

'Oregon ' Cattle Country

...Broadly speaking, the cattle country of the Pacific Northwest during the period covered by the study was divided into two regions. One of these, the Columbia basin proper, comprising roughly eastern Washington, the panhandle of Idaho and northeastern Oregon, was in reality an economic province. The other, and the larger, of these regions, comprising southeastern Oregon and that portion of Idaho lying south of the Salmon river mountains, was physiographically and economically somewhat apart from the Columbia basin. It was in fact the northern portion of a widely extended cattle province that had for its capital a small town situated on the Humboldt river, in northwestern Nevada-- Winnemucca, a busy shipping point on the Central Pacific railway...

-- Cattle Herds & Ranches in the Oregon
Country, 1860-1890 - J.Orin Oliphant
Agricultural History, October 1947

Willamette Cattle

...here (in Western Oregon) and particularly in the Willamette valley, cattle had been accumulating for some three decades (before the gold rushes of the Northwest), slowly at first but rapidly since the beginning of the 1840s. Some of these cattle were of Spanish origin and had come up from California. They were scrawny animals, remarkable not so much for the richness of their milk and the tenderness of their flesh as for their general toughness and their long horns. However, for the most part the cattle of Oregon were of a better sort as they were from American stock that had come over the plains with successive caravans that were Oregon-bound.

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Early Cattle Movements

...Western Oregon...became the cattle nursery of the Pacific Northwest. With the opening of mining camps in the Far Northwest from 1858 onward, cattle began to move out of this nursery. Down Puget Sound to British Columbia, up the Columbia river, and through the mountain passes they moved, northward and eastward, ~~they~~ to supply the wants of miners.¹⁰ And so great were these wants that cattlemen began to seek larger pastures for larger herds. Thus began the pastoral occupation of the Columbia basin, southeastern Oregon and southern Idaho, and thus began an eastward movement of cattle and other livestock from western Oregon that was to continue for three decades or more.¹¹

The Klickitat and Yakima countries, the Walla Walla country, and northeastern Oregon were soon overrun with cattle, and presently some stockmen were driving their cattle to grasslands in southeastern Oregon and southern Idaho, while others were moving their cattle northward to lay hold of the splendid ranges in the country between the Snake and the Spokane rivers.

10 JO Oliphant--"The Cattle Trade on Puget Sound" Agric. Hist. Vol.7

11 Eastern Oregon and eastern Oregon, it must be remembered, were not occupied entirely by an eastward movement of cattle from western Oregon. During many of the years of this eastward movement, cattle were entering the intermountain country from States east of the Rockies. A story published by the Weekly Mountaineer (The Dalles, Ore.) July 29, 1871, illustrates the "westward" movement of cattle: "We learn from Messrs. Perkins and Savage, of Yamhill county, who have just returned from Kansas, started from Abilene on the 6th inst., overland by the old emigrant road, with a drove of 4,200 head of Cherokee and Chickasaw cattle, bound for Eastern Oregon. They also purchased in Illinois, and put in with the drove, 10 blooded bulls. This is one of the largest droves ever passed across the plains at one time, and the enterprise speaks well for the proprietors, who are the most extensive cattle dealers in Oregon--Herald."

Fisk & Walker

In 1875 the editor of the Willamette Farmer obtained from "a fellow-townsmen, Mr. M. Fisk," the following information about a ranch owned by Fisk and Walker in Washington Territory "about 50 miles above The Dalles":

...Chapman's creek puts into the Columbia there, and about three miles up the creek is a small valley containing about 300 acres of rich arable soil. Here the ranch is located; and here they have a fine farm for grasses, vegetables and cereals, with a good orchard; but that is the only arable land within a circuit of 15 miles around, and as a consequence there is no other settlement to interfere with them in all that distance. The cattle of Fisk and Walker ought to number at least a thousand head, but there is no easy means of counting them. They are inhabitants of a range 200 miles in extent, at least some of them stray over that extent of territory.⁵⁷

57 ~~Willamette~~ Willamette Farmer, May 14, 1875

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J.O. Oliphant, Agricultural History Oct. 1947

