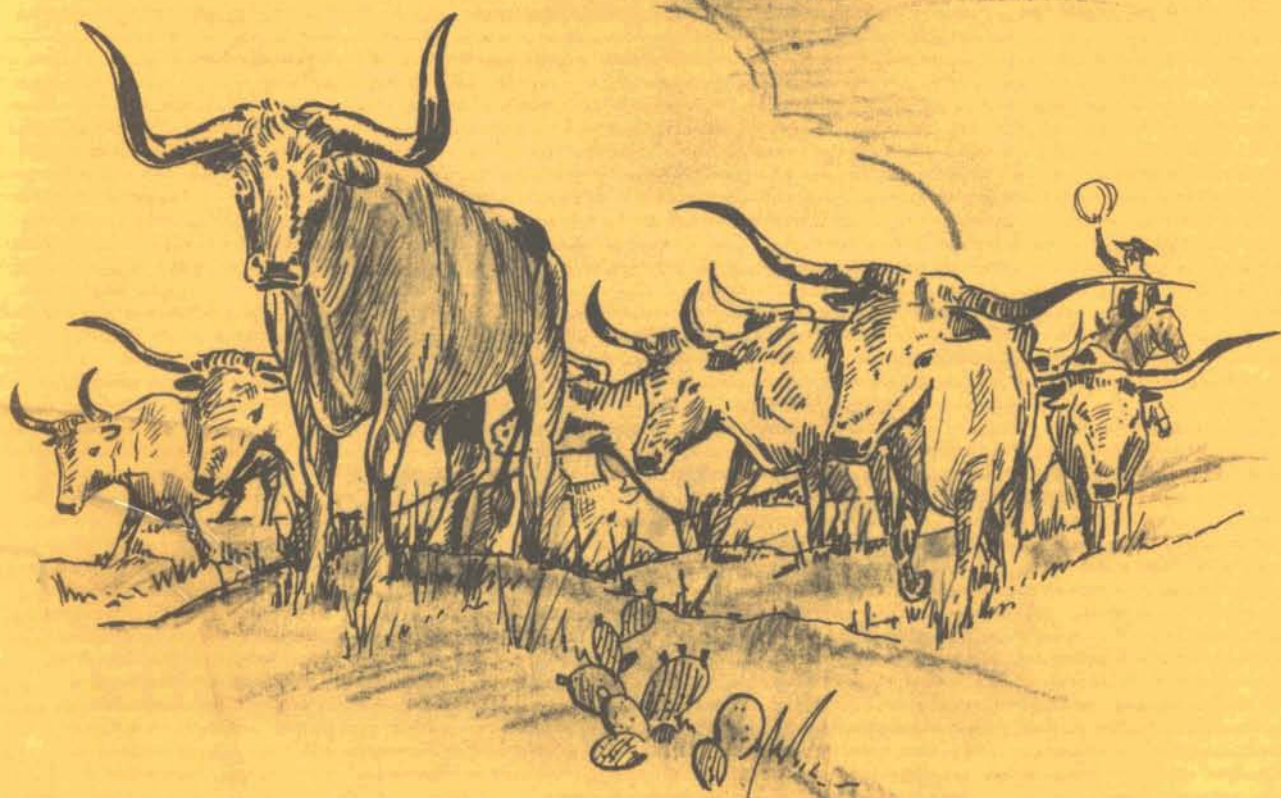


LONGHORNS

of the
BIG BEND



LONGHORNS OF THE BIG BEND

**A Special Report on the
Early Cattle Industry of the Big Bend Country of Texas**

by

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UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Big Bend National Park 79834

April 1962

**UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Region Three
Santa Fe, New Mexico**

1/24/75 CW
The cowboys and the longhorns
Who partnered in eighty-four
Have gone to their last roundup
Over on the other shore.

They answered well their purpose,
But their glory must fade and go,
Because men say there's better things
In the modern cattle show.

--John A. Lomax

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LONGHORNS OF THE BIG BEND

The Big Bend country today is one of the leading cattle-raising regions of Texas, internationally famed for the quality of its Highland Herefords. Perhaps because it was the last frontier conquered by pioneer Texas stockmen, in the twilight of the era of the long drive, the open range, and indeed the legendary Longhorn himself, most histories of the range cattle industry have devoted little attention to it. Yet, though sparsely documented, ranching in the Big Bend deserves better of historians of the cattlemen's frontier. The story of ranching in the Big Bend contains elements of drama that parallel the better known story east of the Pecos. And it was not without significance. As the Big Bend was the last cattlemen's frontier to be conquered, so too it was the last stronghold of the open range and the Texas Longhorn. This brief account is by no means a pioneer venture; it merely pulls together a few rather obscure sources. The history of ranching in the Big Bend awaits its definitive historian.

Texas and the Range Cattle Industry

The first cattle in the New World came from Spain, and the range cattle industry of the Western Hemisphere has operated ever since within a framework of techniques evolved on the Iberian Peninsula during the Middle Ages. Columbus brought cattle to

Santo Domingo in 1493, and from there, in 1521, Gregorio de Villalobos took some to the Mexican mainland. From Mexico City, as the mission-presidio-pueblo frontier spread north and south, so too did Spanish cattle. They multiplied prolifically, for the Spaniards did not castrate their bulls. Northward into Tamaulipas, Durango, Coahuila, Chihuahua, and Sonora the Spanish pioneers drove cattle. Coronado took a herd to New Mexico and Quivira in 1540-42. Colonizing New Mexico in 1598, Oñate's settlers grazed a few cattle, but here sheep usurped the ranges until the advent of American cattlemen in the 19th century. Not in Texas, which was destined to become the cradle of the range cattle industry in the United States.

As vanguards of the Spanish colonial advance, missionaries introduced the first cattle into Texas. In 1690 Franciscan fathers trailed a herd of two hundred to eastern Texas, where they founded the mission of San Francisco de los Tejas for the Christianization of the Indians living on the Neches River. Cattle arrived in far greater numbers in the early decades of the 18th century, when other Franciscans built missions along the San Antonio River and on Bahía del Espíritu Santo, to the south. The Government encouraged stock raising with liberal land grants, and private entrepreneurs developed herds on the San Antonio, Brazos, and Colorado Rivers and, beginning about 1700, on the Rio Grande. Despite unfavorable market

conditions and government commercial restrictions, the mission and private herds increased enormously in the 18th century. So did the population of wild cattle which sprang from cows and bulls that escaped from traveling herds or strayed from unfenced pastures. The Spanish had two names for wild cattle--mesteñas, those that with skill and daring might be captured, and cimarrones, those too wild to be controlled. At the close of the Spanish era in 1821, there were hundreds of thousands of cattle in Texas.

These cattle, both domestic and wild, were a distinctive breed that originated on the Iberian Peninsula during the Middle Ages through the crossing of European all-purpose cattle with an Iberian type native to Spain and Portugal. The breed doubtless underwent some further modification in the New World. The cattle of Spanish Texas were feral and wild, with long shaggy hair, thick heavy horns, thick skulls, stringy meat, and tough hides. Quick, agile, alert, suspicious, and even in domestic state tending to ferocity, they could take care of themselves with minimum care on the prairies and in the brush country of southern Texas. They came in many colors--red, brown, blue--but black or a near variation of black predominated. The first American settlers in Texas called the native stock "Spanish cattle," "Mexican cattle," or simply "black cattle." Through common usage, these labels became almost generic terms for the cattle Americans found in Texas early in the 19th

century and, applied to wild cattle, persisted nearly to the close of the century.¹

After Mexico won her independence from Spain in 1821, liberal immigration laws attracted settlers from the United States to Mexican Texas. Beginning with Moses and Stephen Austin and their followers, American colonists increased so rapidly that by 1836 they were strong enough to assert the independence of Texas from Mexico. Although the Americans brought with them some cattle--all-purpose shorthorn varieties from the States--they came not as stockmen but as farmers. In Texas, however, the newcomers observed the teeming herds of wild Spanish cattle free to anyone with the courage and skill to challenge their freedom. The vast reaches of rich grass were also free to anyone with the courage to leave the security of the settlements and move into the path of Comanche

1. J. Frank Dobie is of course the undisputed authority on the appearance, habits, and psychology of the Texas Longhorn and his progenitors, the Spanish or Mexican cattle: The Longhorns (New York, 1941). The Grosset and Dunlap Universal Library edition has been used in this study. Chapter 1 discusses Spanish cattle. A concise explanation of the evolution of the Longhorn is Dobie's "Longhorn Cattle," in Walter P. Webb (ed.), The Handbook of Texas (Austin, 1952), 1, 78-79. A discussion of the European progenitors of Spanish cattle with an enlightening treatment of the foundations of the American cattle industry is Charles J. Bishko, "The Peninsular Background of Latin American Cattle Ranching," Hispanic American Historical Review, 32 (1952), 491-515.

raiding parties that regularly swept down from the north. Although it was not a lucrative occupation and the market remained principally domestic, Texans in the years of the Republic (1836-45) and early statehood (1845-61) prepared the groundwork for the cattle boom that burst upon them after the Civil War.²

