

Was There a Chisholm Trail in Texas?

ANYONE WITH INTEREST IN OR
AFFECTION FOR THE CHISHOLM TRAIL
MUST AT SOME POINT WRESTLE WITH
THIS QUESTION:

DID THE CHISHOLM TRAIL EXTEND INTO TEXAS?

The Chisholm Trail played a crucial role in the culture and economy of Texas. But the geography of the trail that brought cattle from all over the Lone Star state is complicated.

There were many cattle trails in Texas. They converged at different locations, and nearly all came together at Red River Station, along the border between Texas and Indian Territory. Like a river, the Chisholm Trail was fed by tributaries and would change course when conditions dictated, widening at some spots and narrowing at others.

Ranchers from across the Texas cattle kingdom would form a trail crew, and that crew would gather the herd and guide them north.

Because of the imprecise geography, Chisholm Trail museums, historical markers, and events dot the Texas landscape. For generations, enthusiasts have tried to apply geographic boundaries to the cultural phenomenon. Texan P. P. Ackley, a veteran of the Chisholm Trail cattle drives, erected signs marking the Chisholm Trail across Texas, placing one outside his house in Donna, Texas, that read, “*End of the Chisholm Trail.*”

REGARDLESS OF WHERE THE TRAIL BEGAN OR
ENDED, NO ONE CAN DOUBT ITS ENDURING IMPACT
ON THE HISTORY, CULTURE AND ECONOMY OF TEXAS.

Texas cowboys posing with their herd.
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The Trail through Indian Territory

AFTER THE CIVIL WAR, THE AREA WE NOW KNOW AS OKLAHOMA WAS SEVERELY ECONOMICALLY DEPRESSED.

As historian Edwin McReynolds states, “*In 1865 the Indian Territory was a region of desolation.*” War, neglect, meddling, mismanagement, and

outright treaty violation on the part of the United States government significantly weakened the tribal nations.

The Five Civilized Tribes brought livestock with them from the Southeast, but rampant cattle thieving and the stresses of war decimated their herds. The United States government strongly encouraged the tribes to try ranching, but while certain individuals made a go in the cattle industry, a lack of experience rendered most attempts unsuccessful.

However, the prairie grasses of Indian Territory proved nourishing to the longhorns headed to Kansas. The drovers pushed their herds through Indian Territory at a leisurely pace, the longhorns grazing and gaining weight on their way to the stockyard. The Chisholm Trail cut through Kiowa-Comanche and Cherokee-Arapaho reservations. After a time, tribal leaders began collecting tolls, charging 10 cents a head from each outfit crossing their lands.

FOR THE TRIBES AND THE DROVERS, THE ARRANGEMENT WAS MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL AND PREDOMINANTLY PEACEFUL.

The Chisholm Trail route entered Indian Territory at Red River Station, then skirted areas hostile to the cattlemen and their longhorns. For trail crews, tribal lands promised feed for their herds and relative peace for themselves. For the tribes, the cattle drives provided a steady income stream and a way to address the economic damage inflicted by the Civil War.

Comanche men sit in front of a tipi in Ft. Sill, Oklahoma, 1873.
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W. S. Soule, Photo.

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Fort Sill, I. T.

TA-HER-YE-QUA-HIP or HORSE-BACKS CAMP. B.

NO-CO-NIE. COMANCHES.

No. 2.