Roundups in General

Ordinarily two roundups a year were held in the Oregon country, the first one beginning in April or May and lasting, sometimes, for several weeks. The second was held in the later summer or early autumn, at which time calves that had been missed in the spring were branded and marked, and beef cattle that were ready for market were separated from the herds.⁸¹ When the practice began, about the middle 1870s, of selling cattle to stockmen east of the Rockies and to buyers from the Middle West, the spring roundups in the Oregon country acquired peculiar importance, for it was at these roundups that cattle contracted for the preceding winter were delivered. Spring delivery was necessary because of the time required to drive cattle from eastern Washington or eastern Oregon to ranges in Wyoming or other far-distant States or Territories or to get them to Cheyenne or some other point on the Union Pacific Railroad from which they could be sent by rail to feeding grounds or markets in the Mississippi valley. Accordingly, at the spring roundups, the cattle that had been sold to Eastern buyers were cut out of the herds, branded with the road brand of the buyer and the counter-brand of the seller, and started toward their eastern destination, grazing en route.⁸²

81 Yakima Record, Apr. 15, 1882; May 12, 1883, Kittitas Standard, Sept. 22, 1883; Yakima Signal, Oct. 13, 1883

82 Gordon, "Report," 1082

Blackleg

...it was not until 1880 that the blackleg began to strike down young cattle. Between that year and 1884, this disease was reported to be present in nearly all the cattle districts of the Pacific Northwest, the worst year probably being 1883.¹¹⁶ ...An average annual loss of $1\frac{1}{2}$ per cent from disease was reported by a Klickitat cattleman in 1880 and of 2 per cent by a Yakima cattleman in the same year.¹¹⁸ Before that year the Yakima cattleman had suffered no loss from ~~the~~ disease.¹¹⁹

116...Yakima Signal, Mar. 24, June 9, 1883; Kittitas Standard, July 14, 1883,.

118, Gordon, "Report", 1090, 1091

119, Ibid, 1091

-- Cattle Herds & Ranches in the Ore. count
J.O. Oliphant, Agric. History, Aug. 1947

Rustlers

..To honest cattlemen, rustlers were the meanest creatures fashioned by the hand of God...They altered cattle brands and marks and laid claim to cattle that were imperfectly branded or marked. If they happened to be drovers, they might put a road brand on cattle they had not bought.⁹⁸ All such diverting pastimes as these were apart from open stealing, of which during the 1880s there were widely voiced complaints--complaints that organized bands of cattle thieves were operating in Idaho, eastern Oregon, the Yakima valley, and the Big Bend country of eastern Washington.⁹⁹ By law the property of cattlemen appeared to be adequately protected but law enforcement was difficult in a sparsely peopled and poorly policed country. There were indictments, trials and convictions of cattle thieves, but of the men who felt called to the profession of cattle ~~thieving~~ stealing there were no doubt many more who escaped detection than served sentences in State or Territorial prisons.¹⁰⁰

98...Yakima Record, July 10, 1880, Walla Walla Union, Apr. 11, 1874...

99 Yakima Record, July 10, 1880; Walla Walla Union, Nov. 25, 1882, quoting the Yakima Record..,

100 ... Yakima Record, Oct. 21, 1882...

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The Grass

As late as the summer of 1868 the surveyor general of Washington territory could write:

...the crowing glory of the vegetable kingdom in the (Columbia) basin is the "bunch grass," popularly so called from its growth in bunches or tufts, between which the surface is naked and more or less depressed according to the nature of the soil, the light particles having been scooped up and driven away by the prevailing winds. Prevailing in greatest abundance everywhere, rich and nutritious above all other grasses, and retaining its nutritive qualities after being dried up by the heats and droughts of climate, it already affords sustenance to thousands of horses, cattle and sheep, which may be increased to millions without overstocking the contry. This at present is the great resource of the basin, and the Columbia valley has been termed, not inaptly, the grazier's paradise²

- 2 S. Garfield (e) to Joseph S. Wilson, July 31, 1868 in the U.S. General Land office, Report of the Commissioner, 1868, p. 339. See also J. Ross Browne, Report on the Mineral Resources of the States and Territories West of the Rocky Mountains (Washington 1868) 548, 555, 567; and H.N. Moseley, Oregon: Its Resources, Climate, People and Productions (London 1878) 384, quoting Philip Ritz.

