



OPEN RANGE CATTLE BREEDS
Cowboys move the Kohrs herd in 1910. These shorthorn and Hereford cattle, along with the Texas Longhorn (far left) were common breeds during and after the Open Range Era. BOTH 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 Great 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.

With the 1850s came change. The fur industry ended, American Indians were 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?



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

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.

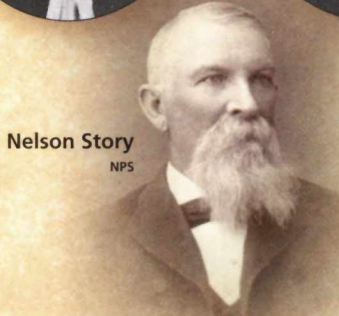
It seemed the Great Plains did offer more than passage west. People could prosper on the open range, and money could be made in cattle ranching—at least, for the lucky few. This site, where the families of Johnny Grant and Conrad Kohrs ranched for over 130 years, helps tell the story of the many people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



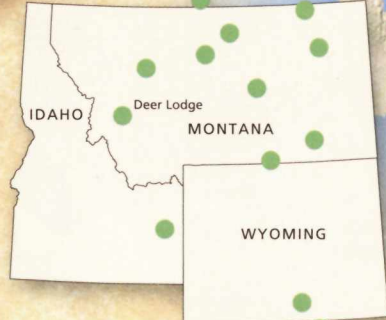
Johnny Grant
MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Conrad Kohrs
MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Nelson Story
NPS



WIDE OPEN GRAZING
By the 1890s Kohrs' cattle grazed over 10 million acres of land. Green dots show where they 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



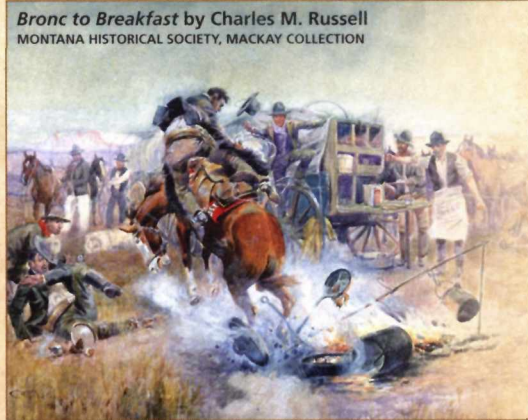
OPEN RANGE TODAY
Ranchers continue to drive cattle across the West and raise beef to feed America. © KRISTIN DICKERSON



