

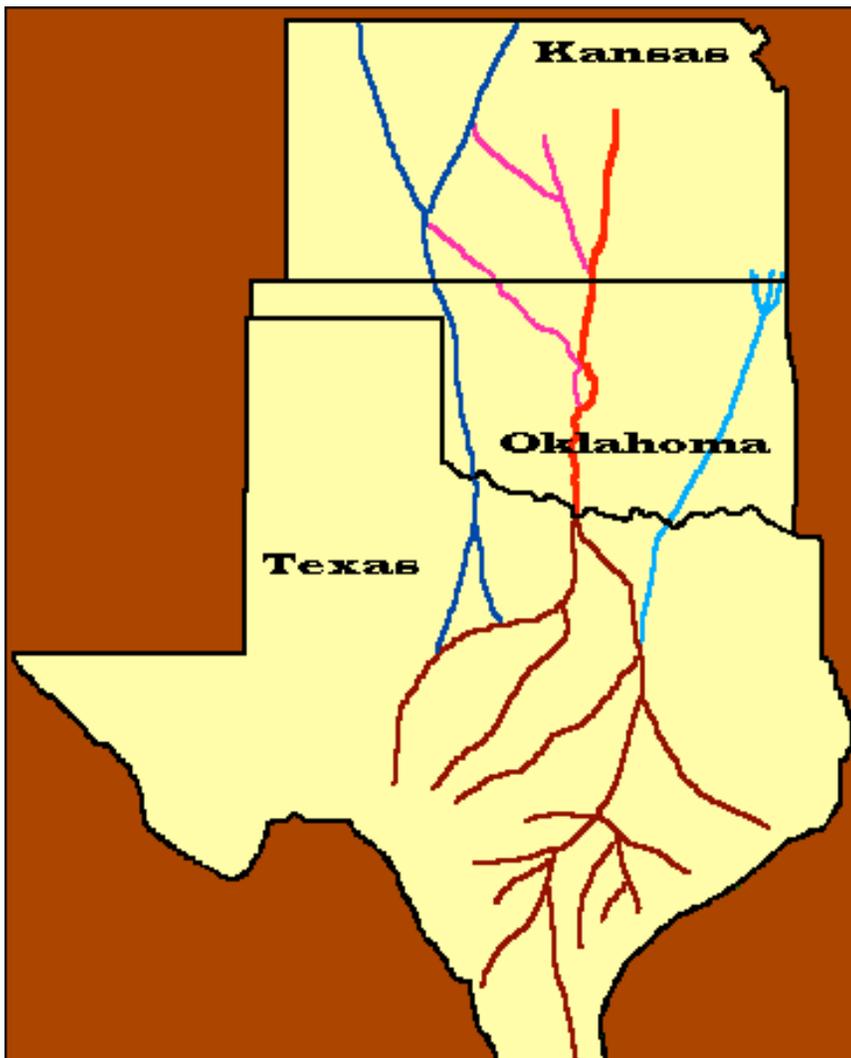
LIFE ON THE OLD CHISHOLM TRAIL



During the first few days of the drive, the cowboys pushed the cattle pretty hard to get them far away from their familiar ranges and so they wouldn't try to run at night. After about a week they were trail broken. After that, the extra hands headed home. Once the Red River was crossed, you were in Indian territory. At that point, especially during the late 1860s and early 1870s, there was the danger of attack from Kiowa, Comanche, Southern Cheyenne, and Arapahoe. These tribes had been sent to reservations by the Treaty of Medicine Lodge Creek, but many did not accept it. The Indians might demand a few cattle or just stampede them. Sometimes buffalo or mustangs stampeded the herd too.

The greenest men were assigned to the rear of the herd to bring up the weakest cattle. Experienced hands wouldn't take that job since you would be eating dust all day. Flankers and swing men who rode on the side away from the wind weren't much better off.

During a typical day, guards changed duty about 4 a.m. The off-duty hands woke up the cook. The cook woke up the hands when breakfast was ready. The hands got dressed and rolled up their gear and ate breakfast. They saddled up the horses. The pointers positioned themselves well behind the lead steers so the cattle could graze at their own pace. The trail boss rode ahead to pick out watering holes and a noon resting place. The men positioned themselves around the herd as it began to move forward. The men ate in shifts at noon. They ate supper in shifts too. If there was no "nighthawk" (man assigned to take care of the horses), each man hobbled his own string, except for his night horse. White horses were never used as night horses because of the widely held belief they attracted lightning. One story of a white steer being struck in a lightning storm, and another one being struck 50 yards away, with both dying, lent some credence to this belief. The herd bedded down about 9 o'clock. The hands sat around for awhile talking or singing cowpoke songs. They gazed at the stars, for many were fairly expert at navigating and telling time by them.



Thunder and lightning, usually at night, was one of the hazards that most often stampeded the herd. When that happened, oftentimes the cowboys could only follow along until the herd stopped. The Wilson Brothers once lost an entire herd when a storm stampeded them into the "Stampede Gully" near the Brazos. Sometimes herds would keep at least one fast horse for racing when herds were close enough together or at a trail town. One such was Jesse James Burton, who won \$50 from Tobe Obem when his mare, Gray Eagle, won. After the cows were sold, the cowboys rode back to the home range, hunting and fishing along the way.

A map showing the principal cattle trails out of Texas and through the old "Indian Territory" – now known as Oklahoma