.	Economic depression.
Reports came back from people who had travelled to the west, saying how wonderful life was.	Land was overcrowded and expensive.

## 1. The Journey West

- a. **to travel to the west coast of North America meant that they would have to travel across the Great Plains.**
  - The journey to California and Oregon was very long; it was more than 3800km (2300 miles).
  - The geography of the journey was harsh; the weather conditions were dangerous; there were dangers from animals and other humans; food was also scarce.
- b. **They would join up into groups to travel together for safety.**
  - All settlers met in one of the towns by the Missouri River to stock up for the journey.
  - They travelled in a wagon in which they had to take everything that they would need on the journey, and also what they needed when they arrived in the west.
  - They would then travel along a trail that other groups had travelled along before. Many groups had a 'mountain man' to guide them.

## 2 Mormons

- a. **The start of the Mormon movement (1820–1831)**
  - In 1823, a poor farmer called Joseph Smith claimed he had dug up some gold plates containing messages from God. He preached his message and by 1830 had over 1000 followers.
  - Mormons firmly believed that anyone who wasn't a Mormon was godless and they told Christian people, who thought themselves to be good, that they were 'gentiles' and would not go to heaven.
- b. **The Mormons in Kirtland (1831–1837)**
  - In 1837, the Mormon bank collapsed. The investors, both Mormon and non-Mormon, lost all their money; this made them very unpopular.
- c. **The Mormons in Missouri (1837–1838)**
  - The Mormons were friendly towards the Indians, and encouraged slaves to run away.
- d. **The Mormons in Nauvoo (1839–1846)**
  - By 1845, 11,000 Mormons lived in Nauvoo. Political parties in Illinois wanted their votes; in return, the Mormons demanded that they have their own laws and a private army (the 'Danites').
  - In 1844, Smith ran for President; in 1845 he was killed by a mob.
- e. **Brigham Young succeeded Smith as leader of the Mormons**
  - Young realised the Mormons needed to move to a place that no one else wanted.
  - Sept 1845, Young moved the Mormons to Salt Lake Valley, a poor, dry area in the middle of the Rockies.
- f. **How were the Mormons able to survive the journey to Salt Lake Valley?**
  - The Mormons were used to working together and were united in their common belief that God wanted them to settle Salt Lake Valley.
  - They travelled in stages, and 'pioneer' groups travelling ahead left supplies at different points along the route so that people following them could use them instead of having to carry large amounts of supplies.
- g. **How did the Mormons succeed at Salt Lake Valley?**
  - Salt Lake was not a fertile area. There were few raw materials, such as iron.
  - No one in Salt Lake could own the land or pure water.
  - Church leaders controlled the farming and what was built.
  - Each person was given the land that they needed, and the skilled workers were carefully identified and given jobs relevant to their skills.
  - A Perpetual Emigrating Fund was set up to encourage more Mormons to come to Utah.
  - By 1890, Utah became a state in the United States of America; however this did not happen until the Mormons agreed to a ban on polygamy.

## 3 Miners

- a. In 1848, gold was discovered in California. 40,000 men crossed the Plains to get from the east coast to California to stake a claim and make their fortunes. Almost as many men took a sea route round from the east to the west coast. Throughout the nineteenth century gold was discovered in different places in America and miners flooded to those areas.
- b. Miners lived in mining camps. These grew and failed quickly.
- c. More people made money from supplying goods to these camps than from the mining itself.
- d. Around the 1850s, miners had to become more professional. They would be backed by businessmen from the eastern states and they started to live in more permanent settlements.
- e. The mining industry was changed by the development of the railroad. Trains helped to move the silver and gold, and brought food and supplies to the miners.

## 4 Cattle ranching in Texas

- This is not an AQA topic: I have out some notes at the end of this sheet for if you are doing Edexcel or OCR.

## 5 Homesteaders

### a. Why did people want to settle on the Great Plains?

Pull factors (pulled people to the Plains)	Push factors (pushed people out of the east)
The US government wanted US citizens to settle all over North America to stop other countries such as Britain from taking over.	Poverty and unemployment in the east.
The <i>Homesteaders Act</i> of 1862 offered settlers 60 acres of free land.	Far western states such as California and Oregon were full – no cheap land.
Manifest destiny – all Americans believed they had the right to all of North America.	Desire for a new start; many former soldiers and slaves wanted to make a new life somewhere else.
Railroads – offered settlers free land near to the railroad.	Religious persecution/racist persecution.