-- Cattle Herds & Ranches in the Oregon Country 1860-1890, J. Orin Oliphant
in Agricultural History October 1947

Cattle Herds

Information as to the size of the herds that grazed in the Columbia basin, whether in eastern ~~Oregon~~ Washington or in northeastern Oregon, is fragmentary and inexact, but it appears that herds of great size were altogether exceptional. A sale of 12,000 head ~~at~~ in the Okanogan country, reported to have been made in 1881 by Phel & Wadleigh to Benjamine E. Snipes of The Dalles, was perhaps unique.¹⁶ These men were, in the vernacular of the country, "cattle kings," but other men in the Columbia Basin, men whose operations were on a lesser scale, were likewise spoken of as "cattle kings." Whatever the evidence examined--whether reports of sales, reports of movements of livestock, or estimates of cattle in a given locality-- the result obtained is the same. Many herds consisted of onaly a few hundred head each, others numbered a thousand head each, a few were as large as 2,500 head or more, and rarely was one as large as 5,000 head. The Yakima cattleman who described at length his operations for the Gordon Report of the Tenth Census claimed to possess no more than 2,000 head, and the Klickitat cattleman who likewise described his operation for that report laid claim to only 5,000 head. We may conclude therefore that in the Columbia Basin a man whose cattle numbered no more than 5,000 head might claim membership in a bovine royalty.¹⁷

16 Idaho Tri-Weekly Statesman (Boise City) Mar. 22, 1881; Spokane Times (Spokane Falls, Wash.), Mar. 31, 1881

17 Weekly Mountaineer, Feb. 24, 1872; Washington Standard, May 1, 1875; West Shore (Portland, Ore.) Feb., 1879, P. 57; Walla Walla Union, Mar. 20, 1880; Gordon "Report", 1089-1091; Yakima Signal, Jan. 27, June 9, 1883; Kittitas Standard, July 21, 1883

Kittitas Range

For many years Yakima valley cattlemen drove their herds to summer ranges in the Kittitas valley and returned them to winter ranges on the lower Yakima River in the autumn.

Walla Walla Union, May 3, 1873, Oct. 17, 1874; Willamette Farmer, Apr. 26, 1884; Oregon and Washington Farmer, May 1883, P. 14

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Cattle Drives
to Mines in 60s

In the decade of the 60s many bands of cattle were driven through eastern Washington to the mines in British Columbia, as well as to the mines in Idaho and Montana. Toward the close of May 1864 a small drove of cattle passed through Walla Walla "en route to the Kootenai mines"--Washington Statesman, June 3, 1864. In August 1866 a correspondent of the Statesman observed a band of 650 head of cattle passing through Wallula for Cariboo. This band had been driven from California. The owners of the band, he stated, had been engaged in driving cattle to British Columbia since 1860 and each year drove into that country from 600 to 1,000 head-- Walla Walla Statesman, Aug. 17, 1866. No satisfactory account of the cattle industry in these years has, so far as I am aware, been written, although considerable material on this subject is available in the territorial newspapers.

-- J. Orin Oliphant in a footnote on Page
~~207~~ 209 of Vol. 17, Wash. Hist. Quarterly

In 1858 western Oregon had become the cattle reservoir of the Pacific Northwest. In response to the demand created by the ~~the~~ mines in the north, bands of cattle were driven from the Willamette, Umpqua and Rogue River valleys to the lower Columbia river. Here the trail divided. The cattle destined for the mines of eastern British Columbia ~~river~~ went up the Columbia river to the Dalles, and thence were driven northward to the desired markets. The most important route through eastern Washington was by way of the Okanogan valley.³ On the other hand those intended for Vancouver Island or western British Columbia pursued different courses. Occasionally a few head were shipped from Astoria or from Portland to Victoria; but, for the most part, the cattle intended for the areas of the British Northwest accessible by sea were crossed to the north bank of the Columbia river and thence driven by the Cowlitz River route to Puget Sound... since there were facilities for pasturing in the Puget Sound country, the expense of transportation could be lessened by moving the cattle north in large bands. From the pasture grounds in western Washington they could be shipped in small lots as the needs of the northern markets demanded...Steilacoom became the chief cattle-shipping port on Puget Sound.

3 For a contemporaneous description and a brief account of the use made of this route, see R. C. Lundin Brown, *British Columbia: An Essay*, 20-22 (New Westminster, 1863). See also the *British Colonist* (Victoria V.I.) Nov. 9, 1861; *Morning Oregonian* (Portland Oregonian) Mar. 22, 1861; *Washington Statesman* (Walla Walla); Feb. 1, 1862; Gov. James Douglas to the Duke of Newcastle, Oct. 9, 1860, in *Further Papers Relative to the Affairs of British Columbia*, Part 4 (London 1862) 22; A. J. Splawn, *Ka-mi-akin, the Last Hero of the Yakimas*, ch. 22, 25 (Portland, re., 1917); Danile M. Drumheller, "Uncle Dan" Drumheller Tells Thrills of Western Trails in 1854, P. 66-70, 123-128 (Spokane, 1925) Both Splawn and Drumheller were pioneer cattle drovers...