During these years the Texas Longhorn began to evolve, an evolution that continued and accelerated until the closing decades of the 19th century. Unlike the Spaniards and Mexicans, the Americans practiced selective breeding. By choosing superior calves to be left for bulls, Texas stockmen improved the old Spanish breed without fundamentally altering its essential characteristics. The Texas Longhorn acquired some shorthorn blood, too. It was not significant--an estimate in 1830 numbered American imports at one-fifth the total cattle population of Texas--and was largely absorbed by the dominant Spanish blood, but the shorthorn contribution must

2. Most of the standard histories of the range cattle industry treat its origins in Texas. See E. E. Dale, The Range Cattle Industry (Norman, 1930); Joseph G. McCoy, Historic Sketches of the Cattle Trade of the West and Southwest, ed. by Ralph P. Bieber (Glendale, 1940); Ernest S. Osgood, The Day of the Cattlemen (Minneapolis, 1929); Louis Pelzer, The Cattlemen's Frontier (Glendale, 1936); James Cox, Historical and Biographical Record of the Cattle Industry and the Cattlemen of Texas and Adjacent Territory (St. Louis, 1895). See also Clara M. Love, "The Cattle Industry of the Southwest," Southwestern Historical Quarterly, 19 (1916), 370-99, 20 (1916), 1-18; T. C. Richardson, "Texas Cattle," American Heritage (Fall 1952), pp. 28-33.

be considered in differentiating Texas Longhorns from true Spanish cattle. Other factors, unknown, may also have exerted an influence. Texas Longhorns retained the endurance, agility, alertness, ferocity, and muscularity of their Spanish ancestor, but their horns grew longer, their bodies more heavy and rangy, and they displayed a nearly infinite variety of colors. No longer did they qualify as "black cattle." Frank Dobie thus pictured a herd of Texas Longhorns:

. . . Tall, bony, coarse-headed, coarse-haired, flat-sided, thin-flanked, some of them grotesquely narrow-hipped, some with bodies so long that their backs swayed, big ears carved into outlandish designs, dewlaps hanging and swinging in rhythm with their energetic steps, their motley-colored sides as bold with brands as a relief map of the Grand Canyon--mightily antlered, wild-eyed, this herd of full-grown Texas steers might appear to a stranger seeing them for the first time as a parody of their kind. But however they appeared, with their steel hoofs, their long legs, their staglike muscles, their thick skins, their powerful horns, they could climb the highest mountains, swim the widest rivers, fight off the fiercest bands of wolves, endure hunger, cold, thirst and punishment as few beasts of the earth have ever shown themselves capable of enduring. On the prairies they could run like antelopes; in the thickets of thorn and tangle they could break their way with the agility of panthers. They could rustle in drouth or snow, smell out pasturage leagues away, live--without talking about the matter--like true captains of their own souls and bodies.³

3. Longhorns, pp. 41-42. Chapter 2 deals with the emergence of the Longhorn from the Spanish cattle.

The cattle industry had established itself before the Civil War and had even, in the 1850's, probed tentatively at markets beyond the borders of the state. Texas beef found a limited market in New Orleans, herds were driven to Missouri and California throughout the decade, and the frontier military installations provided a new and dependable market. Still, cattle increased faster than markets. The Civil War wrecked the burgeoning industry. Texans trailed some herds to the Confederate armies early in the war, but after 1863, when Federal forces gained control of the Mississippi River, Southern soldiers ate no more Texas beef. With most of the able-bodied men in the Confederate service, the cattle took to the brush, multiplied rapidly, and greatly augmented the existing herds of wild cattle. When the men came home after Appomattox, they found the state teeming with millions of these mesteñas and cimarrones--perhaps a third or a fourth of which bore no brand whatever. They were to be seen in small bunches nearly anywhere east of the Pecos River, as far north as Red River, and south to the Rio Grande and beyond. The largest concentrations, however, crowded the brush country between the Nueces and the Rio Grande. Here, in the years after the Civil War, ex-Confederate soldiers revived the livestock industry. Swiftly it spread over the entire western United States.

In Texas the Longhorns were not worth much, but the price of dressed beef in the East made it well worth while to devise means

of linking the supply with the demand. The long cattle drives from Texas to the railroads pushing west into Kansas and Nebraska were fraught with danger, privation, and speculative peril, but the successful drive netted a handsome return. Too, as other cowmen moved into the grasslands of the Dakotas, Montana, Wyoming, Nebraska, and Colorado, they turned to Texas for their seed stock. Texas Longhorns soon populated the Great Plains to the Canadian border. Later, cornbelt stockmen drew on Texas for feeders to be fattened in the Middle West before slaughter.

Attracted by such opportunities, hundreds of Texans turned to ranching. Cattle proved the means by which the state won economic recovery from the wreckage of war and reconstruction. In the 20 years following the war, through boom and bust, cattlemen spread up the Colorado and Brazos and on to the caprock of the Staked Plains. Their herds covered the grasslands to the Red River on the north, to the Rio Grande on the south, and to the Pecos on the west. But beyond the Pecos, as late as 1880, only a few venturesome cowmen had defied the Indian menace to establish their herds in the Big Bend country.

The Big Bend Country

Dropping deep into Mexico from its eastward bend at El Paso, the Rio Grande describes a great arc that embraces a region of wild

plains, mountains, canyons, and deserts known as the Big Bend country. The term lacks precise definition. Although the Rio Grande on the south and west and the Pecos on the east are conceded as boundaries, different northern limits are set by various students. Recently it has been convenient to regard the line of the Southern Pacific Railroad as separating the Big Bend from the rest of Trans-Pecos Texas. The railroad did indeed tend to make a distinct economic and social unit of the country south of it, and for modern purposes the definition is sound. But so firmly linked in every way during earlier times was the lower Big Bend with the Davis Mountains, north of the railroad, that historically the two must be viewed as a unit--the Big Bend country.

It was and is, as many authorities have written, "a natural cow country." Rich grama grasses--black, blue, and white--carpet the alpine valleys and broad plateaus. A century ago the grass even grew abundantly on today's sterile deserts. Other forage plants and shrubs, perhaps 30 to 40 varieties, supplement the grass. Cattle find year-round grazing. High mountains, some rolling and tree covered, others craggy and barren, shelter the grassy ranges from winter winds. "Northers" occasionally sweep down in the winter, but temperature extremes are rare, and weather changes are uniform and usually predictable. Rainfall averages about 16 inches annually. Here as everywhere in the cow country water is sometimes scarce, but

not scarce enough to pose a serious hindrance to large-scale cattle raising. To pioneer stockmen, the Big Bend offered some of the choicest cow country in the West. Yet until near the end of the era of the open range few took advantage of it.

Although nearly all the Big Bend was virtually unknown to white men until after the middle of the 19th century, Spanish cattle almost certainly browsed along one fringe in the 17th and 18th centuries. Many Spanish expeditions to New Mexico used a route that ran down the Conchos River, up the Rio Grande to the bend where El Paso del Norte was founded in 1680, thence on up the river to Santa Fe. As early as 1583, Antonio de Espejo had named the junction of the Conchos and Rio Grande La Junta de los Rios. It became a place well known to Spanish travelers. When in 1683 the Jumano Indians residing in the vicinity asked for missionaries, the Spanish obliged. Fray Juan Dominguez Mendoza established six missions in the neighborhood. They lasted only a few years, but in 1715 other fathers founded a cluster of Indian pueblos and missions on both sides of the Rio Grande at La Junta. A few settlers lived here intermittently, too, and in 1759 the Spanish built a fort, Presidio del Norte, as a bastion against Indian raids into northern Mexico. It occupied several locations in successive years, but its feeble garrison of 50 or fewer soldiers made little headway against the Comanche and Apache warriors from the north. By the early years

of the 19th century, because of the Indian menace, Spanish settlement at La Junta had dwindled to insignificance.

Wherever there were Spaniards there were sure to be cows. The records of Spanish activity in the La Junta area are sparse, but if the mission fathers did not have cattle they departed from the habits of their counterparts elsewhere in Texas. It is reasonable to assume, too, that cattle escaped from the missions, as they did farther east, and founded herds of wild cattle that sought refuge in the mountains of the Big Bend. If so, they probably fell victim to Comanche or Apache arrows, for 19th-century travelers do not mention wild cattle west of the Pecos. Penetrating the Big Bend in the late 1840's, Americans found a scattering of Mexicans at Presidio del Norte (present Ojinaga), on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande below the mouth of the Conchos, and a band of Mescalero Apaches in the Davis Mountains. The rest was entirely uninhabited.

