

## How did the Cattle Industry Develop Part 2

### Solution 3 - Set up Ranches on The Plains - The Open Range System

#### **John Iliff and the beginnings of ranching on the Plains**

In 1861 John Iliff bought a herd of cattle for \$500- a cheap price because the herd was exhausted after a long drive across the Plains and was too thin to sell for beef. Iliff saw an opportunity that would bring significant changes to the cattle industry.

Also during 1861, a gold rush in the Colorado Rocky Mountains led to an increase in the number of prospectors living in the area. This meant that there was a great demand for meat however there was no rail link to this area at this time.

**Iliff spotted the opportunity in the problem; if he could fatten his new herd up on the grass from the Plains, he would be able to sell beef for a good price to the mining towns without the need to move cattle on long drives.**

He also discovered the cold winter on the Plains killed the ticks on the Texan Longhorns meaning they no longer would spread disease to other cattle.

Iliff became a millionaire by using the Plains to have a huge open range ranch from which he sold beef to mining towns, teams building the Union Pacific Railroad, and to the government for Plains Indian reservations. In 1872, he won a contract to provide beef to a reservation of 7,000 Sioux Indians.

**As he raised his cattle on the Plains, this was the start of a new phase: ranching on the open range of the Plains, rather than driving them up from Texas. Others followed his example. This was going to cause conflicts with the homesteaders who were also moving onto the Plains.**

#### **The cattle barons**

The 1870's saw a 'beef bonanza' in the West. Although the long drives from Texas continued to railheads in Kansas, the big growth was in ranching on the Plains. Through the 1870's, the cattle industry was seen as a sure way to make

money: costs were low (free grass, almost free land, cheap transportation by rail) while profits were high. As a result, investors poured money into the industry.

The best way to make a lot of money was to have very large ranches and enormous herds of cattle. The consequence was that a few men, backed by rich investors, dominated the cattle industry. They were called **cattle barons** because of their wealth and influence. Some controlled local politics as well as almost all the land. They defended their interests fiercely, especially against cattle rustling. (see the Johnson County War for an example to demonstrate this)

Tasks:

- 1) Explain how John Iliff changed the cattle industry, particularly in terms of where it was located.
- 2) What is meant by open range farming?
- 3) What were the main benefits of farming cattle in this way and in this location?
- 4) Who were the main markets for his cattle and beef?
- 5) Iliff became Denver's first millionaire; can you predict some consequences for this change in cattle farming that will not be so positive?

New Title:

### **Rivalry between the Open Range Ranchers and the Homesteaders**

- 1) Use pages 57 in the textbook to explain why there was tension between the Open Range Ranchers and the Homesteaders.
- 2) List the tactics and methods which ranchers used against the homesteaders to block them using land.
- 3) Barbed wire became an important tool for one side to use - can you decide who would welcome the development of barbed wire more?
- 4) The Open Range system of farming cattle would bring significant changes to the cowboys. Use the information below to organise into two columns in your books:

Cowboys before the Open Range	Cowboys after the Open Range

No longer needed to drive cattle for months along trails, they were now much nearer to their markets.

Work was seasonal, from spring round up to the long drive in the autumn.

Work was year round and full time but fewer were needed.

Dangers included stampeding cattle, wild animals, crossing rivers, rustlers, hostile Indians and extreme heat.

Slept in open air around camp fires.

In free time often visited saloons, brothels in cow towns.

Drinking, gambling, guns and knives banned. Many struggled to adapt this.

Dangers were fewer but rustlers, Indian attacks and wild animals were still threats.

Slept in bunkhouses and used cookhouses.

Due to the extreme weather, in winter cowboys would have to dig out snow bound cows, find them during blizzards, break ice at waterholes for them to drink etc.

Work involved rounding up, branding and driving cattle hundreds of miles.

Work involved rounding up, branding and driving cattle but over much shorter distances. Also checked ranch boundaries, made repairs etc.

On the biggest ranches cowboys would be sent out over the winter to stay in cabins or sod houses dotted around the perimeter. It was a cold and lonely life.

5) Why do you think many cowboys struggled to adapt to these changes in their work and way of life? Explain your answer.

Summary of the Changes: Make a copy of the summary below into your books:

