A Kid's Guide TO THE NATIONAL RANCHING HERITAGE CENTER AT TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY
REAL RANCHES.

Every object at the National Ranching Heritage Center is tied to a real ranch. The people who settled and ranched in this area were full of creativity, grit, and resiliency. The ranching industry honors their memory through activities, language and behavior inherited from pioneering men and women of the past.

REAL STORIES.

The National Ranching Heritage Center is home to 55 historic structures and 20,000 artifacts that represent the history of ranching in North America. Combined, these objects allow us to tell unlimited stories about the people who settled and made a living on the American frontier, the land and resources they used, and the modern-day culture that evolved as a result of their influence.

REAL HERITAGE.

The legacies of past generations are still alive at the National Ranching Heritage Center. We strive to care for, display and educate visitors about the rich history, traditions, and culture that impacted the nation and continues to do so today.

THE GREAT PLAINS OF THE UNITED STATES

The Great Plains is a large area of level land extending from the Rio Grande River north into Canada.

Animals native to the Great Plains are grass-eaters, except for the coyote and wolf, and can get along with little or no water supply. The most important of the plains animals was the bison (a.k.a buffalo). Before being exterminated by hide hunters in the 1870s, huge herds of bison covered the Great Plains living on the grasses. These same grasses make this area an ideal location for ranching. As European settlers arrived on the plains, ranches popped up throughout the landscape. Today, the Great Plains is still mostly used for ranching and farming.
Los Corralitos
1780

The lifestyle established in early Spanish Texas shaped the cattle industry of Texas we know today!

LAND GRANTS
José de Escandon is known as the Spanish colonizer and first governor of the colony of Nuevo Santander (Laredo). In 1753 he granted 350,000 acres of land along the Rio Grande River to the Borrego family. The land grant started with this fortified ranch structure to protect the family from Indians and bandits.

ESTABLISHING RANCHES
Ranching in Texas was evidence of the Spaniards’ ability to adapt their lifestyles to the vast prairies of the frontier. As the colonists entered the semi-arid regions of Texas, they knew that farming would be limited so they turned to ranching. Ranches could be run by a small number of people.

IMPORTED CATTLE
Cattle and other livestock were brought to Texas during Spain’s first attempts to colonize the Americas. Because the animals multiplied so rapidly, herds of wild cattle and horses soon roamed parts of Texas. The unowned, wild animals were known as mesteños and were later called longhorns. These animals were used for transportation, heavy labor, and food. On the frontier, ranching developed quickly. Strong traditions also took root. In time, these traditions shaped the history and culture of Texas. The vaqueros, or cowhands, developed many of the techniques cowboys still use to control livestock.
El Capote Cabin
1838

This humble one room cabin has ties to several famous rebellions through its first European owner and French nobleman, Count Joseph de La Baume.

1776

THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION | Joseph de La Buame crossed the Atlantic to join the American Revolution. After less than six months of service, La Baume reached Louisiana and the war ended.

1806

TEXAS UNDER SPANISH RULE | La Blume moved to San Antonio in 1806 and became interested in purchasing a 26,000-acre tract of land among the Capote Hills from the Spanish. He acquired a land grant from Spain, but his purchase was held up by another struggle for independence. This time Mexico was seeking independence from Spain.

1813

THE MEXICAN WAR FOR INDEPENDENCE | This war lasted 11 years and complicated La Baume’s land purchase. Although he was pardoned from being a traitor, his property was not returned. He petitioned the government in 1825 for his confiscated property and employed 32-year-old Stephen F. Austin as his attorney. The newly formed Mexican government eventually returned his property.

1836

TEXAS REVOLUTION | The Count died in 1834 with uncontested ownership. Although the Texas Revolution and the establishment of the new Republic of Texas delayed judicial action for 12 years, courts executed the will in 1844 and his family took ownership of the land, naming it El Capote Ranch.

| The Six Flags over Texas

Under Spain 1519-1821
Under France 1685-1690
Under Mexico 1821-1836
Texas as a Republic 1836-1845
Texas in Confederacy 1861-1865
Texas in U.S. 1845-1861 1865-present
The 1848 war in Germany caused many to leave their homeland. Some German immigrants came to Texas hoping to have better lives, while others wanted to leave behind the narrow beliefs of German rulers. Many were hoping to find jobs, trying to escape overcrowding in their native country, or simply seeking adventure in a new land.

The largest wave of German immigration occurred in the 1840s when the Adelsverein, The Society for the Protection of German Immigrants in Texas, assisted thousands in coming to Central Texas. These immigrants established the cities of New Braunfels and Fredericksburg.

