

VIDEO SCRIPT

TITLE: Cowboys of the Open Range

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FADE IN:

Open

Nat. Sound Up and Under.

Cattle drive.

Narrator: Starting in the late 1870s cattle arrived on the western grasslands of Dakota Territory. They came from Texas by the thousands, but they didn't get here on their own. Men on horses rode with the herds, guiding them to good grazing land.

Re-creation of cowboys on horses.

These men were cowboys of the open range.

Historic photos of cowboys.

The open range meant miles and miles of public land for cattle to graze, without fences.

Historic photo of woman rancher, and rodeo trick rider Mattie Newcombe.

Very few women helped move the herds up the plains, although they built ranches, owned cattle, and helped make western culture popular world-wide.

Image of moon over prairie.

Here's how a typical cowboy day started—before sunrise in the summer—according to Earle Knepper, a South Dakota cowboy of the 1890s.

Re-creation of cowboys on a cattle drive.

RE-CREATE VOICE OF EARLE KNEPPER:
Well, we got up real early. One of the boys on last guard, he comes in to camp at 3:30 in the morning and he wakes up the cook, if the cook isn't already up, and the cook gets breakfast and calls the boys. We had sour dough biscuits. Boy! Those big old biscuits. And there was always dried fruit, prunes and plenty of coffee. And we had bacon and ham and sometimes fresh beef. By around 4:30 breakfast is over, the boys have their beds rolled and the wagons and

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Historical picture of cook.

everybody are all set to go. Any cowboy who couldn't get his bed rolled up in time and get everything ready was called a "drag."

Narrator: A cowboy's mornings and evenings would have been pretty sorry without the cook and his chuck wagon.

Chuck wagon.

The chuck wagon meant a kind of home for the cowboys. It carried all the supplies necessary for living with a *few* comforts—a hot, fresh-cooked meal and a blanket or two to keep warm.

A chuck wagon with pots and Dutch ovens for cooking over a fire, food, and rolls of bedding.

The cook had everything he needed in that wagon.

Chuck box table top.

He even had a table to roll out dough for biscuits.

Re-creation of food and supplies.

There were plenty of drawers in the chuck wagon full of plates, cups, knives, forks, coffee, cans of sugar, salt, and lots of molasses, which the cowboys called "lick." A water keg was hitched to the side of the wagon.

Cattle

When cowboys wanted beef for supper they usually chose a yearling and killed it in the late afternoon.

Recreated cook and chuck wagon.

When it was time to eat, the cook would yell: "Chuck!" or "Chuck-away!"

And sometimes...

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Re-created cook.

RE-CREATED COOK:

"Come and get it or I'll throw it out!"

Historical photos

Narrator: Everybody had to follow the cook's rules, even the boss. Cowboys knew not to ride their horses near the chuck wagon while the cook was preparing food because they might kick up dust. Anyone who made that mistake could expect a serious tongue-lashing.

Historical photos

Cowboys didn't want dust in their food even though they themselves were usually covered in it. They were with the herds night and day and didn't change clothes, since most only brought the clothes on their back. When they wanted a bath, they found the nearest river.

Re-creation.

Cowboys often slept under the stars with their hats and boots for pillows. For entertainment they invented a style of music that remains popular today.

Re-create sleeping out.

MUSICAL SEGUE: Cowboy playing harmonica.

Map showing states.

Narrator: Cowboys who drove cattle up from Texas followed the Northern Trail, which led them to Wyoming, Montana, and Dakota Territory.

Big cattle herd.

Why go to all the trouble of driving *thousands* of cattle *hundreds* of miles from Texas?

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Grasslands of northern plains.

Grass,

Stream or river.

water,

Railroad cars shipping beef.

and markets for beef.

Grassland again.

Dakota Territory had some of the best grass in the country for grazing cattle. Short grasses like wheat grass and grama were nutritious for cows, and helped fatten them. Cattlemen—the owners of cattle—knew they would get a better price at market for cows that grazed for two or three years in western Dakota Territory.

Grassland in winter.

The grasses here usually survived drought and did not easily die during winter. Instead of freezing and drooping to the ground, the grass stems stood up, through the snow so that cattle could continue grazing.

Re-created voice.

A cowboy looking at land for his boss in Scotland said :

Shots of Belle Fourche River.

RE-CREATED VOICE: "My mouth waters when I think of the feed in that region. The bottom lands of the Belle Fourche had grass three-feet high although it was November."

Map of rivers in western SD, cattle drinking from a stream.

Narrator: Cowboys always knew where to find the nearest water. This part of the country had streams and rivers running into the Missouri. The Belle Fourche, Grand, Cheyenne, Bad, White and Moreau were all good sources of water for cattle.

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Back to earlier railroad picture.

About markets for beef—trains carried cattle to distant cities for slaughter. For a while Belle Fourche ranked as the world's busiest cattle shipping rail yard.

Belle Fourche rail yard.

And cattlemen knew there were people who wanted beef right in South Dakota.

Historic photos.

Soldiers stationed at military posts in Dakota Territory, miners in the Black Hills, and residents in new towns springing up across the prairie all ate beef.

Historic photos.

