

## Who were the cowboys and what was their life like?

When cattle ranching declined in importance, many cowboys ended up working as extras on cowboy films! Hollywood films, cowboy novels and, later, TV programmes such as 'Bonanza', glamourised the cowboys, and made them seem like heroes.

### The real cowboys

The Hollywood image of cowboys was not realistic. Many real cowboys were **black ex-slaves**, whereas the Hollywood heroes were always white. Also, after the hardships of the long drive, it seems unlikely that many genuine cowboys were specially good-looking!

They were, however, **highly skilled**. They could ride, shoot, lasso, wrangle, round up, herd, cross rivers, 'turn' stampedes, scout, keep watch and drive off rustlers - all in rain, hail and burning sun.

### Life as a cowboy

The life of a cowboy followed the seasons:

- In **winter** they hung round the ranch, or lived in 'line camps', taking daily rides to stop the cattle 'drifting' onto the open plain.
- In **spring**, they went 'bog-riding' to haul out 'mired' cows, and then went on the 'round-up'.
- In **summer**, they went on the trail drives to market.

Cowboys' lives were **similar** in many ways to the lives of Native Americans:

1. They were entirely dependent on the **natural products** of the Great Plains.
2. They **moved around** (though the cowboys were herding cattle, whereas the Native Americans were following the buffalo).
3. They cared for the cattle (eg by bog-riding and from line-camps) in a way similar to the way Native American dog-soldiers cared for the buffalo.
4. Their food and clothing was derived from cattle (**beef and leather**).
5. The **round-up** was a collective, community event similar in many ways to a buffalo hunt.
6. Cowboys developed a system of **long-range signals**, such as waving a hat, in much the same way as the Native Americans used smoke signals.

## Who were the cowboys and what was their life like?

Real life cowboys had to endure numerous **hardships**:

- freezing winter **cold** in the line camps
- danger of **being trampled** (especially in a stampede)
- danger of **drowning** (crossing rivers)
- rain, hail and **burning sun** on the long drive
- having to stay awake all night on **guard duty** on the long drive
- having to **ride 'drag'** on the long drive (dust from the herd)
- attacks from Native American **warriors** on the long drive
- attacks from **rustlers**

Cowboys were paid about ten dollars a week, they were not wealthy. After a long drive they would often spend the money on drink, prostitutes and gambling in the railroad cow towns.

### **Cowboys and their jobs**

The long drive was a very difficult task, and the cowboys who did it had to be highly skilled.

There were different types of cowboys who each did a particular job:

### **Cowboys and their responsibilities**

<b>Cowboy</b>	<b>Job</b>
Trail boss	Is in charge of the drive
Chuck wagon	Acts as the cook
Point	Keeps lookout and turns the herd
Swing	Watches the flanks of the herd
Drag	Chases up stragglers
Wrangler	Looks after the horses