Louis (Ludwig) Martin sailed to Texas with the first shipload of German immigrants recruited by Adelsverein, landing in Galveston in 1844. By 1853 he had moved to the banks of the Llano River with his wife Elisabet and their eight children. They settled at what became known as Hedwig’s Hill. Martin made his living farming, ranching, and providing a freight service to military installations and sold general supplies to the public. He also bought and traded land often.

The German influences on Texas include schools, food (such as brustwurst), dances and festivals, and Christmas trees.
The roots of the American cowboy go back to the years immediately after the Civil War when large numbers of wild cattle were gathered and driven north to railroad towns in Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, and Missouri. From these locations the cattle were loaded into railroad cars and transported back East to feed people living in cities. This was known as the Trail Driving Period and started around 1865 and lasted until about 1880. Because Texas had a huge supply of wild cattle and no railroad, the state was the center of activity for driving cattle to northern railroad towns. During this time, thousands of young men (and some girls who disguised themselves as boys) were drawn to the business of herding livestock. The skills and equipment they developed in that short time have lasted into the present day. Even the word “cowboy” appeared at this time. Before 1870, the people who handled livestock were known as “herders” or “drovers.”

Returning home from the Civil War, George Jowell found that the unclaimed Longhorns running wild throughout the state would support his dream of starting a ranch in Palo Pinto, Texas. He joined other cattlemen in driving herds to Kansas and Missouri to capitalize on the northern market. According to legend, he was on a trail drive to Kansas City in 1872 when American Indians burned his cabin to the ground. During the night, the horses began neighing and the cattle moved restlessly. Feeling the unease, Mrs. Leanna Jowell stepped outside to see what was happening. A rock fell abruptly at her feet. Quickly, she grabbed her baby and shouted for the hired hand to saddle the horses. The three of them rode to a neighbor’s house. When she returned several days later, the remains of the cabin were smoldering on the ground. Because George was determined to build a house that would protect his family, he planned and built a complex of stone that wouldn’t burn but would provide peace of mind and protection when he was away on trail drives. He had no way of knowing that there wouldn’t be more attacks. Most American Indians in the area were subdued and on reservations by 1876.
The appearance of barbed wire in the early 1880s marked the end of the open range. To continue in the business of raising cattle, ranchers had to purchase or lease grazing lands for their cattle. W.T. Waggoner leased 500,000 acres in Indian Territory (Oklahoma) for his herds. When the U.S. government no longer allowed grazing in Indian Territory, ranchers began to purchase land in the 1890s. By 1903 the Waggoners had accumulated more than a half-million acres of land covering more than 780 square miles. That same year as he was drilling a well to supply his cattle with water, Waggoner struck oil. This discovery significantly increased the wealth of the ranch. By the 1970s the ranch consisted of more than 500,000 acres, which made it the largest single ranch in Texas at the time.

Christopher Columbus Slaughter and with many other ranchers in the late 1890s knew that the wild Longhorn cattle did not produce as much meat as European breeds. Shorthorn and Hereford cattle could eat the same grass and produce bigger profits. In 1897, Slaughter purchased 2,000 Herefords from Charles Goodnight. The stocky white-faced cattle grazed all around this structure and inspired its name. The problem with these cattle breeds was that they required more care than their wild cousins. Line camps like the Long S Whiteface were built to house cowboys who cared for cattle in pastures that were distant from ranch headquarters. With the new practice of fencing pastures, cowboys could stay for extended periods of time.
The Box and Strip House represents the home of a small West Texas ranch in the late 19th century. The rancher’s concerns were the same as his predecessors on the dry plains: limited wood and water. But there was a difference. By this time, a railroad network connected ranchers to the rest of the nation. A ranching family could buy windmills, cloth, lumber, toys and furnishings—the same items available in the East. All they had to do was visit a store in a nearby town or buy from mail-order companies such as Sears, Roebuck and Company or Montgomery Ward.

This is the house that “grew” and served three ranching families. The house began as a tiny, one-room, stone structure and grew over time to include several sections. The growth of the Harrell house also represents the growth of cultural and social activities. As the population in ranching communities increased, women began to push for activities that would provide not only entertainment for their families, but also educational opportunities. Women’s clubs, political clubs, libraries, and literary societies were all outgrowths of the increasing focus on cultural activities. From these humble beginnings, the groundwork was laid for modern theatrical productions, art galleries, symphony orchestras and other Texas cultural institutions.
Pioneers liked buffalo chips, but not as snacks! Buffalo chips are dried buffalo droppings. Because they burned well, the chips were handy for lighting cooking fires on the treeless plains. Children found other uses for the chips as well, such as throwing them at one another or seeing who could make them sail the farthest. After the buffalo were gone, pioneers used cow chips. How would you like to toss that kind of frisbee?

