



OPEN RANGE CATTLE BREEDS
Texas Longhorn cattle (left) were one of the main breeds during the Open Range Era. Hereford cattle, like Conrad Warren's (background), were also introduced then.
PHOTOS—NPS

AN OPEN RANGE OF OPPORTUNITY

It was about wealth—opportunity. It was also about people who, by the early 1800s, made the trying journey west, across North America's vast plains, hoping for a shot at fortune. Fur, gold, or trade—it didn't always matter how. It was more about the prospect of it all.

They traveled through the Plains, these pioneers, trailblazers forging paths through the wild frontier. They couldn't do it alone, so a patchwork of people emerged—African, American, Canadian, European, American Indian, and more—trading at outposts, blending as families, and working together.

THE LUCKY FEW

By the mid-1860s the western cattle industry was set to boom. Dwindling bison herds, from 60 million in the early 1800s to under 1,000 by 1884, opened up the range to cattle. The growth of eastern cities, primarily due to the new industrialized economy, led to a demand for beef.

Soldiers returning to Texas after the Civil War found millions of roaming, unbranded cattle. Too many cattle in Texas, not enough beef in the eastern cities—this meant the same cow selling in Texas for \$2 could sell in New York City, Boston, or Chicago for \$30 to \$40.

Montana's industry took off. Poindexter and Orr were the first to register a brand in Montana in 1864. From April to December,

With the 1850s came change. The fur industry ended, American Indians moved to reservations, and people began to wonder: did the Plains offer more than passage to the next opportunity—gold fields farther west?

A few thought maybe they still had a fighting chance on the Plains. They thought of settling and trying their luck at something new. Could they prosper on the wide open range? Was there money to be made in another industry—say, cattle ranching?

1866, Nelson Story made the first cattle drive from Texas to Montana. Driving more than 1,000 Texas longhorns, he and his twenty-five cowboys defied the US Cavalry and continued through Sioux territory. After surviving several attacks, they arrived in Bozeman, where hungry miners paid ten times the purchase price for his cattle.

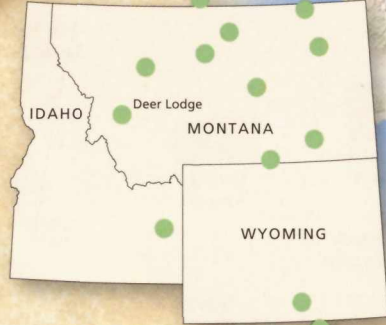
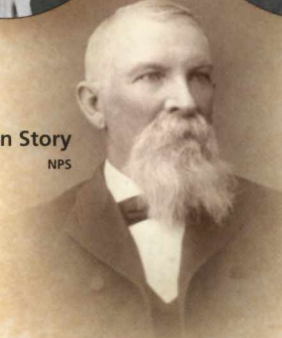
It seemed the Plains did offer more than passage west, people could prosper on the open range, and money could be made in cattle ranching—at least, for the lucky few. This site, where the families of Johnny Grant and Conrad Kohrs ranched for over 130 years, helps tell the story of the many people of the Open Range Era.

Johnny Grant
MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Conrad Kohrs
MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Nelson Story
NPS



By the 1890s Kohrs' cattle grazed on over 10 million acres of public land. Green dots show where his cattle grazed.



RANCHING PEOPLE AND CULTURES

For centuries Spanish ranch hands (vaqueros) roamed North America's western lands. They honed skills and techniques in horsemanship and raised cattle in vast, arid terrains.

Spanish land grants led to many of the West's first ranches. Spain granted some land to women. Maria Rita Valdez, of Spanish and African descent, owned a 4,500-acre cattle ranch in California. Her ranch, Rancho Rodeo de las Aguas, is now the site of the Beverly Hills Hotel, and Rodeo Drive is named after it.

The Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole raised cattle in the Indian Territory as early as the 1830s. By 1861 the Cherokee Nation's herd had grown to 250,000. Their approach of communal land-ownership suited open-range grazing. When

the last grazing ground opened to white settlement in 1893, tribes lost over 300,000 cattle.

Cattle ranching was established in Mexico by the 1860s. Many Mexicans owned ranches, especially in the Southwest and California. Some Mexican ranchers ventured northward into the Plains.

Some women found success as cattle ranchers. Widow Margaret Borland (right) took over her husband's cattle business, grew the herd to 10,000, and became the first woman trail boss. She once drove over 1,000 head up the Chisholm Trail from south Texas to Wichita.