The first American settlement in the Big Bend sprang up in the La Junta area, not to support stock raising but as a trading center. The established trading route between Missouri and Chihuahua City lay over the Chihuahua Trail to Santa Fe and over the Santa Fe Trail to Independence. In 1839-40 Dr. Henry Connelley, prominent trader, and about two hundred Texans and Mexicans attempted to shorten this route. They blazed another "Chihuahua Trail" which ran down the Conchos to La Junta, up Alamito Creek, through Paisano

Pass to Comanche Springs (where Fort Stockton was later built), thence to the Pecos and on to the States. This trail carried little if any traffic between Mexico and Missouri, but after the Mexican War the southern segment, west of the Pecos, came into prominent use as a freighting route between San Antonio and Chihuahua City. During the 1850's, this trade and the new settlement at La Junta developed simultaneously, the growth of each stimulated by the other.⁴

In Chihuahua City in the spring of 1848 three freighters, John W. Spencer, John D. Burgess, and Ben Leaton, laid plans to establish themselves at La Junta. Leaton had located at La Junta by the end of 1848, and Spencer and Burgess were there by the spring of 1851. All three acquired property on the Texas side of the Rio Grande, opposite Presidio del Norte, married Mexican women, and founded clans that inhabited the Big Bend for several generations. Leaton built a rambling 40-room adobe trading post 5 miles down the river from present Presidio, Texas, and engaged in a questionable commerce with Comanches and Apaches, which prompted Mexican

4. For the origins of the La Junta settlement, see Clifford B. Casey, "The Trans-Pecos in Texas History," West Texas Historical and Scientific Society Publications, No. 5 (Alpine: Sul Ross State College, 1933), pp. 11-13; and Jack (Mrs. O. L.) Shipman, "The Savage Saga: A Vivid Story of the Settlement and Development of Presidio County," Voice of the Mexican Border (Marfa, Tex. 1938 ed.), pp. 8-9. See also Casey, "Presidio, Texas," in Webb (ed.), Handbook of Texas, 2, 408.

officials to protest to the commander of the new U. S. military post at Franklin, across the river from El Paso del Norte. Spencer built a horse ranch opposite Presidio del Norte, and Burgess, using Spencer's ranch as headquarters, continued for the next 25 years to freight goods on the Chihuahua Trail. In 1853, Leaton having died of yellow fever in San Antonio 2 years earlier, Burgess came into possession of Leaton's trading post. From these beginnings the town of Presidio, Texas, sprang, although until 1865 it was known as Spencer's Ranch. The Mexican town across the river, Presidio del Norte, became Ojinaga.⁵

5. Clifford Casey, the soundest authority on early Presidio, does not locate Leaton at Presidio until 1851, but the official reports of Maj. Jefferson Van Horne, commanding at Franklin in 1849 and 1850, make it apparent that Leaton was in business in 1848: Van Horne to Maj. George Deas, Assistant Adjutant General, 8th Mil. Dept., Nov. 8, 1849, with encl. Angel Frias, Gov. of Chihuahua, to Inspector of Military Colonies at El Paso, Oct. 10, 1849, encl. to Maj. Gen. George Brooke to Adjutant General of the Army, Jan. 10, 1850, RG 94, AGO Doc. File, B46/1850, National Archives. Mrs. Shipman, who investigated Presidio County deed records, says that Mrs. Leaton, who had three children by a former marriage, married Edward Hall after Leaton's death. Hall gave Burgess a deed of trust on Fort Leaton as security for a loan. Burgess then ordered Hall and his wife, the former Mrs. Leaton, to vacate. Hall refused and one morning was found murdered. Burgess occupied Fort Leaton after Mrs. Hall and the children, fearing for their lives, had taken refuge across the river in Mexico. One of her sons, Bill Leaton, avenged the death of his stepfather. On Christmas Day 1875 at Fort Davis he shot and killed John D. Burgess. Fort Leaton later fell into ruins, was restored as a relief project in the 1930's, and is now once more falling into ruins.

Other Americans and Mexicans settled around Spencer's Ranch, and gradually it grew into a small frontier community. The settlers quickly recognized the advantages of the country for cattle raising. Two conditions retarded its growth--hostile Indians and isolation from large markets. Although these conditions persisted for more than a quarter of a century after the founding of Presidio, the bars to profitable ranching were soon to be lifted just enough to attract a few potentially large-scale stockmen. In 1854 the U. S. Army came to the Big Bend to fight Indians and, in the process, to eat beef.

The First Stockmen, 1854-1880

Early in October 1854, six companies of the 8th United States Infantry, Lt. Col. Washington Seawell commanding, marched up Limpia Creek, on the northeastern fringe of the Davis Mountains, and bivouacked at "Painted Comanche Camp," a popular watering place on the San Antonio-El Paso Road. In the years since the close of the

Mexican War, this road had carried increasingly heavy travel--freighters destined for El Paso or Chihuahua City, California-bound immigrants, and U. S. mail and military express riders. Mounting depredations of Comanches and Apaches had finally led the military authorities to extend protection to the western segment of the road. The department commander, Bvt. Maj. Gen. Persifor F. Smith, toured the Trans-Pecos in advance of Colonel Seawell's march and selected a site for a new fort. In a box canyon near the Limpia, the infantrymen built a rude post, which was named Fort Davis.⁶

It took more than 25 years for the Army to conquer the Indians whose plunder trails to Mexico scarred the Big Bend. Before the final victory, two more posts had to be founded in the Trans-Pecos--Fort Stockton at Comanche Springs in 1859 and, a year earlier, Fort Quitman on the Rio Grande 90 miles below El Paso, where the post laid

6. Robert M. Utley, Special Report on Fort Davis, Texas (Santa Fe: National Park Service, 1960), pp. 18-24.

out by Maj. Jefferson Van Horne in 1849 had been named Fort Bliss. The grasslands that beckoned the cowmen were little safer after the establishment of Fort Davis than before. Perhaps the proximity of soldiers induced a slight feeling of security. More important, the garrison offered a dependable local market for beef. Around Fort Davis and Spencer's Ranch, a handful of men, lured by beef contracts with the Army, ventured into the cattle business.

The first stockman of note seems to have been John W. Spencer, one of the trio of founders of Presidio. For 3 years he had met discouragement in his horse-raising enterprise. There was no dependable market for horses, and the Indians persisted in plundering his herds. He knew that Indians prized cows less than horses, and with the coming of the soldiers he decided to switch to cattle raising. Negotiating a contract with Colonel Seawell to supply beef to the troops, Spencer brought in a herd of cows from northern Mexico and pastured them on his range.⁷

Doubtless a few other men emulated Spencer and grazed some cattle in the immediate vicinity, but only one dared to leave the comparative security of the settlement to defy the Indians on the virgin grass to the north. Milton Faver was the first really large-

7. Casey, p. 12; see also Carlisle G. Raht, The Romance of the Davis Mountains and the Big Bend Country (El Paso, 1919), pp. 114, 136.

scale cattleman of the Big Bend, a builder whose character and attainments have given him top rank in the list of pioneers of the Big Bend. For more than three decades he stamped his influence on the stock industry of western Texas, and for nearly 20 years his herds had the grass of the lower Big Bend virtually to themselves. Today in his home country Milton Faver has become a legendary figure.⁸

A big man with a flowing beard and an iron will, "Don Milton" came west in the middle 1850's. Some say that he was a New Yorker with tuberculosis whose doctors advised him to go west to die. He went to work in a flour mill at Meooue, Mexico, about 100 miles south of Presidio del Norte. Marrying Francisca Ramirez, Faver acquired some wagons and began freighting down the Conchos Valley between Meooue and Presidio del Norte. The business prospered and grew, and service soon extended as far as Santa Fe. In 1857 Faver moved to Presidio del Norte and opened a store. In the same year,

8. Accounts of Faver based on recollections of early stockmen who knew him in his old age are in Virginia Madison, The Big Bend Country of Texas (Albuquerque, 1955), pp. 104-05; Mrs. O. L. Shipman, Taming the Big Bend: A History of the Extreme Western Portion of Texas from Fort Clark to El Paso (Marfa, Tex. 1926), pp. 26-27, 106-07; and J. Evetts Haley, Jeff Milton, A Good Man With a Gun (Norman, 1949), pp. 74-76. The most informative account, based on interviews in 1927 with Faver's sister-in-law and others and on county tax records, is in John Ernest Gregg, The History of Presidio County (MA Thesis, University of Texas, 1933), pp. 52, 61-69.

perhaps attracted by the market opportunities at Fort Davis, he decided to become a cattleman. On Cibolo Creek 25 miles north of Spencer's Ranch, Don Milton and his wife established the headquarters of what was to become the vast Faver domain. County records reveal that he recorded his deed to the Cibolo property in 1858.

Favor named his ranch headquarters Cibolo. Designed for defense against Indians, it was a rectangular fortress with 20-foot adobe walls pierced with loopholes for rifles and surmounted by lookout posts. Ultimately Faver hired a large force of Mexican laborers and vaqueros and located four more places: Ojo Bonito, Cienega, Cienegita, and Tinajo Chino. Each had a complex of adobe and rock buildings and corrals, an irrigated farm on which he raised beans, corn, and chili, and an orchard of Mexican peach trees from which enormous quantities of peach brandy were regularly made and liberally dispensed to all travelers and visitors. Purchasing a herd of cattle in northern Mexico, Faver drove them across the Rio Grande and stocked his ranges. He acquired sheep, too, thus setting a precedent of co-existence that persisted into the eighties and nineties, when violence and bloodshed marked relations between sheepmen and cowmen elsewhere. Even in the beginning, when his embryo herd numbered no more than three hundred head, Don Milton presided with a firm hand over his growing empire. A cottonwood whipping

post stood in the courtyard at Cibolo. "He made his own laws and enforced them," recalled an associate, Den Knight.⁹

While Spencer and Faver built herds near the Rio Grande, other stockmen, taking advantage of the comforting proximity of Colonel Seawell's soldiers, grazed cattle on the pastures near Fort Davis. With the troops came E. P. Webster and Diedrick Dutchover, who worked for the rather informal mail and stage line that linked San Antonio with El Paso before the Birch and Butterfield Companies took over. Both men acquired small numbers of sheep and cattle. Manuel Musquiz, a political refugee from Mexico, established himself in Musquiz Canyon, 6 miles southeast of Fort Davis. With his family, servants, and employees, there were 20 people in the household. The adobe ranch house and headquarters buildings constituted a sizable settlement for West Texas in 1855. How many cattle he herded in Musquiz Canyon is not known, but he probably was the largest operator in the Fort Davis area before the Civil War. Other beef contractors also did business at Fort Davis in the fifties, but they left scant record of their activities.¹⁰

9. Gregg, p. 62.

10. Barry Scobee, Old Fort Davis (San Antonio, 1947), pp. 8, 46-50, 67, 72-73. The melted adobe ruins of Musquiz' home stand beside the highway from Fort Davis to Alpine.

