

Cowboys



Cowboys were men who often lived in the American west during the 19th century. The land where they lived was an enormous open space and they lived lonely lives on horseback. In fact, cowboys still exist today, but they behave quite differently, now using technology to help them do their jobs. Cowgirls were first described in the 19th century also, but their roles attracted much less attention so we know a lot less about these women.

Living in the American West Many Years Ago

Life was hard – many men began training as a cowboy at the ages of 12 or 13. Cowboys lived in dry and often wild conditions. They could die of thirst if they didn't find water to drink. Cowboys often caused trouble in the towns that they encountered because they were quick gun shooters and liked having fun.

The Job of a Cowboy

In the past, cowboys were drawn to the open lands of the west because the men were often young, wanting adventures and freedom. They didn't get paid much for their job and worked long, physically tiring days, often alone. Their jobs included herding cows to a ranch and guarding cows from rustlers, so they usually camped out in the open air near the animals. Some cowboys took cows on trail drives. These were long journeys taken by the cowboys and the cows they looked after. These could last for months and were really tiring, but they were useful for taking the cows to sell in other parts of the country.

How did Cowboys Travel Around?

It is thought that cowboys preferred not to walk anywhere, but rather rode on horses. Their horses were very important because they helped the cowboys to do their job properly and were also their companions on the long, lonely cattle trail drives.

What Did Cowboys Wear?

Cowboys were well known for wearing big hats, lassos and tall brown leather boots with spurs. The spurs were small, jagged discs of metal attached to the back of their boots. The cowboys could kick their horses with these to make them run faster in a chase.

Cowboys in Films

Many films have been made about the lives and adventures of cowboys in the Wild West. These are called 'Westerns'. Actors such as John Wayne and Clint Eastwood were made famous through their cowboy characters.

Rustlers - people who steal cows

Ranch - farm

Lasso - a rope knotted into a loop at the end for throwing round an animals' neck to capture them