As a single woman, cattle rancher Lizzie Johnson registered a brand in her name. In 1879 she and her husband signed a premarital contract that allowed her to keep control of her financial



affairs and keep her property separate. By her death her estate was worth almost \$250,000.

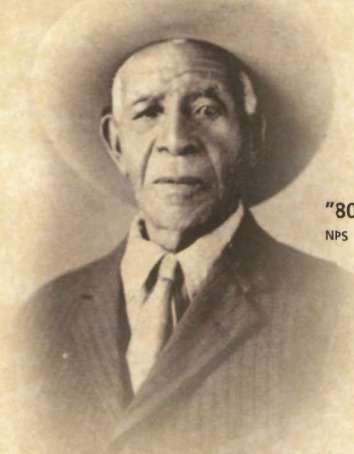
Nearly one in four cowboys were of African descent. Born enslaved in Tennessee around 1854, Nat Love (left) wrote one of the few surviving first-hand accounts by a black cowboy. Cowboy Daniel Webster "80 John" Wallace bought a ranch of about 1,200 acres and 600 cattle. Many born into slavery could find new freedom on the range and experienced less open discrimination.

Along with Americans and Europeans of Dutch, English, French, German, Scottish, and other backgrounds, the open range became a colorful landscape of people and cultures connected through cattle ranching.

NAT LOVE—DOCUMENTING THE AMERICAN SOUTH, UNC-CHAPEL HILL LIBRARY



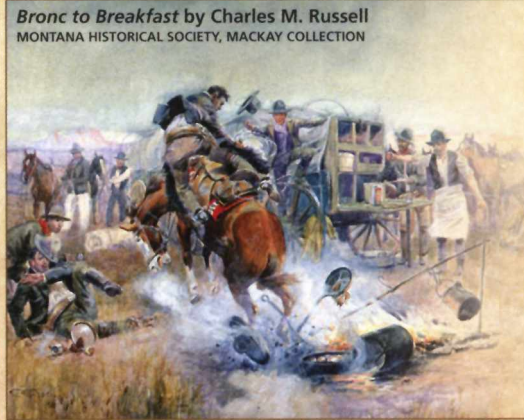
OPEN RANGE ERA TODAY
Ranchers continue to drive cattle across the West and raise beef to feed America.
© KRISTIN DICKERSON



"80 John" Wallace
NPS



The CK was one of Kohrs' brands. Brands symbolized pride, reputation, and a cow's ownership.
NPS



Bronc to Breakfast by Charles M. Russell
MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, MACKAY COLLECTION

THE AMERICAN COWBOY: MYTH OR REALITY?

He was a young man, late teens or early twenties, with a great responsibility: driving his cattle across the Plains. Awake through lonesome, starry nights on the open range, he sang soothing melodies to calm his cattle. Fearless and strong, he swam with his herd across swollen rivers and stayed with them during dangerous stampedes. A lover, a fighter, a just man, he was an American cowboy. But were cowboys really like this?

Since the first trail drives, people were captivated by stories of the rugged men who herded half-wild longhorns across America's prairies. Articles and dime novels treated readers to Wild West adventures. Handsome, honorable, and brave, cowboy heroes in these popular books and later movies rode proudly. They were tough and hard-working, independent and free.

Many stories exaggerated cowboy life. Clothes, for example, were worn for specific purposes. A wide-brim hat protected him from the sun, a bandana covered his face from dust the cattle kicked up, and high boots shielded him from needles and thorns. Yet these practical aspects of cowboy life became cultural symbols of the values cowboys portrayed. Part myth, part truth, the American cowboy lives on.