Nearly all the stock in the Big Bend in the fifties were long-horned Mexican or Spanish cattle, not the true Texas Longhorn, which indeed had just begun to emerge in the heartland of the Texas cattle country farther east. The herds that crossed the Big Bend in the fifties bound for California doubtless contained animals that represented the stage of evolution the Longhorn had reached by that time. Some herds, too, were probably driven from San Antonio for use at Fort Davis. But most of the stock came from the great haciendas of northern Mexico. The Faver herds were typical. They were, recalled T. C. Mitchell, who saw them, "long-horned Mexican steers of every color you could think of and lots of them with a spread of horns of four to five feet." Other observers remembered black as the dominant color. These cattle were invariably described by some such phrase as "wild as deer," or "wild as antelope and just about as fleet of foot." They were difficult, sometimes impossible to herd, and nearly any trivial happening could set off an uncontrollable stampede. The meat was barely palatable by modern standards, but the animals were in every way equipped to survive in a rugged country where more refined stock would soon have perished. "The cowboys say," observed Mitchell, "that a long-horned Mexican cow never dies and the same about the Mexican peach trees that Don

Milton made his peach brandy of."¹¹

Indian raids made stock raising dangerous and often disastrous. Col. J.K.F. Mansfield, who inspected Fort Davis in 1856, recorded a typical occurrence: "Not long since the beef contractor had a drove of cattle on a ledge of this mountain, where it was supposed impossible to get them out except at the entrance. Yet the Indians in a single night altho' not 500 yards from the post, forced them up thro' a pass that took off the hair from some, and captured them all beyond recovery."¹² Here as in eastern Texas, the Civil War dealt a mortal blow to the cattle industry. Federal troops evacuated Fort Davis in April 1861. A small Confederate garrison occupied it during the summer of 1861, then, leaving the post in charge of Diedrick Dutchover, also withdrew. Now entirely unrestrained, Apaches swarmed in and demolished it. Dutchover took refuge at Spencer's Ranch. Gone now was the minimum restraint the troops had placed on the Indians, and gone too was the steady market for beef.

11. T. C. Mitchell in Madison, p. 117, 119; Shipman, Taming the Big Bend, p. 27; Gregg, p. 61; Henry T. Fletcher, "From Longhorns to Herefords: A History of Cattle Raising in Trans-Pecos Texas," Voice of the Mexican Border (October 1933), p. 61.

12. M. L. Crimmins, "Colonel J.K.F. Mansfield's Report of the Inspection of the Department of Texas in 1856," Southwestern Historical Quarterly, 42 (1939), 354.

Apaches swept down on the Musquiz Ranch in the summer of 1861, even before the Confederate garrison left. Musquiz was absent at Spencer's Ranch, but the warriors slaughtered everyone at the ranch, wrecked the buildings, and ran off the cattle. Musquiz gave up and did not start anew. Not Milton Faver, whom Indians also nearly ruined. Forted up at Cibolo, he turned back all attacks on the ranch, but he could not prevent the theft of his cattle. He had about three hundred head by the early sixties, but Indian raids left him with only 30 to 40 milk calves in a corral at Cibolo. Faver stayed, and with these as seed stock he slowly began to rebuild his herd.¹³

Except for Faver and a handful of settlers at Spencer's Ranch, the Big Bend was deserted during the Civil War years. With the reoccupation of Forts Davis and Stockton by U. S. troops in the summer of 1867, however, the population began to increase. Freighting became a lucrative occupation, and long strings of lumbering freight wagons made their way over the San Antonio-El Paso Road and the Chihuahua Trail. Stimulated by freighting and by Army contracts, Spencer's Ranch, renamed Presidio, and Presidio del Norte, renamed Ojinaga, took on new life. A village called Fort Davis grew up adjacent to the fort.

13. Scobee, p. 47; Gregg, p. 61.

Another kind of traffic used the Chihuahua Trail in the postwar years--cattle. Years of Indian raids in northern Mexico had denuded the ranges of cattle and created a demand for new seed stock, a demand that the stockmen of central Texas swiftly took advantage of. The first recorded drive through the Big Bend took place in 1864, when W. A. Peril trailed a herd from the Fort McKavett country over the Chihuahua Trail to Mexico. The traffic reached a peak, however, in 1868 and 1869, when thousands of Longhorns threaded Paisano Pass and dropped down the Alamito to the river crossing at Presidio. In 1868 Capt. D. M. Poer drove 1,200 head from Fort Concho to the Terrazas hacienda in Chihuahua. W. O. Burnam and 25 neighbors assembled a herd of more than a thousand Longhorns in Burnet County and pointed them along the trail in the same year. The drive took 2 months. The drovers had no trouble with Indians but lost stock to Mexican rustlers. Burnam apprehended a band of seven or eight Mexicans at Burgess Springs (site of modern Alpine) and inspected their herd. Although it contained none of his cows, he observed brands of other owners who had preceded him on the trail.¹⁴

14. W. A. Peril account in J. Marvin Hunter (comp. & ed.), The Trail Drivers of Texas (Nashville, 1925), pp. 411-12; Shipman, Taming the Big Bend, p. 39; Raht, p. 157; Alice Virginia Cain, A History of Brewster County (MA Thesis, Sul Ross State College, 1935), pp. 44-45.

Travelers on the Chihuahua Trail and men who came to Fort Davis with the Army observed the fine cattle country, and the attractions of the Big Bend became more widely known. Despite the Indians, a scattering of ranchers located in the Big Bend during the 1870's. Diedrick Dutchover returned with the troops and established cattle and sheep in Limpia Canyon near Fort Davis. Sam Miller accompanied the soldiers in 1867 as civilian butcher. He had a beef contract, too, and pastured 165 beef cattle and 150 work oxen east of the fort. Apaches ran them off, but he started another herd. The civilian baker, Whittaker Keesey, opened a mercantile store in the village of Fort Davis and with liberal credit helped new stockmen get a start. Daniel Murphy also began a mercantile business in Fort Davis and established a wheat and cattle ranch in the Toyah Valley, on the northern edge of the Davis Mountains. George Crosson, a freighter on the Chihuahua Trail as early as 1861, hauled 60 buck sheep from San Antonio in wagons in 1878 and, with 1,800 ewes purchased from Milton Paver, located in Musquiz Canyon. Sgt. Charles Mulhern, assigned to Fort Davis in 1879, began building a cattle herd on the side. When he took his discharge in 1885, he stayed as a rancher. Col. Benjamin H. Grierson did the same thing.¹⁵

15. Raht, pp. 160-61, 185-86, 202-03; Scobee, pp. 72-74; Shipman, pp. 176-77; T. C. Davis, "The /IN Ranch: History and Development of a Pioneer Ranch," Voice of the Mexican Border (October 1933), pp. 76-81.

Farther south, Milton Faver finally got a neighbor, destined to inspire a Big Bend legend only slightly dimmer than his own. In 1870 eccentric "Uncle John" Davis built a fortress-like home on Alamito Creek east of Cibolo and developed a sizable herd of cattle and horses. In many ways he resembled Faver. He married a Mexican woman and raised a large family. He employed 15 to 20 Mexican families, who lived in adobe huts clustered around his fort, and even planted peach orchards from which he, too, manufactured brandy. Davis' clear water, shade trees, and open hospitality, featuring food and peach brandy, made the Alamito settlement a popular way station on the Chihuahua Trail. When his wife died in 1892, however, Uncle John closed up his establishment and went back to North Carolina, where he remarried. Farther east, on the upper reaches of Maravillas Creek, John Beckwith grazed a herd as early as 1878. With the establishment in 1880 of Camp Peña Colorado, a subpost of Fort Davis, Beckwith also served as post sutler. About 1885 he moved to Fort Davis.¹⁶

Milton Faver prospered. With the 30 to 40 milk calves saved from the Indian raids of the early Civil War years, he rebuilt his empire. By the early 1880's more than 10,000 long-horned Mexican cattle--some estimates run as high as 20,000--bore the Lazy F

16. Gregg, pp. 56-58; Haley, p. 77; Raht, p. 225; Cain, p. 62.

brand (U). They multiplied so rapidly that uncounted Faver cows never felt a branding iron, and more than a few cattle kings of future years started their herds by mavericking unbranded Faver stock--a practice to which less odium attached then than later. During the seventies, before the coming of the railroad, Faver drove herds north on the Chihuahua and Chisholm Trails to markets in Abilene, Hays, and Dodge City, Kans., and also sold beef to the Army at Fort Davis. Much of Faver's success in making a comeback has been attributed to the competence of his foreman and brother-in-law, Carmen Ramirez, "who knew how to handle peons as well as sheep and cattle." But even after Ramirez was killed by Apaches in 1870, Don Milton's fortunes continued to improve.¹⁷

As a sure sign that the foundations of the cattle industry of the Big Bend had been laid, ranchers began to record their brands. The first entry in the Presidio County brand book is that of José Rodríguez of Fort Davis, whose mark, recorded on September 10, 1875, was a hole punched in the center of each ear. Nothing more is known of this pioneer cowman. In 1877 the Texas and California Stage Company entered a holding brand for its horses and mules.

