

THE CHISHOLM TRAIL MONUMENT

Up the Chisholm Trail, by sculptor Troy Kelley

Up the Chisholm Trail consists of 17 bronze panels, three longhorns, barbed wire, and a Texas star that represent various aspects on the history of the trail. Sculptor Troy Kelley has added his own artistic interpretation to this history, and has adhered to the facts of the trail as well.

PANEL I.

The Chisholm Trail. FROM 1867 TO 1887, OVER 14 MILLION HEAD OF LONGHORN CATTLE WERE DRIVEN NORTH FROM TEXAS ALONG THE CHISHOLM TRAIL TO REACH NEWLY FORMED COWTOWNS IN KANSAS. THE TRAIL, WHICH INCLUDED A TRIBUTARY THAT RAN THROUGH BELL COUNTY, AFFECTED THE ENTIRE NATION ECONOMICALLY, AND HELPED CREATE A NEW FOLK HERO – THE AMERICAN COWBOY.

By the end of the Civil War, over five million wild longhorn cattle roamed Texas. First brought to the New World by 16th-century Spain, the cattle had no real economic value; a practical means of transportation to the more populated, beef-hungry Eastern United States did not exist. In the 1840s railroads spread into Missouri, and then further west into Kansas. Texans recognized the profit to be made *if* cattle could reach buyers at the railheads.

Since the trail from San Antonio to Abilene, Kansas, is 800 miles, each panel represents 50 miles. The space between the panels represents the many branches of the trail.

PANEL II.

Portrait of Jesse Chisholm, sculpted from only one photograph of him. Chisholm, born in Tennessee in 1805, appears on this panel. His mother was Cherokee; her sister, Tiana Rogers, later married Sam Houston. Jesse Chisholm settled in Indian Territory (Oklahoma), and served as an interpreter and guide for many travelers and soldiers. Chisholm also managed several trading posts. He traveled so much over a particular route through the region that it became known as Chisholm's trail. He died in 1868, and never knew that his name would become so well-known. Also on Panel II is an arrow that points north, with "Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas" indicating the current states that the Trail went through. Notice the end of the arrow – an arrowhead, or projectile point. The arrow points due north.

PANEL III.

A group of longhorns grazing in South Texas. In 1541, Francisco Vásquez de Coronado brought Spanish cattle into South Texas to provide food for members of his gold seeking expeditions. Soon after, Alonso de León traveled throughout Texas establishing missions, and distributed cattle near every river he crossed. The cattle flourished.

By the 1840s, the construction of railways opened up new opportunities for selling Texas cattle. The Shawnee Trail, or the "Texas Road," served as a route from Texas, through Indian Territory (Oklahoma), and into western Missouri, where cattle were shipped by train to Chicago. Problems with the Missouri settlers soon arose. Missouri cattle suffered from "Texas Fever," a fatal disease caused by ticks which the immune Texas longhorns carried. In December 1855, Missouri banned, or quarantined, Texas cattle, even though the new law was not enforced.

By 1860, quarantines and the approaching Civil War contributed to the decline of the trail drives. Because trade was prohibited between the North and South, any Texas cattle sold usually went to New Orleans to help feed Confederate soldiers. Texans returned from the Civil War to find over five million longhorns roaming the state. However, no practical way existed to get the beef to the northeast, where the demand was high: railroads had not yet reached Texas.

PANEL IV.

Other states were carved or born; Texas grew from hide and horn.

-Berta Hart Nance

More longhorns heading north. Three hundred years of adaptation to the harsh South Texas environment resulted in several unique characteristics in the longhorn. The breed developed a very strong immune system which made them immune to the parasitic tick and the resulting "Texas fever." Also, strong hooves made the animal able to walk for miles without a rest. "Long legs and lanky bodies lent them speed," said Wayne Gard, author of *The Chisholm Trail*.

PANEL V.

A vaquero rounding up cattle. Mexican cowboys taught American cowboys how to successfully cowpunch. Note the bullwhip, and the attire of the cowboy – all indicate Mexican influence. The artist has also infused movement into this panel; the viewer can feel the wind blowing through the hair of the horse and the rider.

PANEL VI.

An American cowboy rounding up cattle. Both horse and rider have a patch over their right eyes. Note the brand on the horse; it means, “One-Eyed Jacks.” **I JS** — This cowboy appears on Panel VI and on Panel Xvi, *Whoopin’ it Up*. This is the only cowboy that appears more than once on the monument.

PANEL VII.

A branding scene. An African-American cowboy struggles to hold the leg of a calf in preparation for branding. This was one of the many dangers and hard work of cow punching. The average drive consisted of 3,000-5,000 beeves. When the entire herd was rounded up, the drover counted and noted the brands of each animal. Notice the bandaged head on the kneeling cowboy holding the front leg of the calf.

PANEL VIII.