### b. Homesteaders' problems (and some solutions):

Problem	Solution
Little wood to build houses.	Houses made from sods of earth.
No wood for fuel.	Cattle and buffalo dung was used as fuel.
The Plains had never been ploughed; and there were not enough people to plough the land as in the east.	Deere and Co. Steel 'sodbuster' ploughs were brought by train. Homesteaders clubbed together to buy one.
In winter, the temperature was $-40^{\circ}\text{C}$ . In the summer it was over $80^{\circ}\text{C}$ , and hot winds evaporated any rainfall.	'Dry farming' – when it rained in the summer, the land was ploughed immediately to put a fine layer of dust over the moisture to trap it and stop it evaporating.
There was no moisture in the soil, and no rivers or lakes.	Wind pumps meant that water deep underground could be pumped to the surface.
Crops that were planted could not survive the extreme temperatures and low rainfall.	In 1874 Turkey Red wheat (a Russian crop) was introduced which could survive the climate of the Plains.
The 60 acres offered to them by the <i>1862 Homesteaders Act</i> was not enough to support a family.	The <i>Timber and Culture Act</i> of 1873 allowed farmers to claim a further 160 acres if they grew half an acre of trees.
Farmers needed to fence the land so that they were sure where their holding was, and to stop animals from straying.	After 1874, barbed wire allowed farmers quickly and efficiently to fence their land. This allowed selective breeding to take place.
Fire, Colorado beetle and grasshoppers.	None.
Fleas and bedbugs.	A coat of whitewash.
Lack of soap.	Made from boiling fat with potash.
Isolation and hardship.	Occasional trips to town; local hoedowns.

## 6 How important were the railroad companies in opening up the west?

- The US government wanted to build a railroad linking the west and the east coasts.
- Gold miners needed to bring their valuable gold cargo back from the mines in California to the eastern states.
- The first transcontinental railroad (the Pacific Railroad) was built from the east to the west coast in 1869; it cost many thousands of lives but was achieved.
- Railroad companies were given land on the line to build towns and attract settlers.
- It provided homesteaders with a way to transport supplies and machinery, and this encouraged more people to farm and settle in the Plains.

## 7. Law and order

- a. Crime was a major concern in mining areas: e.g. gunslingers and gangs, stealing, claim jumping. Miners could 'stake a claim' to an area of land by hammering wooden stakes into the ground and then registering the claim. If gold was discovered, then someone might steal the claim by stealing the stake or the land.
- b. There were no US government law officers, so it was up to the local people to deal with these crimes.
- c. **Local people – miners' courts**
  - Disputes about claims were dealt with by a committee of miners.
  - A sheriff was appointed to deal with law breakers and a court of all the miners would decide on the punishment.
  - Common punishments were flogging, banishment or hanging.
  - Miners' courts were ineffective as participants could be easily influenced.
- d. **Local people – vigilantes**
  - Vigilantes became popular in mining towns – they were a group of people or a person who was not official but claimed to uphold law and order and deal with suspected wrongdoers.
  - They did not take the suspect to a court, but instead dealt with them quickly – usually by hanging.
  - Many people feared the vigilantes because they often ignored evidence so that they could deal with the 'criminals' quickly, and their rapid decisions sometimes meant that they killed the wrong person.