From the late 1890s to 1937, the Bairfield Schoolhouse served the children of cowboys, ranchers and homesteaders in the Texas Panhandle. During these 47 years, 25 teachers (3 men and 22 women) taught in the schoolhouse and sometimes handled nine grade levels with only one or two pupils in each grade. Lessons centered around the three R’s: reading (w)riting and (a)rithmetic. They would occasionally study other subjects. “The kids were hardy, and they knew how to get about the country,” said a teacher who taught at the school during the 1930s. “We would take long walks. There was a real nice waterfall on the ranch. It was one of our favorite places to go. It was always our science lesson when we went. We gathered rocks and flowers and even found some Indian arrowheads on some days. They could imagine all the buffalo that roamed the county.”
WHAT DO CATTLE EAT? The answer is grass. Cattle have a specialized stomach that can digest it. Animals that live on grass, such as cattle, goats, sheep, deer, and buffalo, are called ruminants. The Great Plains was covered with millions of miles of grasses, making it a perfect place to raise cattle. The grass here at the JY Bunkhouse is called Blue grama. To livestock it is very palatable (pleasant to taste) all year long and provides the nutrition they need. Blue grama provides as much as 40 percent of the diet of cattle in this region.

Three million acres of public land in the Texas Panhandle was used to pay for a new state Capitol in 1876. A business called the Capitol Freehold Land and Investment Co. was formed to pay for construction of the Capitol building in Austin in exchange for the land, which later became the famous XIT Ranch. At its peak between 1885 and 1912, the XIT Ranch had 150 cowboys who rode 1,000 horses, herded 150,000 cattle and branded 35,000 calves in one year. It had the most windmills of any ranch—335—and the tallest windmill of any known in the world at a height equivalent to a 13-story building. The new owners always intended to subdivide the land and become a land-selling syndicate. The goal was to get out of ranching someday. As a result, the XIT embodies the story of ranching on the plains of Texas, moving from free range to enclosed grazing land to development of small ranches and farms.
The Great Plains were considered unfit for cultivation in the 18th century and labeled the “Great American Desert” because droughts followed rainy spells and the sun and wind dried surface moisture. Early settlers on the plains could barely haul enough water for personal needs, let alone grow crops or water livestock. Most of the water flowed deep underground, often more than 300 feet below the earth’s surface.

The availability of affordable, durable windmills altered the entire structure of ranching when adoption of the windmill swept across the ranching empire in the 1870s and ‘80s. The historic XIT Ranch, the largest fenced ranch in the world in 1887, had 335 windmills spread over 3 million acres of the Texas Panhandle. Because the mechanisms required frequent attention, the ranch employed 14 full-time windmill workers.
Not every rancher had a carriage house, and certainly not ranchers just starting in the ranching business. This structure housed fine buggies and surreys that would be pulled by excellent horses. The carriage house was a possession aspired to by many young men. It came with prosperity and usually a wife and children, as most dignified ladies did not ride long distances horseback. The carriage house at the National Ranching Heritage Center is from John B. Slaughter’s fine ranch headquarters in Post, Texas, and was made possible from years of hard work and smart business transactions.

The railroad was essential to the growth of ranching: transporting cattle, settlers, manufactured goods, supplies and lumber to the plains. Traditionally, railroads had connected previous settled points. But in the West, railroads were often the forerunners and spurs to civilization. Such was the case with Ropes. The depot was the first business establishment in the town. As more and more farmers and small stockmen moved into the area, the Santa Fe realized the economic value of a town-site at the railroad.

MATCH THE VEHICLES TO THE CORRECT POWER SOURCE

- Baldwin Locomotive
- Conestoga Wagon
- Buggy
- Model T

- Gasoline
- 4 Horses
- Steam
- 1 Horse
RANCHING TODAY

Cowboys and ranchers are alive and well in Texas, though they may be less visible from the highway.

Although it may look different than it did 100 years ago, livestock ranching still plays a critical role in feeding a growing world. Most experts agree that there will be almost 10 billion people on Earth by 2050. Just as cattle and other livestock were important through all the eras you watched unfold at the National Ranching Heritage Center, they will be center stage for feeding a growing world. Pound for pound, beef provides a great source of protein, iron and other nutrients we all need. Maybe even more important, cattle use a special four-chambered stomach that enables them to digest things like grass that people can’t eat. Ranchers also tend to use land that isn’t very good for crops. Ranching ensures that thousands of acres of rangeland stay as “green space,” which benefits many species of wildlife.

Ranchers and cowboys also carry on important values and traditions. Our friend, Red Steagall puts it best: *those values are honesty, integrity, loyalty and work ethic. It’s dedication to your family, conviction in your belief in God and practicing common decency and respect for your fellow man every day that you live.*