17. Gregg, pp. 61-68. Gregg's estimate that Faver owned 10,000 cattle is the most conservative of all the estimates. Gregg investigated Presidio County tax records, which showed still lower figures, but points out that actual holdings have always been much higher than declared holdings for assessment purposes.

Diedrick Dutchover and Uncle John Davis legalized their brands in the same year. George Crosson recorded a figure 5 on the left hip in 1878.¹⁸ Still, the Big Bend was sparsely populated, and many square miles of grass lay untrodden by cattle. At the opening of the decade of the eighties, however, a combination of factors abruptly reversed this condition and within 5 years crowded the Big Bend with more than 60,000 cattle--Mexican varieties, Texas Longhorns, and even a scattering of blooded shorthorns.

The Coming of the Texas Longhorn, 1880-1890

For decades the Comanches and Mescalero Apaches had made life on the Texas frontier precarious. The Comanches met defeat in the Red River War of 1874-75 and were confined on reservations in Indian Territory, thus halting for all time their destructive raids southward across the Big Bend to northern Mexico. The pace of Apache raiding mounted in the late 1870's and finally culminated in the Victorio War of 1880-81. Two years of rigorous campaigning by cavalry from Fort Davis and other posts finally crushed the Mescaleros. Victorio himself was killed in battle with Mexican troops,

18. Rudolph Mellard, "Early West Texas Cattle and Horse Brands," West Texas Historical and Scientific Society Publications, No. 3 (Alpine: Sul Ross State College, 1930), pp. 52-55.

and the remnant of his followers fled westward. On January 29, 1881, in the Sierra Diablo northwest of the Davis Mountains, Texas Rangers nearly annihilated a small band of Apaches in the last Indian battle on Texas soil. The Indian menace that for three decades had barred the Big Bend to cattlemen abruptly vanished.

In 1881 and 1882, immediately after the conquest of the Indians, surveyors and construction workers, guarded by detachments of Texas Rangers, slowly pushed the tracks of the Texas and Pacific and the Southern Pacific Railroads across the Trans-Pecos--the former north of the Davis Mountains, the latter south of them. The Southern Pacific laid out townsites along the route--Marathon 6 miles north of Camp Peña Colorado, Murphyville at Burgess Springs, Marfa at the western base of Paisano Pass, and Valentine 35 miles farther west. Murphyville was named for Daniel Murphy, Fort Davis merchant who had acquired the land at Burgess Springs, but in 1888 the residents changed the name to Alpine. Fort Davis and Presidio, bypassed by the railroad, yielded their role as commercial centers of the Big Bend to the new towns of Alpine and Marfa, which became the county seats respectively of Brewster and Presidio Counties. Binding the Big Bend for the first time to the settled part of Texas, the railroads heightened still more the attractions of the country for stock raising.

At the same time, all Texas east of the Pecos had filled with cattle, and the ranges were becoming seriously crowded. For several years stockmen had looked longingly at the rich cattle country of the Big Bend. A few had moved into it, but most were deterred by Indians. The conquest of the Indians and the approach of the railroads released the pressures building up against the Pecos barrier. Further stimulated by drouths to the east, the big rush lasted from 1880 to 1885, and by 1890 nearly all the Big Bend country had been fully stocked.¹⁹

One newcomer was W. L. (Uncle Billy) Kingston. With his bride, 107 cows, a team and wagon, and \$4.70 in cash, he set out for Arizona. But west of the Pecos he watched some men dress a yearling that yielded 400 pounds of meat. Learning that the animal was raised in the Big Bend, he turned south to take advantage himself of grass that could produce such beef. Another was George W. Evans. One day in 1883, at his home near Lampasas, he butchered a 175-pound shoat and hung it up to dry. As neighbors dropped by during the day, he invited them, as was the custom, to carve off a chunk. By evening nearly all had disappeared. "I thought the matter over, and said to my wife, 'This is no place for us. People are getting

19. Cain, pp. 49-50; Gregg, pp. 74-84; Fletcher, "Longhorns to Herefords," p. 64.

too thick here and we had better move on west.'" With his brother-in-law, John Z. Means, Evans drove his stock to the Big Bend and settled in the Davis Mountains. David Merrill and his sons came out from Coleman County in 1881 to investigate the possibilities. Returning home, they bought land script and in 1885 drove a herd of 250 cattle to the Davis Mountains. William T. Jones trailed 1,800 head from Coleman County in the same year. W. F. Mitchell, recalled his son, "lived on a ranch in south Texas. He ran out of grass and, hearing of Presidio County grass, came out and bought one section, Antelope Spring, ten miles south of Marfa."²⁰

After 1882 a few stockmen shipped their cattle to Marathon, Alpine, or Marfa by railroad, but most owners drove their herds over the Chihuahua Trail. After the drouth in Taylor County in 1883, a group of men made up a herd of eight thousand and in 1885 drove it to the Chinati Mountains. Most of these cattle belonged to Otho Durant, who sent them in charge of Den Knight. From Frio County in the same year another group of owners drove eight hundred head to the Big Bend. Lucas C. Brite owned 140 of these. He

20. Lewis Nordyke, Great Roundup: The Story of the Texas and Southwestern Cowmen (New York, 1955), pp. 83-84, 202-05; Hunter, Trail Drivers of Texas, pp. 328-29; Cain, p. 46; Madison, Big Bend Country, p. 104; Will F. Evans, Border Skylines: Fifty Years of "Tallying-Out" on the Bloys Round-up Ground (Dallas, 1940), pp. 173-81.

established his headquarters at the foot of Capote Mountain. Ultimately his Bar Cross domain contained 128,000 acres, one of the largest spreads in the Big Bend. Many newcomers were former Texas Rangers, attracted to the country during service guarding the railroad builders and chasing outlaws. Among them were J. C. Bird, Pat Dolan, Charles and Robert Nevill, James B. Gillett, Doc Gourley, J. D. Jackson, and others. Big sheepmen like Haley and Crosson, who moved from Musquiz Canyon in 1884 to new locations on Calamity Creek, and Capt. A. E. Shepherd, who traded an interest in a fleet of Great Lakes freighters for the Iron Mountain ranch north of Marathon, switched to cows after the "Cleveland Tariff" wrecked the sheep business. By the scores they came, and within a decade filled the Big Bend nearly to capacity.²¹

The cattle trailed to the Big Bend in the eighties were for the most part Texas Longhorns. "They resembled the Davis, Spencer and Faver cattle in their long legs and horns and their many colors--black, red, brown, blue, white, grey, roan and spotted. They were very hardy and tough and their long legs enabled them to go long distances back into the mountains from the water holes for grass. They were wild and would fight their shadows, being fully

21. Shipman, pp. 115-19; Evans, pp. 239-43; Gregg, pp. 74-75, 81-82; Davis, "The /IN Ranch," pp. 76-77.

adapted to wrest a living from a wild rough country and protect themselves from the panthers and wolves that abounded."²² They mixed with the thousands of Mexican cattle that Spencer, Davis, and Faver grazed on the Cibolo and Alamito. The cowboys from east of the Pecos soon discovered that Mexican cattle were even more untamed than the Texas Longhorn. "Whole herds of those darn Mexican steers looked like they never had a mouthful of anything but loco weed in their lives," remarked one cowboy. "They were wild-eyed and crazy, and a feller was about the same way by the time he got 'em up the trail and penned at the railroad."²³ Even though the vast majority of cattle in the Big Bend in the eighties were Mexican and Texas Longhorns, there was some refined stock. John Beckwith had a hundred Herefords on Maravillas Creek as early as 1878, and Capt. Pat Dolan put graded cattle in Limpia Canyon in 1884. But not until the end of the open range did stock improvement begin in earnest.²⁴

22. Fletcher, p. 64. See also Hunter, pp. 328-29; Gregg, pp. 79, 114

23. Quoted in Madison, p. 136.

24. Cain, p. 59; Shipman, Taming the Big Bend, pp. 111-12; and Shipman, "The H⁴ Herd," Voice of the Mexican Border (October 1933), p. 73. Pat Dolan was Mrs. Shipman's father.

Each cowman drove his herd to a promising stream or water hole and announced, "My country extends from this water to the divide." Other cowmen respected this unilateral declaration and made their own somewhere else.²⁵ The ranges near the railroad, which happened also to offer the richest grass and the most abundant water, were claimed first. By 1885 several dozen ranches dotted the country on both sides of the Southern Pacific from Marathon to Valentine.