The trail boss. His belt buckle holds the initials CSA, the Confederate States of America. The trail boss was often the lone literate cowboy on the trail. He was also usually the only cowboy who carried a gun. In the early days of driving cattle, many cowboys wore remnants of Confederate uniforms. However, stronger clothing was needed that could withstand the rigors of the trail. Levi Strauss created his blue jeans in the 1870s and cowboys on later drives possibly wore them, although they were not the same style worn today. Chaps were first used in the heavy brush of South Texas. Cowboys in other areas soon saw the protection they offered from abrasions and weather. Boots cost approximately \$25-35 in the late 1800s and usually lasted two to three years, even when worn constantly. The crew consisted of both skilled and unskilled men. Cowboys, who averaged 20 years of age, were paid ten to twelve dollars a month, and were often advanced part of their pay in order to buy blankets, clothing, and tobacco for the long drive.

The "drover," or trail boss, was in charge of the crew. He determined the daily route, which depended upon the availability of grass and water. He usually rode 40 miles a day; the herd only walked 12-15 miles a day.

After determining the route, the boss stood on a hill and signaled to the crew the appropriate direction. If water was some distance away, he motioned for the flank, swing, and drag positions to "move in," which made the herd walk faster and farther. Cattle walked one mile per hour and ate 75-100 pounds of grass per day.

PANEL IX.

Up the trail. It often took three months to reach Abilene, Kansas. The days were spent in the saddle dodging rattlesnakes, stampedes, cattle rustlers, and the sharp whack of a long horn. A Texas cattle raiser who planned a spring drive to Kansas began preparing in the fall. He would visit neighbors and ask if they wanted to contribute cattle to the drive. It cost \$1-1.50 per head to contract their cattle to the drover. Further preparations included hiring experienced cowboys, other crew members and a cook, and training horses to help control the herd.

Most cattle raisers owned only enough land for their home and corrals; cattle grazed freely on public lands. This situation created the need for branding as a way of identifying each longhorn's owner. The practice of gathering cattle for branding was called a cow hunt in the early days, and then later a round-up.

A group of neighborhood men usually cooperated on a round-up. One common way to gain control of the wild cattle, or mavericks, was to drive a decoy herd of tame beeves into the area, and often the wild longhorns would follow the herd into the corral. For more stubborn cattle, roping and restraining were necessary.

PANEL X.

The chuck wagon. The chuck wagon was the hub of the trail drive. The men looked forward to the end of the day, when they would gather to eat and rest. Not only did the chuck wagon provide food, it also served as storage for bedrolls, guns, ammunition, spare equipment, rope, etc. The chuck wagon even served as a compass. In unknown country, the cook would turn the wagon's tongue north at night to avoid getting lost if fog was present the next morning.

They took turns standing watch over the herd, and often sang to the skittish beasts. The cook was an important member of the trail drive. Meals consisted of sourdough biscuits, jerky, strong coffee, and the ubiquitous beans. Supper was a time to relax, sing, and tell stories of home and lost love around the campfire.

PANEL XI.

Woman on a pedestal. Many women rode up the trail. One well-known lady was from Georgetown, Harriet Standifer Cluck. The artist, however, has placed a brand on this woman's horse – VK – honoring his wife, Vickie.

PANEL XII.

Crossing Salado Creek, with Salado College in the background. River crossings were always very dangerous for the herd and cowboy alike. Here, one longhorn has successfully crossed the creek, but the others seem to be struggling. In fact, one of the beasts is upside down, which indicates that he didn't make it.

PANEL XIII.

A lightning storm and stampede in Belton. In 1875, a herd was camped in what is now Confederate Park in Belton. One morning, an electrical storm occurred, which caused the cattle to panic – a stampede ensued. As cowboy Bill Northrup tried to calm the cattle, lightning hit a large tree, and ricocheted to unfortunate Bill. The longhorn trampling on his prized hat indicates that the cowboy didn't make it.

PANEL XIV.

The grave of cowboy Bill Northrup. The cross states, "Bill Northrup killed April 1875."

PANEL XV.

A trail boss negotiating crossing through Indian Territory. This panel shows a meeting between a trail boss and a rather emaciated Native American. Each rider holds up two fingers, indicating that the trail boss will give two longhorns (in the background) to the Indian for safe passage. Indian Territory is now the state of Oklahoma.

PANEL XVI.

Whoopin' it up! Finally, the drive is over. Arrival in Abilene means payment (about \$30 dollars), a bath, a good meal, and sometimes, a visit to the saloon. Cowboys often had their picture taken at pineboard studios located in most cow towns. They appeared tough with guns in their holsters, but most of the time the weapons were studio props.

PANEL XVII.

Shipping cattle to eastern markets. The final scene illustrates loading cattle into the boxcars that will take them to market. During the twenty years of the Chisholm Trail's existence, over 14 million longhorns were shipped from Abilene, Newton, and other newly created cowtowns in Kansas. Eventually, McCoy built stockyards in Abilene to hold 1,000 head of cattle. His yards were designed to load 40 boxcars filled with cattle in only two hours. He also constructed a barn, office, bank, and a hotel - all situated next to the railroad. McCoy advertised his new railhead by sending flyers and messengers to Texas.

Texans seized upon the opportunity offered by McCoy and drove their cattle to Abilene, without even being certain of the destination. McCoy's stockyards were barely finished when the first herd came into town.

The first trainload of cattle left Abilene on September 5, 1867, headed eastward.

"Clouds of dust on the horizon told the people of Abilene that Texas herds were breaking in the new trail."

Wayne Gard, *The Chisholm Trail*