## Conflict on the Plains

### 1. Why did white Americans and Plains Indians come into conflict?

- a. The white Americans wanted to settle and farm on the Plains, while the Indians wanted to maintain their ancient way of life of following the buffalo across the land.
- b. White Americans believed they had a right to settle wherever they wanted to across North America, and that it was their 'Manifest destiny' and their God-given duty to do so. Plains Indians believed that land was sacred and shouldn't belong to anyone and shouldn't be bought or sold. They believed that they were connected to nature, and to the land.
- c. There were two different attitudes among the white Americans about what should happen:
  - 'Negotiators': These were mainly people living in the east. Some of them were government officials who worked with the Indians and gained some understanding of their way of life. They believed that aggressive tactics would make matters worse. Instead, they believed that through education, missionary work and settlement onto reservations they would turn the Indians into model citizens.
  - 'Exterminators': These people mainly lived in the Plains – settlers, miners, ranchers – and had the most to gain if the Indians were removed. They believed that the only solution would be if all Plains Indians were destroyed – 'nits make lice'.
- d. The settlement of the Plains was not planned or organised. The American government had to change its policy to adapt to circumstances:
- e. **Land:** Settlers in America wanted more land and the government could not stop them taking it. Also the American government wanted to control America, they wanted loyal people to settle the country to stop it being taken over by 'older' empires like the British.
- f. **Gold:** Miners invaded Indian lands quickly and had plenty of influence when they became rich.
- g. **Public Opinion:** Manifest destiny meant that white people believed that if they followed the law and were Christian, God would give them the land. Also Many white Americans believed that Indians were savages and did terrible things.

## 2. Conflict between white Americans and Plains Indians – dateline

### Stage One: 'Permanent Indian Frontier'

1803	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Louisiana Purchase:</b> the USA bought the Great Plains from the French; they used it as a place for American Indians to live and forced all Indians from the eastern United States (e.g. Cherokee, Seminole) to move to Oklahoma ('the Trail of Tears').</li> </ul>
1832	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Permanent Indian Frontier:</b> The Great Plains were seen as a desert by non-Indians; and set aside as Indian country.</li> </ul>
1840–1850	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>White Americans began to cross the Plains:</b> The early pioneers crossed the Plains in order to get to Oregon (Oregon Trail, 1840) and California (California Trail, 1849). The Mormons moved west (Mormon Trail, 1846).</li> <li>• At first the American Indians traded with them or even guided them through the Plains.</li> </ul>
1848	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Gold was discovered in California:</b> Miners crossed Cheyenne and Arapaho land to get to the gold mines in California during the California Gold Rush. They killed the buffalo, and brought disease and whisky to the Plains Indians. The railroad started to develop and settlers began to come to the Plains.</li> </ul>
1850–1851	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>American Indians sometimes attacked the emigrants:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Whitman Massacre (1847):</b> a missionary and eleven settlers were killed in Oregon.</li> <li>○ <b>Mariposa Indian War (1850–1851):</b> American Indians in California destroyed trading posts and attacked white settlers and gold prospectors.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

### Stage Two: 'Concentration'

1851	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Fort Laramie Treaty:</b> This was between the chiefs of the nations of the Plains Indians and the US government. Special areas of land on the west of the Plains were designated for each nation of Plains Indians to live and hunt. These were away from the settler trails and the treaty said that the Indians would not be disturbed.</li> </ul>
1859	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Gold was discovered in Colorado:</b> The government had no control over the miners as they rushed to these areas to make their fortunes.</li> </ul>
1861	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Indians began serious attacks on the miners, settlers and railroad surveyors:</b> They were refusing to obey their chiefs who had made treaties with the US government.</li> </ul>
1862	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Homesteaders Act:</b> First farmers onto the Plains. Soon after (1866), cattle ranchers started trailing their cattle through American Indian territory on the Long Drives.</li> </ul>
1864	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Sand Creek Massacre:</b> Cheyenne and Arapaho men, women and children were massacred by the US cavalry. They were surrendering.</li> </ul>
1865–1868	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Red Cloud's War:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Gold was discovered in Montana in 1862, an area that had been designated for the Sioux Indians. A new trail called the Bozeman Trail was forged directly through Montana, which crossed Sioux land and broke the peace treaty.</li> <li>○ The Sioux attacked the people who travelled along the Bozeman Trail for a year, while the army tried to negotiate peace with the Sioux leader, Red Cloud. The army built a chain of forts along the trail, which angered Red Cloud and the Sioux attacked the army.</li> <li>○ In 1866 the army were under siege in their forts. The Sioux killed 80 men led by Captain Fetterman trying to escape Fort Kearney. Almost 200 Sioux were killed and wounded. No travellers could use the Bozeman Trail.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