"80 John" Wallace
NPS



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

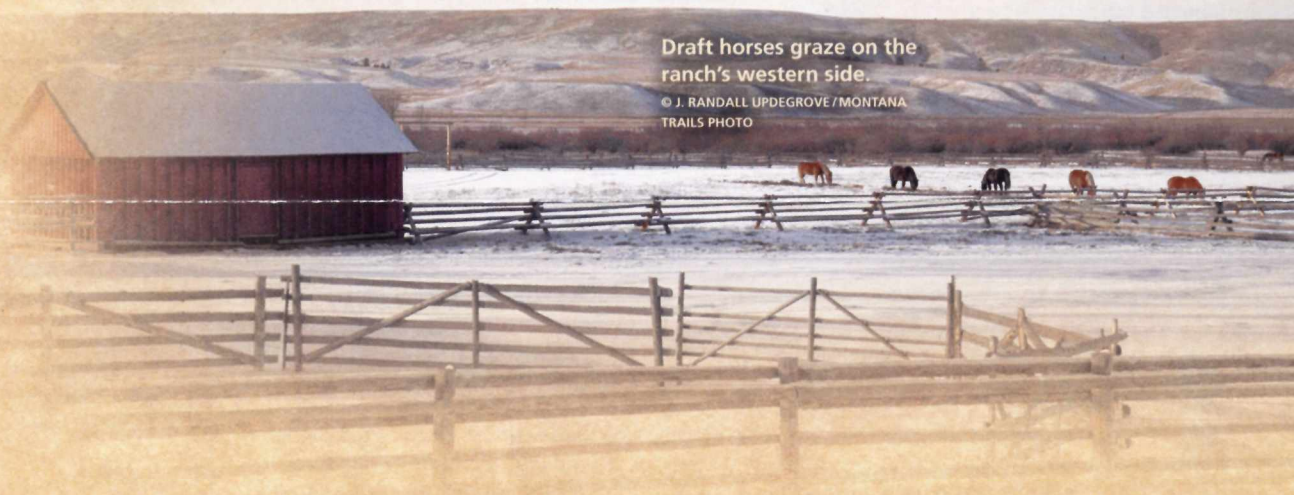
THE IMPACT OF AN ERA

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 URDEGROVE / MONTANA TRAILS PHOTO



FAMILIES AT HOME ON THE RANGE

In 1831 **John “Johnny” Grant** (*right*) was born at Fort Hall, a trading post in today’s Idaho, to a Canadian fur trader and Métis (meh-tee) mother. (Métis are of French-Canadian and Indigenous descent.) After his mother died, his Métis grandparents raised him. At 17 he joined his father at Fort Hall 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, 1890
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 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**
1884, 1907, 1930s
Cowboys and ranch hands ate and slept here. In the evenings they swapped stories, mended gear, and played cards.
- 3 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.
- 4 Garage/Repair Shop**
1930s
Conrad Warren stored gas-powered vehicles here. It also served as a repair shop and a place to shoe horses.
- 5 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.
- 6 Feed Lot and Sheds**
1930s
Warren added this part of the ranch when he began raising Herefords.
- 7 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.
- 8 Buggy Shed**
1883
This shed once adjoined the east end of Bunkhouse Row. In 1907 it was moved to make way for railroad tracks.
- 9 Granary**
1935
Grains (oats and corn) were ground and mixed for cattle feed then stored here.
- 10 Draft Horse Barn**
1870
Kohrs and Bielenberg raised several breeds of draft horses—Shires, Percheron-Normans, and Clydesdales—to do heavy chores.
- 11 Dairy**
1932
Dairy cows were milked here. In the 1930s Warren sold the milk to Deer Lodge Creamery.
- 12 Oxen Barn**
1870
As draft horses replaced oxen, this barn housed other livestock but kept its name.
- 13 Bielenberg Barn**
1880
Young cows having their first calves were often kept here so ranch hands could make sure the calving (birthing) went well.
- 14 Warren House**
1934
The Warrens’ home was a wedding gift from Augusta Kohrs.
- 15 Warren Barn**
1950s
The barn stored hay, grain, and Warren’s prize Herefords.

- 16 Beaver Slide Hay Stacker**
1870
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.

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. Visit the park website to learn more about special events.

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

For information go to the visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check the park 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. • Firearms are prohibited in the buildings listed above in “Explore the Ranch.”

Explore the Park Use the official NPS App to guide your visit here and at the other national park sites shown at right.



Venture Beyond the Ranch

During the early years of the Montana Stockgrowers’ Association, Kohrs befriended another cattle rancher—Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt’s Chimney Butte Ranch is now part of **Theodore Roosevelt National Park**.

When Kohrs heard of the US Army attack on the Nez Perce camp in the Big Hole, he sent a large wagon (*right*) to transport wounded US soldiers. **Big Hole National Battlefield** honors this tragic conflict.

In 1883 Kohrs and Bielenberg trusted George Lane to trail 1,800 cattle from Sun River to the Belly River area in Alberta, Canada. Lane met Fred Stimson and accepted his offer to be the **Bar U Ranch** foreman, now a unit of Parks Canada. Lane eventually bought the Bar U Ranch and helped found the Calgary Stampede, a famous rodeo and festival.

MORE INFORMATION
Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site
266 Warren Ln.
Deer Lodge, MT 59722
406-846-2070
www.nps.gov/grko

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The Kohrs used this large Dougherty Wagon for a seven-week trip to the new Yellowstone National Park.
NPS