American Indians on reservations were guaranteed food as part of treaty agreements.

Historic photos of non-American cattle owners.

Some cattle owners lived far away in places like France, Scotland, and England. Some lived in Dakota Territory. Modern South Dakotans might recognize their names. That's because towns were named for them.

SD map showing these towns.

Lemmon, Philip, and Murdo.

Photo of Ed Lemmon doing something with cowboys.

Ed Lemmon was foreman of the Flying V cattle company.

Photo of Scotty Philip with bison.

James "Scotty" Philip ran cattle and was also known for his part in saving bison.

Photo of Murdo.

Murdo McKenzie was one of those from far

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Re-created boss.

away—from Scotland.

These were boss men to the cowboys.

Wide angle of cattle on plains

For bosses, as big as western Dakota was, there was a time when it didn't seem big enough. Cattlemen wanted more land so they could run even bigger herds. They pressured the government to break up the Great Sioux Reservation, and they didn't like sharing the land with buffalo or sheep.

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This time during the 1880s was called the “bonanza,” with many big cattle companies making profits in Dakota Territory.

Gentle snow fall on the plains.

Something that impressed cowboys and their bosses was how healthy cows were in winter, as they grazed on grass sticking through the snow. Because of the snow, they didn't inhale much dust.

Blizzard shots.

But then came winters that weren't healthy and, in fact, turned into killers.

Historic photos of cow skeletons.

Some cowboys thought the snow would never get deep enough to prevent cattle from grazing. The terrible winters of 1886, 1887, and 1888 proved them wrong. Blizzards and sub-zero temperatures continued for days. Cattle died and cattlemen lost money. Many cattlemen went broke and returned to Texas. Those who stayed knew they would have to do things differently if they wanted their cattle and businesses to survive.

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Historical re-creations.

First, they would need to start cutting hay and storing it for their cattle to help get them through tough winters. Also, herds would have to be smaller.

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The time of the open range was ending, and the era of ranching was beginning.

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A ranch meant land owned by an individual, closed off by fence boundaries. Instead of sleeping under the stars, cowboys now lived in bunkhouses.

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Some cowboys found themselves working hard in a different way. As ranch hands, they began a great building project—fencing the western plains.

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Before the invention of barbed wire, it simply wasn't possible to put up much fencing on the Plains. There were not enough trees to build fences out of wood. All that changed in 1874 when Joseph Glidden developed a machine to produce barbed wire. Now ranchers could enclose many square miles.

Historical re-creations.

Ranch cowboys strung this devil's rope, as it was sometimes called, along wooden posts. They used spades and post hole diggers to plant the posts securely in the ground. They worked hard after putting the fence up to keep it up. Cattle often knocked areas of the fence down.

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Ranch cowboys kept cattle alive during winter by riding long distance to bring them hay. Sometimes ranch cowboys had to respond to

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Cap Mossman and Diamond A images.

emergencies, like cows stuck in snow banks.

Cap Mossman was owner of the Diamond A Ranch. The Diamond A was spread out over half a million acres on the Cheyenne River Reservation. Cap's cowboys built 60 miles of fence to separate his cattle from Murdo MacKenzie's.

Historical photo of 1902 cowboy.

But before fencing was completed, there was one last big roundup on the open range, in 1902.

Roundup footage.

Roundups were when cowboys from different cattle companies worked together to find and gather up several thousand head of cattle from each company.

Cattle.

As cattle grazed on the open range during the year, one company's herd got mixed with another. During the roundup, cowboys needed a way to tell who owned which cattle.

Old-time branding.

Brands were the answer. A brand was a mark burned onto the hide of the animal.

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Brands could be made up in any shape. They were often letters, numbers, crosses, diamonds, or some combination of those things.

Brand display. (Wall Drug Gallery).

MUSICAL SEGUE.

Horse shots.

Narrator: On the roundup, a cowboy called the "nighthawk" was responsible for taking care of

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Re-create wrangler with horses.

the cowboys' horses at night, and a "wrangler" cared for the horses during the day.

Cowboys had to do so much riding that one horse wouldn't have been strong enough to endure it. Each cowboy had 6 to 10 horses. The nighthawk sometimes had to take care of over 200 horses.

Horse ranch.

In fact, so many horses were necessary for running cattle companies that some people developed separate ranches just for breeding and training horses.

Good landscape shot.

The purpose of a roundup was to search every draw, coulee, and creek in the area until all cows were in.

Sunset shot.

Cowboys told time by the sun, not by a clock, and when the sun sat low on the horizon they rode back to camp for the night.

Picture of cowboys at night around a fire.

The 1902 cowboys probably knew this was the last big roundup they would work.

Historical photo of a bank teller.

As the times changed, some cowboys decided to look for different jobs altogether.

Photos of 1902 roundup and cowboy reunions.

Whatever they did, though, the 1902 roundup cowboys never forgot who they were. They enjoyed reunions the rest of their lives.

Photo collection Belle Fourche Museum.

Contemporary images of rodeo men

More than a hundred years later, we haven't

Approved: _____

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and women.

Close.

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forgotten them either—or any of the other cowboys of the open range.

Closing Music.