### Stage Three: 'Small reservations'

1867	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Treaty of Medicine Lodge:</b> The army withdrew from the Bozeman Trail, and the Indians moved onto the Great Sioux Reservation, including the Black Hills of Dakota, which was to be an area where no non-Indians would be allowed to settle. The government promised to provide food and medicine. Red Cloud agreed to this treaty.</li> </ul>
1868	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Abilene established as the first of the 'cow towns'.</b></li> </ul>
1869	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>First Transcontinental railroad completed.</b></li> </ul>
1872–1874	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Slaughter of the buffalo:</b> By 1885, only 200 buffalo remained alive in the US; this was a conscious policy to destroy the Plains Indians – 'When the buffalo are extinct they, too, must dwindle away.' (Francis Parkman)</li> </ul>
1874	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Gold was discovered in the Black Hills.</b></li> </ul>
1876	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>All Indians were ordered to return to their reservations.</b></li> </ul>
1876	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Great Sioux War began:</b> The Sioux, the Arapaho and the Cheyenne were angry about the Black Hills being invaded and refused to return to their reservations.</li> <li>• In June, this led to the <b>Battle of the Little Bighorn</b>, and Sitting Bull's defeat of General Custer and the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry.</li> </ul>
1877	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little Bighorn made the US determined to defeat the Plains Indians, and they destroyed resistance by a winter war.</li> <li>• Sitting Bull left the Plains and went to Canada, where he tried to make money by working in a Wild West show, but eventually he returned to the reservation.</li> </ul>

**a. What was the purpose and effect of the reservations?**

- The reservations were intended to:
  - keep the Indians, homesteaders and ranchers separate
  - keep different Indian nations separate
- get the Indians to farm the land, and therefore become farmers and ‘civilised’.
- To start with, the Indians could leave the reservations to hunt buffalo, but after 1876 this was banned by the US government. Reservations were supervised by Indian Agents.

Conditions on the reservations	Effects on the Plains Indians
Reservations had poor quality land for farming; the Plains Indians became dependent on handouts for food and clothing.	The government broke its promises to supply food and medicine; the Indians were constantly hungry and ill.
Their customs, feasts and ceremonies such as the Sun Dance were banned.	They lost their spiritual self-belief, resulting in alcoholism and suicide.
Their horses and weapons were taken away from them.	Relying on handouts, the men lost their status as hunters and warriors.
Children were sent to Indian Boarding Schools to be assimilated into white American culture.	Children could not learn the culture of their tribe; family life was damaged.

**b. The Battle of Little Bighorn, 25 June 1876**

- In June 1876, Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse and warriors from the Sioux, Cheyenne and Arapaho nations set up camp on the banks of Bighorn River, an area outside the Great Sioux Reservation.
- The US army had orders to attack all Sioux who had not returned to their reservation; it planned to trap the Sioux camp in a three-pronged attack but this plan failed when Crazy Horse and some of the warriors attacked General Crook’s column (Battle of the Rosebud, 17 June).
- Instead, it was decided to send the 7th Cavalry, led by General Custer, to attack the Sioux camp from the south. He was offered extra weapons and men but refused them.
- Custer marched his cavalry of 500 men quickly, arriving a day early but exhausted. However, when his scouts reported the Indians were leaving, Custer decided to attack.
- Custer split his small force into three (led by Major Reno, Captain Benteen and himself) to attack from different sides; Reno’s and Benteen’s attacks failed and they retreated.
- Custer continued but, attacked by the Indian army, was wiped out (‘Custer’s Last Stand’).

Why did the US army lose?	Why did the Plains Indians win?
There was no communication. They did not know how many Indians were there. They did not attempt to hide their attack. Custer refused reinforcements or better weapons. Custer pushed his men too hard. Custer failed to wait for the larger cavalry and weapons. He wanted the glory for himself.	The Plains Indians were angry. The camp at Little Bighorn was the largest in Plains Indian history. The US army believed there were 800 warriors, but in fact there were 2,000. Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull were skilful leaders.

