

Where We Worked in Southwest Kansas, 2012 Tour

In 1879, John W. Beaty and his three brothers created the first permanent settlement in the area, establishing cattle ranches in what is now Morton, Stanton and Stevens counties in Southwest Kansas, and south to the Beaver River in Oklahoma. The Beatys employed about 40 cowboys and ranch hands, used four round-up crews and ran almost a million head of cattle over the sand hills and open plains of Southwest Kansas and parts of Colorado and Oklahoma.

Cowboys working for the Beatys spent long hours each day on horseback taking care of cattle and sleeping in bedrolls on the ground through all kinds of weather. Their biggest job was to keep the Beaty herds separated from trail herds heading to Dodge City from Texas and later, keeping the different ranches' cattle separate from each other.

In 1910, when the final cattle drive sent approximately 4000 steers to market, the herd was driven from the Beaty ranches near the Colorado border to the shipping point at Arkalon, northeast of Liberal on the Rock Island Railroad, a trip of about 70 miles. The herd was so large that it had to be divided into two groups. Each group traveled approximately fifteen miles per day and two to three days apart to allow the animals enough water.

A trail crew consisted of "point" cowboys, "flankers" and those "riding drag" who drove the cattle and kept them in line. One cowboy rode ahead to inform local ranchers and settlers that the herd was on the way, and to make arrangements for water. Farmers and settlers along the way were responsible for supplying the water and for moving their own cattle back from the trail to keep them from mixing with the large herd.

The Beatys eventually sold their outfit to the H. S. Boise Cattle Company of Kansas City. The cattle empire days in Southwest Kansas ended in 1910 when the Santa Fe Land & Improvement Company purchased five hundred quarters, or 80,000 acres, in Stevens and Morton Counties, including part of the remaining open range.