The lower Big Bend, except for Faver, Spencer, and Davis on its western flank, remained comparatively uninhabited. In 1885 W. T. Henderson located at the mouth of Maravillas Creek, and Jim Wilson, another famous Big Bend character, pastured some cattle 30 miles upstream.²⁶ As early as 1882, Don Martín Solís had begun to run Mexican cattle on the river country east of the Chisos Mountains. The ruins of his adobe ranch buildings still overlook the Rio Grande from a plateau south of Talley Mountain.²⁷ Although the

25. Gregg, pp. 72, 89.

26. Shipman, Taming the Big Bend, pp. 101-03. Walter Fulcher's Will James is almost certainly Jim Wilson: The Way I Heard It: Tales of the Big Bend, ed. by Elton Miles (Austin, 1959), Ch. 4

27. Information from Mrs. Totsy Nelle Hitchcock, Big Bend National Park, who has examined county records and interviewed many oldtimers. Mrs. Hitchcock deals with Solís in Representative Individuals and Families of the Lower Big Bend Region, 1895-1925 (MA Thesis, Sul Ross State College, 1960), pp. 24-29.

heyday of ranching in the lower Big Bend did not come until early in the 20th century, after the passing of the Longhorns, two notable enterprises were established here in the eighties.

Early in December 1881, "Messrs. Powell, Gage and Gano, Surveyors," showed up at the Texas Ranger camp in Musquiz Canyon and presented an order from the Adjutant General of Texas for Capt. C. L. Nevill to furnish them with an escort to the lower Big Bend. Who Powell was does not appear. J. T. Gano represented his father, Richard M. Gano, an ex-Confederate general and prominent Dallas businessman and political figure. A. S. Gage represented himself. To finance construction activities, the railroad companies had issued certificates against the land granted them by the State of Texas as a spur to railroad building. Gage and the Ganos had bought up and consolidated large blocks of these certificates covering much of the lower Big Bend. General Gano held certificates for 100,000 acres. He had come out in April 1881 to inspect his domain. Perceiving that the country was so rugged as to prevent surveying the corners of his property on horseback, he had made arrangements for meandering the river by boat. Powell, Gage, and Gano were at Musquiz Canyon in December for this purpose.

The trip turned out to be high adventure. With an escort of nine rangers, including Captain Nevill, the surveyors launched themselves on the Rio Grande at Presidio in three boats. Unless a

tenuous claim dating back to 1850 is valid, the party was the first to navigate the gigantic canyons of the Rio Grande--Santa Elena, Mariscal, and Boquillas. The treacherous rapids in these canyons proved the most formidable obstacle. One of the boats *split open* on the rocks and sank, carrying precious supplies of guns and ammunition. Captain Nevill was in the boat. Weighed down by two pistols and a belt of ammunition, he nearly drowned before he was rescued. Near present Boquillas, the rangers collided with a small band of renegade Apaches, who abandoned nine horses and fled into Mexico. As ammunition was short and the horses could not be taken along, Nevill ordered them knocked in the head. From this incident, the great gorge in the Sierra del Carmen acquired the name "Dead Horse Canyon" but was later named Boquillas Canyon. Another indecisive clash with Indians occurred east of Boquillas. On January 20, 1882, exhausted but successful in their mission, the surveyors and their escort reached the mouth of Maravillas Creek, where a detachment of rangers met them with supplies.²⁸

A. S. Gage located in the shadow of the Sierra del Carmen at a spring subsequently named for his foreman, T. D. McKinney.

28. E. E. Townsend, "Rangers and Indians in the Big Bend Region," West Texas Historical and Scientific Society Publications, No. 6 (Alpine: Sul Ross State College, 1935), pp. 43-48; Haley, Jeff Milton, pp. 84-86; Walter P. Webb, The Texas Rangers: A Century of Frontier Defense (New York, 1935), pp. 410-11. For a biographical sketch of Gano, see Webb (ed.), Handbook of Texas, I, 669-70.

Together with cattle from the Pulliam and Combs ranches, farther north, Gage cattle wintered in the Chisos Mountains. How long Gage remained here, and how many cattle he ran, is not apparent. Later he moved to new ranges near the railroad in the neighborhood of Marathon.²⁹ Better documented is the history of the Gano enterprise, the G4.

Early in 1885 General Gano organized the Estado Land and Cattle Company. The firm's new ranch in the lower Big Bend contained 55,000 acres in Block G4, extending from the Agua Fria on the north to the Rio Grande on the south and from Terlingua Creek on the west to the Chisos Mountains on the east. Gano named it the G4 and adopted G4 as the brand. Casting about for a suitable cowman to manage the spread, he wrote for advice to Captain Nevill, who had resigned from the Texas Rangers to become sheriff and tax collector of Presidio County. On the side, Nevill ranched near Marfa in partnership with another ex-ranger, Capt. James B. Gillett, then serving as city marshal of El Paso. Nevill recommended his partner for the position, and on April 1, 1885, Gillett resigned from the El Paso police force to become manager of the G4.³⁰

29. Raht, p. 224; Hitchcock interview. McKinney Springs is in Big Bend National Park about 10 miles east of Grapevine Hills.

30. Hunter, pp. 995-97; James B. Gillett, Six Years with the Texas Rangers, 1875 to 1881 (Lakeside Classics Ed. Chicago, 1943), pp. 335-37.

Gano immediately inspected the ranges with Gillett and instructed him where to turn loose the stock. Then he hastened home and in Dallas and Denton Counties bought two thousand head of cattle, which were shipped to Toyah on the Texas and Pacific. Gillett received them there and drove them southward by way of Marathon and Persimmon Gap to the G⁴ range. At Uvalde Gano bought two thousand more cows and had them driven overland by Billy Combs. Gillett met Combs at Marathon and took this herd down through Persimmon Gap. Gano acquired still another two thousand head at Uvalde and shipped them on the Southern Pacific to Marathon.

By the close of the summer of 1885, Gillett had six thousand cattle grazing on the G⁴. It was a vast triangle with each side 25 to 30 miles long. Line camps marked each point of the triangle-- one at the mouth of Terlingua Creek, another on the upper reaches of the stream, and a third, Gillett's headquarters, at Chisos Springs, probably modern Oak Springs, at the western base of the Chisos Mountains. In the eighties, unlike today, this country was thickly covered with grass, and, as Gillett recalled it, "the Terlingua was a bold running stream, studded with cottonwood timber and was alive with beaver." The herds multiplied rapidly and returned a handsome profit to General Gano. Gillett remained with the company for 6 years, when he resigned to devote full time to his own ranching interests. When the Estado Land and Cattle Company

finally closed out about 1897, its cowboys rounded up fifteen thousand head of cattle and trailed them north to the railroad. Doc Gourley and Pink Taylor bought the remnant of the G4 cattle and ultimately gathered another two thousand.³¹

For a short time in the eighties, the G4 and all other ranches in the Big Bend displayed the characteristics of the open range cattle industry of the West. Before fences came, as has been noted, each cowman simply let it be known which range he claimed, and his neighbors usually respected the claim. In the middle eighties, as increasing herds covered the country, this system grew more and more unsatisfactory. Stockmen resorted to leasing key sections that controlled larger ranges. The railroads held as land grants most of the sections that contained water. By leasing these, ranchers could pasture cows on adjacent unwatered grasslands, which were of value only to the man who controlled the nearest water. Most of the dry sections still belonged to the state as school sections (Texas contained no Federal land). The state made persistent efforts to induce the users to lease these sections, too, but with little success until after the introduction of fences.³²

31. James B. Gillett, "The Old G4 Ranch," Voice of the Mexican Border (October 1933), pp. 82-32.

32. Gregg, pp. 90-98; Fletcher, p. 64.

With no fences to restrain them, the herds ran freely and mingled with other herds. Twice a year, in the spring and autumn, each rancher, and sometimes a combination of neighboring ranchers, staged a roundup to gather their cattle, brand new calves, and drive stock intended for market to the railroad for shipment. Even though most of the cows sent to market traveled by railroad, the day of the long drive had not entirely passed. Some owners, especially those with contracts to supply beef to the reservation tribes in Indian Territory, found it cheaper or more expedient to drive them up the Chihuahua Trail, a trip that usually took 2-1/2 months, with a daily average of 12 miles.³³

By 1886 more than 60,000 cows grazed in the Big Bend. The winter of 1885-86 had been unusually severe. Drifting before the northers, the Davis Mountains herds moved into the lower Big Bend. By spring everyone's stock was scattered and badly mixed. It was vital that the herds be untangled before the new calves were weened, for only through the mother's brand could ownership of calves be determined. The cowmen decided to stage a general roundup by all owners in the Big Bend. In August 1886 they carried out their intention.