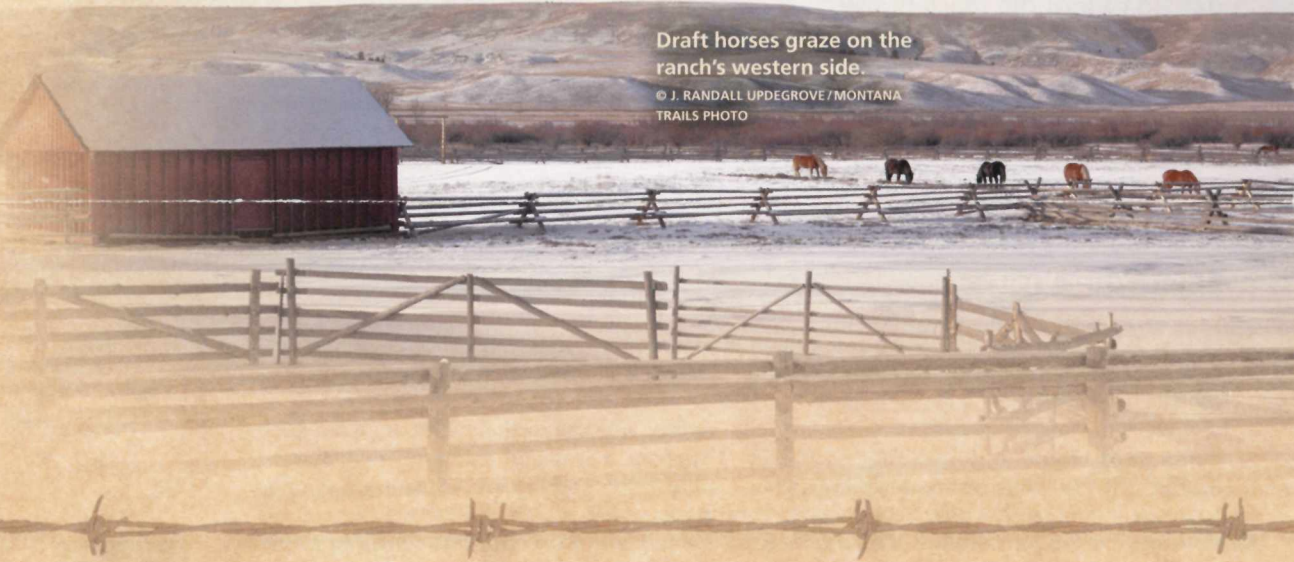
THE IMPACT OF AN ERA

The open-range cattle industry boomed for only a short 30 years. Railroads became more convenient, homesteaders fenced off land, and ranchers faced loss due to disease, theft, encroachment, overgrazing, and environmental challenges like the Hard Winter of 1886-87. The long trail drives of the Open Range Era were over.

This era of ranching helped shape America's character, and its impact endures. With new technologies and techniques, ranching has brought new ways to raise and market cattle. Ranching continues to feed populations and provide economic opportunity for many.

Established in 1972, Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site is the only national park dedicated to this story. The park preserves buildings, furnishings and decor, operations, skills, and the many stories and ways of life connected to this era. Ranch records give an unbroken story of past operations.

Though this ranch was only a small portion of the huge cattle empires of the West, the site symbolizes ranching heritage and the evolution of the American West while inspiring future generations.



Draft horses graze on the ranch's western side.
© J. RANDALL UNDERGROVE/MONTANA TRAILS PHOTO

1804-06 Explorers Lewis and Clark pass close to Deer Lodge Valley. They take back descriptions of this fur trapper's paradise.



NATIONAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL ARCHIVES, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

1850s Johnny Grant marries Quarra (Lemhi Shoshone). Her brother Chief Tendency poses for a portrait (left).

1861-65 The Civil War depletes cattle supplies in the Mississippi Valley, creating shortages in eastern markets. The cattle industry responds.

1862-66 Johnny Grant builds the "first good house" in Deer Lodge valley. In 1866 Conrad Kohrs buys the house and ranch for \$19,200.

1860-70s Homesteaders want cheap, durable fencing. The first US patent for barbed wire is issued. Open-range grazing continues.

1886-87 During a hard winter some ranchers lose 95 percent of their herds. Kohrs loses 60 percent of his valley herd.

1880-1900 Barbed wire enclosing farms signals the end of the open range. Ranchers develop ways of producing and harvesting quality hay.

1940 Conrad Warren's stock-raising operation is nationally acclaimed for its Hereford cattle and purebred Belgian horses. He buys the ranch.

1977 Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site opens to the public. Members of the Kohrs, Bielenberg, and Warren families attend festivities.

1993 Conrad Warren dies. A horse-drawn wagon carries his casket to Hillcrest Cemetery. This wagon is displayed at the park today.

Ongoing The National Park Service, Deer Lodge community, and volunteers preserve the Grant-Kohrs Ranch for future generations.

FAMILIES AT HOME ON THE RANGE

John “Johnny” Grant (right) was born in 1831 to a Canadian fur trader employed by Hudson’s Bay Company. His Métis mother died, and his grandparents raised him. At 17 he joined his father at Fort Hall, a fortified trading post in today’s Idaho, and worked as a fur trader.