**Stage Four: Opening up the Indian lands/ destruction of the Indian way of life**

<b>1879</b>	The Sioux were given cattle and had to live off them to survive on the reservations.
<b>1883</b>	The Bureau of Indian Affairs banned customs like the Sun Dance.
<b>1885</b>	The Plains Indians surrendered: they agreed to live on reservations.
<b>1887</b>	The Dawes Act split the reservations so they were not owned by a single Indian nation but by individuals.
<b>1889</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Oklahoma Land Run:</b> Land that had been given to the Indians was split into 160-acre plots. People raced to claim a plot. Two million acres were on offer and it was all claimed within 24 hours in April.</li> </ul>
<b>1890</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>A medicine man called Wovoka had a vision:</b> He believed and taught that if Indians wore certain ceremonial clothing and danced in a certain way they would be impossible to kill and their way of life would return. This Ghost Dance spread through all reservations.</li> <li>• The government tried to arrest Sitting Bull (he was killed in the attempt).</li> <li>• Sioux Chief Big Foot, trying to avoid the trouble, led his people to <b>Wounded Knee Creek</b>, where they were massacred by the US Army.</li> </ul>

## 4. Cattle ranching in Texas

### a. Origins

- Cattle brought by the Spanish in the sixteenth century.
- The cattle roamed wild and thrived in Texas, which had a mild climate with plenty of water.
- In 1836, the Mexican rulers of Texas were defeated by the Americans who formed the Republic of Texas. In 1845, Texas became a state of the USA.
- In 1861–1865, Texan cattle ranchers went off to fight during the American Civil War; when they returned, they found that the cattle had dramatically increased in number.
- In 1866, one Texas cattle rancher – Charles Goodnight – employed cowboys to drive 2000 cattle to sell to the US Army in New Mexico; this was called the Goodnight-Loving Trail.
- The ‘Long Drive’: cattle were rounded up and driven along cattle trails to railheads to be sent to cities in the north. Beef became a popular food, and people living in towns in the north of the USA paid lots of money for it – the Texan cattle ranchers could make huge profits.
- In 1880 Goodnight formed the Panhandle Stock Association, which cracked down on rustling.
- These long cattle drives were very unpopular as homesteaders feared that the cattle coming from the south would bring diseases to their precious livestock, and the cattle also drank their water. In 1867, Kansas passed the *Texas Fever Law* banning Texan herds from Kansas.

### b. How and why did cattle ranching spread from Texas to the Great Plains?

- **Cow towns**
  - In 1867, Joseph McCoy established a cow town called Abilene where the southern cattle drivers could meet up with the northern cattle buyers.
- **The start of ranching on the plains**
  - As the homesteaders settled on the Great Plains, the routes of the cattle drives were blocked.
  - The Plains Indians would demand payment for cattle drives crossing their land.
  - This led to the start of cattle ranching on the Plains. The homesteaders and the Indians were making driving cattle difficult, so cattlemen started building their ranches on the Great Plains.
  - In the 1870s, John Iliff became ‘Cattle King’ of Colorado, with 200,000 acres and 35,000 cattle.
  - The XIT ranch (1885) in Texas was the largest in the world (3 million acres).
  - The Long Drive from Texas to the north had all but finished by the end of the 1880s.
- **The open range**
  - The ‘open range’ allowed cattle to roam freely on the land; the cattle ignored any boundaries and roamed wherever they wanted to.
  - The ‘Crazy Quilt’ rules allowed cattlemen to graze huge areas for the purchase of little land.
  - To identify the cattle, they were branded.<sup>3</sup> What was life like for a cowboy?
  - Many were ex-soldiers from the Civil War or freed slaves. Twenty-five per cent of cowboys were black and 12 per cent were Mexican.
  - They lived in a dug out or a shack. When ranching replaced the Long Drive, they lived in ranch houses.
  - Cowboys travelled long distances both on cattle drives and around the open range.
  - Their job was to look after the cattle on the open range.
  - They also rounded up the cattle and drove them to market. On the Long Drive they lived on the land and moved round on the land, like the nomadic Indians.
  - Round-ups and branding happened every year. This meant that the cowboys herded the cattle together and branded the new calves with the symbol for their cattlemen or ranch.
- **The Long Drive**
  - In spring, the cattle were rounded up in Texas.
  - The herd had to be guarded 24 hours a day as they were very valuable, so the cowboys slept with the herd. About 10 to 14 cowboys would drive 3000 cattle.
  - There were many dangers on the journey:
  - Natural hazards: stampedes, crossing rivers, scorpions, snakes and quicksand; extreme weather on the Plains.
  - Danger from people: the threat of Indians and other cattle rustlers who could steal the cattle. Some cowboys were killed by Indians raiding their cattle.
  - In 1883 Texas cowboys went on strike for better pay.