The ranchers organized two parties, one under Den Knight to work west of Alamito Creek, the other under Tom Ellison to work

33. Gregg, p. 104.

east of the creek. The Knight group consisted of 60 men with a remuda of 400 horses, while the Ellison party, whose assigned territory contained fewer cows, was much smaller. Beginning at the Rio Grande, the cowboys swept northward on a wide front. About noon each day, with the stock gathered during the morning, they rendezvoused at an appointed water hole. They passed the afternoon, and if necessary the next day, in cutting out animals that belonged in the vicinity and in branding calves. Branding was a free-hand operation performed with a running iron instead of today's stamp iron, and the brand was very large, often covering an entire side of the animal. Moving out next morning, part of the men drove the accumulated cattle that belonged on ranges farther north, and the rest spread out on the east and west to comb the countryside. The Knight party spent considerable time in Milton Faver's neighborhood, not only because of his enormous stock holdings but also because of his liberality with peach brandy. Leaving neatly seggregated and fully branded herds in their wake, the round-up parties averaged about 15 miles a day. At the end of 2 weeks they reached the southern foothills of the Davis Mountains and there disbanded.³⁴

34. Barry Scobee, "The First General Cattle Round-Up of the Davis Mountains-Big Bend District," West Texas Historical and Scientific Society Publications, No. 3 (Alpine: Sul Ross State College, 1930), pp. 45-47; T. C. Mitchell in Madison, pp. 104-05; J. D. Jackson in Hunter, pp. 536-37.

Collective roundups continued for several years, until barbed wire made them unnecessary. At a roundup in 1891, an incident occurred that gave birth to one of the most famous legends of the West--that of the "murder yearling."³⁵ A group of cattlemen in the vicinity of Leoncita, 30 miles east of Fort Davis, held a roundup in January 1891 to brand calves that had escaped branding in the autumn roundup. One of the ranchers, Henry H. Powe, a one-armed Confederate veteran, became involved in a heated dispute with Fine Gilliland, representing the big Dubois and Wentworth outfit, over the ownership of an unbranded yearling. Both men drew their pistols, and Gilliland shot and killed Powe. The murderer swiftly fled the scene and was later killed in the Glass Mountains in a gun battle with two Texas Rangers. The cowboys who had witnessed the killing of Powe promptly threw the contested yearling on his side and with a running iron branded him with the word "murder" in large block letters that ran across his side from shoulder to flank. Then they turned him loose. There is good evidence that the murder yearling was soon afterward driven to Montana, but legend has him still lurking in the Big Bend. Quoting Frank Dobie:

35. Several writers have detailed the story. See especially Dobie, Longhorns, pp. 61-64; Barry Scobee, The Steer Branded Murder: The True and Authentic Account of a Frontier Tragedy (Houston, 1952); and Jack Shipman, "The Lone Red Murder Yearling of West Texas," Voice of the Mexican Border (February-March 1934), pp. 271-73.

Many stories still circulate over the wide spaces of the trans-Pecos country about "the maverick branded M U R D E R": How for years he wandered a lone outcast on the range, never seen with other cattle, and, for that matter, seldom seen at all. How he turned prematurely grey, the hair over the scabs of his bizarre brand showing a coarse red. How cowboys in the bunkhouse at the Dubois and Wentworth ranch one night saw the bull's head come through an open window; he was looking, they imagined, for the man responsible for that brand of horror traced on his own side. Some brands grow in size with the growth of animals; generally they do not. According to the stories, the M U R D E R brand grew until the elongated letters stood out in enormous dimensions, making one familiar with literature think of the pitiless Scarlet Letter that blazoned on Hester Prynne's breast and in the soul of every being who looked upon it.

Down through the years until very recent times, cowboys occasionally reported seeing the murder yearling, a ghostly image that usually appeared at dusk or dawn and presented a fleeting glimpse of the great brand scarring his side.

The Big Bend had its share of stampedes, the very real nightmare of cattlemen in the day of the Longhorn. They were common on the long drives up the Chihuahua Trail to the Indian reservations, and most of them occurred in and near the Pecos Valley. Here, in striking contrast to the Big Bend highlands, both grass and water tasted strongly of salt, which made the Longhorns irritable and easily startled. Too, this country swarmed with millions of kangaroo rats, whose sharp, nervous movements set off more than a few stampedes.³⁶ *In the Big Bend itself, J. D. Jackson recalled an exciting*

36. Madison, pp. 140-42.

stampede of four thousand Mexican cows that Milton Faver's hands were trying to pen in a rock corral.³⁷ But the most memorable stampede occurred at Robber's Roost, a rimrock cliff near the Chihuahua Trail south of Marfa.

During the autumn roundup on the Mitchell spread in 1896, the cowboys penned fifteen hundred steers in a triangular rock corral perched on the rim of the cliff, the precipice itself forming one side of the corral. During the night something set off the herd, and in the wild melee that followed hundreds of cattle went over the edge. Next morning the Mitchells discovered the crevices of the cliff packed with dead and dying steers. At the bottom, recalled Arthur Mitchell, "I saw a sight I never expect to see again. Mountains of meat--gory from torn flesh. Grotesque shapes with broken necks, broken horns; here and there slight movement indicating that somewhere below were a few not yet smothered. But calculated to make fatalists of us all were two steers standing on that mutilated mound, one with a broken leg and internal injuries which caused him to die later, and the other dazed, with one horn knocked up, that recovered to be shipped to Kansas grass."³⁸

37. Jackson in Shipman, Taming the Big Bend, pp. 106-07.

38. Quoted in Madison, pp. 138-39. See also F. A. Mitchell, "The Stampede at Robber's Roost," Voice of the Mexican Border (October 1933), p. 90.

In the Big Bend as elsewhere on the cattlemen's frontier, rustlers found a lucrative field for operations. Brands were simple, and their alteration required a minimum of artistic skill. Many of the rustlers were Mexican bandits who infested the river country. In 1893 such a gang ran off 1,200 head of stock belonging to several ranchers on Maravillas Creek. The angry owners, however, trailed the thieves into Mexico and recovered the cattle.³⁹ Not all rustlers by any means were Mexicans. A band of Americans operated in the Davis Mountains in 1885, specializing in stealing the cattle of newly arrived owners still looking for a place to locate. The cowmen banded together and, with the aid of Texas Rangers, broke up the gang and recovered more than three hundred head of stock.⁴⁰ Rustlers cursed the Big Bend until well into the 20th century and indeed still cause occasional difficulty.

Mavericking, too, was common and not entirely illegitimate. Calves that escaped the branding iron were fair game for anyone, and many a respectable herd sprang from a few such animals that an energetic mavericker had rounded up. Not so ethical, however, was the mavericker who went so far as to separate an unbranded, unweaned calf from its mother, sometimes even by killing the mother.

39. Raht, p. 377.

40. Evans, pp. 201-04.

Rustling and mavericking of Milton Faver's cattle became so widespread and so chronic that the old pioneer, now a patriarchal looking figure with a flowing white beard, was driven in desperation to close out his business. He took the first step in 1886 when he made a deal with Den Knight whereby Knight agreed to run the ranch for 3 years, Faver providing the operating capital, and receive in return every third calf branded and every eighth steer on the range. Knight managed to earn about 2,800 cows in this way but made little profit. In 1888 Faver sold all his heifer calves at \$3 a head and all the 3- and 4-year-old steers at \$10 each, and they were driven to the Texas and Pacific for shipment to Midland. Finally, early in 1889, he disposed of the remnant of his herds, probably seven thousand head. Joe Humphreys bought them for \$18,000 and sold them in New Orleans and Indian Territory.⁴¹

Milton Faver finally died 2 days before Christmas in 1889. Modern ranchers now occupy Cibolo, and the famed peach trees live on. Atop a hill behind the old fort, surrounded by a pole fence, is the grave of Milton Faver. The inscription on the headstone, translated from the Spanish, reads:

41. Gregg, pp. 67-69.

In Memory of
Milton Faver
Who Died Dec. 23, 1889 at
one o'clock in the afternoon
If he had faults may they be forgotten, and only
bear in mind his good deeds.

The death of Milton Faver marked the close of an era. For more than three decades he had personified the open range livestock industry of the Big Bend. At the time of his death in 1889, forces had already taken shape that would soon destroy the open range and the Texas Longhorn in the Big Bend.

The Emergence of the Hereford, 1890-1900

The pattern and techniques of the open range livestock industry worked successfully only so long as there was an abundance of grass in relation to number of cattle. Crowded ranges led to fencing, which ended the open range and fundamentally altered the character of western stock raising. The long drive, the general roundup, and the Longhorn himself, together with a whole series of associated techniques, were casualties of the transition. The process had begun in central Texas in the 1870's and had played a significant role in spurring the rush to the Big Bend that occurred between 1880 and 1885. By 1885 the Big Bend in turn had become so thickly populated with cattle that here, too, the days of the open range were clearly numbered.