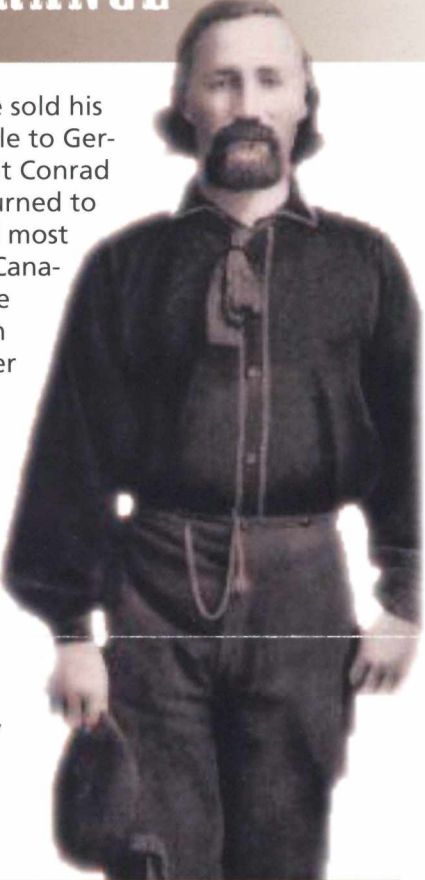
Recognizing cattle and horses could graze all winter in “this luxuriant grassy valley,” Grant settled in Deer Lodge valley, established his ranch, and built a permanent home. Others—mostly traders—joined him, and together they founded the town now known as Deer Lodge.

Grant prospered in Deer Lodge’s community of Mexican, French-Canadian, and Métis families. He ran many businesses and traded with American Indians and many immigrants traveling west to Oregon and California. When gold strikes in places like Bannack and Last Chance Gulch changed Montana’s

population, he sold his ranch and cattle to German immigrant Conrad Kohrs and returned to Canada, as did most of the French Canadians and some of the Mexican families of Deer Lodge valley.

Throughout his ventures in Canada, Montana, Idaho, and Oregon, he was a caring father to over thirty children, biological and adopted.

NPS



Conrad Warren, age 6, and Conrad Kohrs, age 79
NPS/CHRIS FORD

Conrad Kohrs came to Montana with little more than the clothes on his back and a bedroll slung over his shoulder. He primarily made money from cattle ranching and selling water rights to mining camps and a nearby gold mine. He faced many challenges—transporting his cattle to market, major losses during the Hard Winter of 1886–87, and livestock rustling. But his perseverance, keen business sense, and hard work contributed to his success.



The Kohrs’ Monarch stove
NPS

John “Johney” Bielenberg was Kohrs’ younger brother and an expert cattleman. At 18 he arrived in Montana to help with Kohrs’ gold camp butcher shops. Their family partnership lasted over 50 years. His passion for breeding horses grew with the need for superior saddle horses on the range. As early as 1873, he was breeding Thoroughbred stallions to native mares, producing some of the best horses for working cattle in the state.



Horses graze.
© DON KIRK

Conrad Kohrs Warren spent many summers here with his grandparents and his Uncle Johney. He developed a love of animals and the family ranch. At 25 he became the ranch manager. He experimented with artificial insemination, a breeding program for draft horses and cattle, and veterinary skills. In 1940 he bought the ranch. His and his wife Nell’s foresight and determination helped preserve the buildings, artifacts, records, and lore of his family that are today part of the park.



Mount Powell rises above the ranch.
© DON KIRK

PIONEER WOMAN

When newlywed Augusta Kohrs arrived at the ranch, she found a rough, pine-floor house—an informal home for her husband Conrad, and his ten hired men. Her first mattress was a homemade, straw-filled sack infested with bedbugs. She waged a “war of extermination” until no bug could be found. Pregnant with their first child, she kept floors “spotlessly white by scrubbing,” made soap and candles, cooked, roasted coffee, tended chickens, and milked cows. Her hard work over the next 20 years created the luxurious Victorian home her family enjoyed.



Augusta Kohrs
1849–1945
Proud, tall, beautiful, Augusta (age 33 in this portrait) met Conrad Kohrs when children in Germany. They married in Iowa February 23, 1868, after dating for about three weeks.
MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

THE FRONTIER FAMILY



Augusta and Conrad Kohrs’ children: Willie, Anna, and Katherine, 1886.
NPS



EXPLORE THE RANCH

You are invited to tour the ranch on your own. While here, take time to notice little things—feel the fresh air on your face, listen for birds, count colors in the sky and fields, observe textures of wood and leather, or smell the aroma of horses and hay.

