

Cowboy Country

“Without Kansas, the cowboy as we know him—America’s greatest folk hero, the core of our national identity, the embodiment of our philosophy of self reliance—would never have come into existence.”

--Jim Hoy, Cowboys and Kansas, 1995

When the Civil War ended, Texas ranchers needed two things—access to Eastern markets for cattle that had proliferated during the war years and good grass to fatten them. Kansas provided both. Thus began the great trail drives of the late 1800s, moving thousands of longhorn cattle to the lush tallgrass prairie. The Flint Hills region, with its shallow soils, was better suited to grazing than agriculture, and became one of the state’s premier grazing grounds. By 1872, Abilene, at the western edge of the Flint Hills, had grown into Kansas’ first cow town, shipping hundreds of thousands of cattle east by railroad.

Since 1937, Strong City has hosted the annual Flint Hills Rodeo, a three-day festival held on the first weekend in June. Be sure to visit the Old Cowtown Museum (Wichita), a living-history museum that recreates the 1865-1880 era.



Cattle Drive

See for Yourself

Many working ranches host **ranch rodeos** that are open to the public, including ones in Strong City and Council Grove. Some welcome overnight guests to experience the region’s ranching traditions and culture through activities from trail rides to cattle drives.



Cowgirl



Rodeo

Myth meets Reality

Though the mythic Hollywood cowboy lives and dies by the gun, cowboys actually faced far different hazards on the job. During the long springtime ride from Texas, cowboys drove cattle across many rivers, including the Red, Cimarron, Arkansas and Salt Fork, and the melt-water-swollen waters claimed many. Cowboys faced far greater risk from lightning strikes and stampedes than from a shootout on Main Street.