The drouth of 1885-86 hastened the end. No rain fell in the Big Bend between September 1885 and August 1886. Water holes and streams ran dry, and the grass failed to ripen in its customary abundance and richness. The water and grass could not support the thousands of cattle and sheep that had been pastured on it. Between 25 and 40 percent of the cattle in the Big Bend perished during the year. In the Davis Mountains, J. W. Prude lost 70 percent of his herd of 3,000. Only in the lower Big Bend, not yet fully stocked, did the drouth fail to exact a heavy toll. The G⁴, recalled Manager Gillett, "was so vast and the cattle had so much room that when the big die-up came . . . not a head of G⁴ cattle died for want of grass or water. When I went into Alpine in June 1886, and informed the cattlemen that I had just finished branding 950 calves, they were amazed."⁴²

Drouth and crowding stimulated efforts to insure a dependable flow of water. A few stockmen experimented with the ground tank-- a depression scooped out of a natural drainage and blocked with an *earthen dam*. At first these were greeted with suspicion, but the cowmen soon observed that stock trampled them into packed adobe that actually held water. Called "Jake Tanks" because Jake Bowman

⁴². Gillett, "The Old G⁴ Ranch," p. 82; Gregg, pp. 108-09; Evans, pp. 201-04; Madison, p. 120.

first built them commercially, ground tanks became highly popular. Still, in times of prolonged drouth, the Jake Tanks ran dry too. They swiftly gave way to the new device that was revolutionizing agriculture on the Great Plains. There were two windmills in the Big Bend in 1885, and in succeeding years the number grew rapidly. The windmill became the chief means of supplementing the natural water supply. In later years extensive networks of pipes conducted water from the windmills to distant parts of the range, L. C. Brite alone laying 25 miles of pipe.⁴³

Drouth dramatized the perils of crowded ranges, and barbed wire came to the Big Bend. There were perhaps a few drift fences before 1885, but no one built enclosures until 1888. In this year W. F. Mitchell fenced a 3-section pasture he used for a holding trap, and others may have built such traps at the same time. In 1893 Pat Coleman had his pasture surrounded by barbed wire. W. W. Bogel emulated Coleman and hired the same fencing crew to string wire around his pasture. Bogel and Coleman started the trend. In 1895 Humphris and Company enclosed a 16-section pasture, and thereafter one rancher after another gradually constricted the open range. By 1900 fences checkered the Big Bend, one of the last strongholds in the West of the open range.⁴⁴

43. Madison, p. 120; Gregg, p. 109; Shipman, Taming the Big Bend, p. 119.

44. Gregg, pp. 107-08.

Fences made herd improvement feasible and thus doomed the Texas Longhorn. His chief recommendation was ability to thrive under adverse conditions, an essential characteristic on the open range. But in eastern markets he encountered serious competition from the quality products of the Midwest, and Texas stockmen quickly recognized the need for grading up their cattle. In central Texas W. S. Ikard had imported Herefords as early as 1876, and at its Dallas meeting in 1883 the Northwestern Texas Cattlemen's Association adopted resolutions urging herd improvement. "All sentiment regarding the prolific, drought-surviving old monarch of the range, the longhorn, had to be tossed out the window," wrote Lewis Nordyke. "His flesh was less sought after by Northern and Eastern buyers. The immediate mass improvement of Texas cattle dated from that day."⁴⁵

This could be done east of the Pecos, where fences were already closing the range. But in the Big Bend, where herds of various owners still mingled and where conditions still demanded animals that could take care of themselves, the transition to refined cattle had to await fencing. Graded stock had been introduced in the eighties, notably by John Beckwith, George W. Evans, Jim and Beau McCutcheon, Pat Dolan, and Jim Hilder, but not until most of the

45. Great Roundup, pp. 45-46, 95.

ranchers had begun to build fences could improvement get underway on a significant scale. The fences went up in the nineties. Now a cowman could keep his own cattle segregated from his neighbor's cattle, and, the new varieties demanding more care than the self-sufficient Longhorn, he could also more readily see to their daily wants. Most of the Big Bend cattlemen began to grade up their stock in the nineties. The leaders of the movement included those who had brought in high quality animals in the eighties, with the notable additions of L. C. Brite, W. T. Jones, and J. C. Bird.⁴⁶

The imports were largely Shorthorns, Durhams, and Herefords. At first the stockmen preferred Shorthorns. Crossed with Longhorns, they produced an animal with shorter legs and horns and thicker loins and hind quarters. While improving the beef, however, Shorthorn blood weakened the strain and made it less able to endure cold weather and thin grass. Herefords soon displaced the Shorthorns, although only with reluctance did cattlemen abandon the idea that Shorthorn blood was necessary to maintain a proper scale in their stock. Experience demonstrated, however, that well-chosen Hereford sires could produce both quality and hardihood. From the Hereford bulls and breeding cows imported from the Midwest in the 1890's

⁴⁶. Hunter, pp. 328-29; Shipman, Taming the Big Bend, pp. 111-12, and "H4 Herd," pp. 70-73; Cain, History of Brewster County, p. 62; Gregg, p. 108; Fletcher, p. 64; Evans, pp. 176-81.

sprang the famed Highland Herefords seen throughout the Big Bend country today. Their reputation has spread far and wide, elevating the Big Bend to high rank among the cattle raising regions of the nation.⁴⁷

Yet cattlemen recall the rangy old Texas Longhorn with nostalgia, for with their fathers he made the Big Bend a cow country. E. E. Townsend, one of the Big Bend's foremost citizens of the 20th century and "the father of Big Bend National Park," recorded what he believed to be the passing of the last Longhorns in the Big Bend.

When H. Halff and Brother closed out the Circle Dot in the late nineties, some of their Longhorns escaped and took refuge in the Glass Mountains north of Marathon. In 1900 Townsend became manager of the Elsinore Cattle Company, whose spread encompassed the haunts of these animals, by now truly mesteñas. "These old longhorns," wrote Townsend, "branded with the Circle Dot, were long, lean, and tough as the hides that wrapped their ugly carcasses. They were as swift as the coyote, and as wise in the lore of the hills." The Longhorns had a habit of coming down from their lair and leading the Elsinore's gentle stock into the mountains or running off their fat and growth. Several times Townsend's hands chased the trouble makers back to the mountains, but soon they wandered down again.

47. Fletcher, p. 64.

Finally, Townsend took his pistol and rode into the mountains. All day he chased down Longhorns and shot them dead. Some took as many as six bullets before they gave up and died. By evening he had disposed of them all.

"So it happened that the last longhorns in the Big Bend were rubbed out with a .45--otherwise, I guess, they would still be there, leading Herefords in stampedes."⁴⁸

48. Townsend in Madison, pp. 109-10.

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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has been prepared in response to the Director's memorandum of June 5, 1961, subject: Report on Cattle Industry in Big Bend National Park. The purpose of the study was to determine whether or not there existed a historical foundation for exhibiting Longhorn cattle in Big Bend National Park. That the Longhorn, both Mexican and Texas variety, played a significant role in the early cattle industry of the Big Bend country; that Longhorns were actually in the present park area; and that the historical basis for placing Longhorns in the park does therefore indeed exist, I believe this report clearly demonstrates. Although the feasibility of the proposal and the practical aspects of carrying it out should be studied by experts in other fields than history, I would like here to offer my own views on the subject.

Texas was the cradle of the range cattle industry of the United States, which played a prominent, significant, and dramatic role in the westward expansion of the American people. If this theme of American history is to be interpreted in the National Park System, as I believe it properly can be, Texas is the most fitting place to do it. Although the heartland of the Texas cattle empire was east of the Pecos River, the area now included in Big Bend National Park has a close enough historical identification with it to offer an eminently logical center for interpreting the cattlemen's empire. I believe that a Museum of the Cattlemen's Frontier at Big Bend could be as justifiable and popular as the very successful Museum of the Fur Trade at Grand Teton and would greatly enhance the attractions of Big Bend.

If the intention is to put a sizable herd of Longhorns in the park and permit them to run in a comparatively wild state, a number of practical questions must be studied by appropriate technicians. Is the existing range forage adequate to support the cattle, and if so how many and where? What is the probable effect of cattle on the range? How can the cattle be protected from predators--animals, such as the mountain lion, and human, such as inhabitants from across the Rio Grande? Longhorns are said to be especially susceptible to hoof and mouth disease. This and other management problems would need to be carefully studied.

In the course of preparing this study, I have become convinced that the answers to most of these questions probably will be found to be such as to make the introduction of Longhorns in large numbers

impracticable and damaging to the paramount values of the park. I believe, however, that it would be practicable to introduce a small herd (perhaps 10 or 20) of "kept" Longhorns which would be under the surveillance and care of someone employed specifically for the purpose.

There are in the park numerous remains of old ranches, some in fair condition and some in ruins. The locations of the more prominent are shown on the accompanying map. These ranches date from various years in the 20th century and have no particular importance and no association with Longhorn cattle. Nevertheless, they resemble structures found as ranch buildings in the 1880's and 1890's, and therefore possess a certain illustrative value. One of these ranches might be selected and restored as a focal point for telling the cattlemen's story. A small number of Longhorns might be pastured nearby and be managed by a caretaker lodged in the ranch house. Standard museum exhibits in an adjacent structure would interpret the history of the open range livestock industry of the West and of the Big Bend country, with emphasis on the role of Longhorn cattle.

The most suitable ranch complex is the Wilson Ranch, in Blue Creek Valley on the southwestern edge of the Chisos Mountains. This is located within a mile of the tentative alignment of the proposed road from Panther Junction to Castolon, with which it could easily be connected by a spur road. The ranch house is a solid substantial stone structure in good condition. (Most of the other ranches have adobe buildings.) An old-fashioned pole corral and snubbing post, a stock-dipping chute, and a few miscellaneous structures complete the complex. (See accompanying map.) The Wilson Ranch could be put in livable and usable condition with minimum expenditure, and would admirably serve the purpose outlined above.

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