This map shows the ranch’s main buildings (described at right). Please note firearms are prohibited in the visitor center and buildings 1, 4, 10, 11, 15, and 16.

Please start at the **visitor center** to get information and to sign up for a guided tour of the ranch house.

1 Ranch House
1862–90
Grant built the white portion of the house in 1862. It had a trading post downstairs and a residence upstairs. In 1890 Kohrs built the brick wing with a formal dining room, large kitchen, a second bathroom, and bedrooms. Augusta Kohrs acquired elegant furnishings over several decades. Coal to heat the house was stored in the shed behind the back door of the brick addition.

2 Bunkhouse Row
1907–30s
Cowboys and ranch hands ate and slept here. In the evenings they swapped stories, mended gear, and played cards.

3 Ice House/ Tack Room
1880s–1930s
Ice cut from ponds in winter was stored here for summer use. With refrigeration in 1935, the ice house became a tack room. The added room was the summer home of Ham Sam, a Chinese cook.

4 Garage/ Blacksmith Shop
1935
Conrad Warren stored gas-powered vehicles here. It also served as a repair shop and a place to shoe horses.

5 Thoroughbred Barn
1883
Kohrs built this stable for Thoroughbreds; Warren used it for show cattle. Today, it houses horse-drawn vehicles and equipment original to the ranch.

6 Leeds Lion Barn
1885
Each of the ranch’s stallion barns has its own hay loft and corral. To prevent fighting, each barn stabled only one stallion. This barn was named for a famous English Shire draft horse stallion Kohrs owned.

7 Feed Lot and Sheds
1930s
Warren added this part of the ranch when he began raising Herefords.

8 Chicken Coop
1930s
Chickens provided meat and eggs. Hens laid eggs in nesting boxes, pecked for food in the yard, and perched on roosting bars at night.

9 Buggy Shed
1883
This shed once adjoined the east end of Bunkhouse Row. In 1907 it was moved to make way for railroad tracks.

10 Granary
1935
Grains (oats and corn) were ground and mixed for cattle feed then stored here.

11 Draft Horse Barn
1870
Kohrs and Bielenberg raised several breeds of draft horses—Shires, Percheron-Normans, and Clydesdales—to do heavy chores.

12 Dairy
1932
Dairy cows were milked here. In the 1930s Warren sold the milk to Deer Lodge Creamery.

13 Oxen Barn
1870
As draft horses replaced oxen, this barn housed other livestock but kept its name.

14 Bielenberg Barn
1880
Young cows having their first calves were often kept here so ranch hands could make sure the calving (birthing) went well.

15 Warren House
1934
The Warrens’ home was a wedding gift from Augusta Kohrs.

16 Warren Barn
1950s
The barn stored hay, grain, and Warren’s prize Herefords.

Beaver Slide Hay Stacker
In August this horse-run stacker piles hay into 50-ton stacks.

Railroad Tracks
Utah Northern Railroad arrived in 1879; Milwaukee Railroad in 1907.

Fences
Look for three styles of fences: pickets enclose the ranch house, boards and barbed wire mark pastures, and jacklegs (rails on crossed posts) represent the main fence style on early Montana ranches.

Irrigation Ditches
The Kohrs-Manning Irrigation Ditch dates back to the 1870s.

Trails
Hike about 10 miles of roads and trails throughout the park. Ask at the visitor center for a map of park trails.

Paved trail to Ranch House
0.25mi (0.40km)

Visitor Center

Restrooms

Parking
To Main Street and Deer Lodge

Plan Your Visit

Hours The visitor center and ranch are open daily except Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1.

Ranch House Tours A guided tour is the only way to visit the inside of the ranch house. Tour size is limited. You may have to wait. You may visit the grounds until your tour begins.

Activities This is an operating cattle ranch with year-round chores directed by the seasons. The ranch can bustle with activities like branding, haying, and more or seem quiet. Programs and ranger-led activities are offered seasonally. Please visit the park website to learn more about special events.

Accessibility We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For

information go to the visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check our website.

Safety and Regulations Please help preserve the park. • Smoking and pets are allowed only in the parking lot. • Stay in designated areas; watch where you walk. • Close gates behind you. • Do not climb fences or enter corrals or pastures. • Be careful on railroad tracks; the east track is active. • Livestock can be unpredictable; do not approach. • Do not touch historic objects. Federal law protects all historic and natural features. • For general firearms regulations check the park website; for specifics check the map.