c. **Why were there problems of law and order in the cow towns?**

- **Tensions between groups of people:** cowboys vs townspeople; homesteaders vs ranchers; cattle barons vs small ranchers.
- **The cowboys:** Once they reached the cow towns, the cowboys sold their cattle, took their payment and were let loose from the responsibility of looking after the herd. They had spent months of hard work looking after their cattle, and were looking for fun.
- **Cattle rustling:** Cattle on the open range were a target for rustlers. Branding marks were altered.
- **Fence-Cutting War, 1884:** Barbed wire ('Devil Wire') had been patented in 1874 by J.F. Glidden; open-range cattlemen cut the fences owned by powerful cattle barons (who could afford to fence their ranches) and of the small homesteaders and farmers.
- **Homesteaders and ranchers came into conflict** because:
  - After the 1862 Homesteaders Act, homesteaders moved onto the Plains and began to compete for the land; to stop disease, they blocked ranchers from driving their cattle through their land.
  - The 1880s were bad years for the cattlemen because beef prices were falling and droughts and harsh winters killed some of their cattle; many ranchers went bankrupt and lost their land, which the homesteaders were quick to take for their own.
  - Homesteaders fenced off water holes that the ranchers needed for their cattle.
  - Cattle rustling became more and more of a problem, and the cattle barons suspected the homesteaders and the smaller ranchers.
- **Johnson County War, 1892**
  - The Wyoming Stock Grower's Association drew up a list of 70 people they believed were rustlers, but could not get them convicted because juries in Johnson County supported the homesteaders.
  - In April 1892, the small ranchers and homesteaders in Johnson County started to round up all the cattle on the open range, to sort out who owned which cattle, and to stop the cattle wandering.
  - The cattle barons believed that more of their cattle would be rustled. So they:
    - formed a vigilance committee called the Regulators and hired 24 Texan gunfighters;
    - planned to capture the town of Buffalo, kill the sheriff of Johnson County (Red Angus) and then kill the suspected rustlers on their list.
  - On their way to Buffalo, the Regulators attacked Nate Champion's KC Ranch; they burnt him out of his cabin and killed him and his friend Nick Ray.
  - However, the alarm had been raised in Buffalo and, the next day, the Regulators were besieged in the TA Ranch by Red Angus and nearly 300 homesteaders and small ranchers.
  - One of the Regulators managed to escape and the US Cavalry came to their rescue.
  - The Regulators were charged with murder and, although they bribed the jury and were let off, the cattle barons were widely condemned and they lost a lot of their influence.

d. **Why did the open range come to an end by the 1890s?**

- **1880–1885**
  - **Overgrazing:** As the cattle industry made many people lots of money, it encouraged more people to come to the Plains to become ranchers. However, by 1882 there were too many cattle.
  - **Drought:** A drought in 1883 made the grass wither and added to the problem.
  - **Falling Beef Prices:** Demand for beef fell in the east and people paid less for their cattle. Ranchers kept their cattle on the land for longer, which led to more overgrazing.
- **1885–1887**
  - **Bad Weather:** The winter of 1885–1886 was very cold, and the summer of 1886 very hot and dry. The winter of 1886–1887 was the worst on record – cattle could not dig through the snow to eat the grass and so many of them starved to death (the 'Great Die-Up').
- **1890s**
  - **Cattle Rustling:** Leading to events like the Johnson County War.
  - **Unemployment:** Many cattlemen went bankrupt because many cattle had died and the rest were not worth as much as they had paid for them. Smaller ranches required fewer cowboys.