

Cattle Drive Activity

Program: Tall Tales and Florida Trails

After reading *Kissimmee Pete*, *Cracker Cow Hunter* by Jan Day, participants will recreate a cattle drive through their home, backyard, or local park. Parents and guardians can be the “cows” while the younger participants are the cowboys and herding dogs moving the herd from the one starting point to another, mimicking the drive to the coast for transport. Recreating the encounters within the book, participants will come across the obstacles Kissimmee Pete surmounted and try to safely escort all of the cows to the river, where they will be exported.

Objectives:

- Educate participants about the various roles of people and animals in a cattle drive.
- Discuss the history of the introduction of cattle to Florida via the Spanish explorers.
- Emphasize the importance of ranching history in Florida.

Materials Needed:

- Cracker cow cutouts on sticks or clothespins (cut out, decorate, and stick to popsicle stick or use clothespins for legs)
 - One green cow to be String Bean
- Horse cutouts on sticks (cut out, decorate, and stick to popsicle stick or use clothespins for legs)
 - One horse to be Blaze
- Dog cutouts on sticks (cut out, decorate, and stick to popsicle stick or use clothespins for legs)
 - One dog to be Mud
- Alligator prop (cut out)
- Hairless bear (cut out or an actor)
- Computer or phone to play buzzing sound of mosquitoes (or participants can buzz!)

Alternative/Pre-activity:

- Participants can color in/personalize their cows/horses for the cattle drive.

Activity Plan

Set up a route from a point A to a point B, point B being the “port” the cattle need to be shipped from. You can use signs or pictures of a steamboat or dock to signify the port.

Have participants choose whether to be a cow, a dog, or a horse (a cowboy). One leader can be Kissimmee Pete leading the drive. Cowboys stay toward the back and they keep an eye on wandering cows. Cowboys ask cracker dogs to keep cattle in the herd moving forward. Cattle should behave relatively well, but some may wander or get scared and need to be rounded up again. Parents and guardians are a good candidate for playing as the cattle.

Have the cattle drive encounter the alligator, the hairless bear, and the cloud of mosquitoes and decide how to react at each obstacle.

The cattle drive can stop and rest. Have the drive “camp” in one spot for the “night” and note that cow camps were common in the late 1800s for anyone to use during their cattle drive.

After the “herd” has made it past all the obstacles, board the *Hiawatha* and reiterate that these cows were being exported to places like Cuba, Key West, and Nassau in the Bahamas.¹ If you want to give candy, gold coin chocolates can represent the Spanish doubloons the cowboys would have been paid in.

¹ Florida State Parks, “1879 Cow Camp Living History Reenactment,” <<https://www.floridastateparks.org/learn/1876-cow-camp-living-history-reenactment>>

Imagination Ideas:

Plan a route around the backyard or through the house that the cattle drive can follow. Consider using things in the house like house plants to create a forest, hiding behind a piece of furniture to surprise the cattle as the alligator, or use a cardboard box to stand in for the steamboat.

Florida Cracker Life Facts

- Cracker cows are descendants of Andalusian cattle brought by the Spanish conquistadors during their exploration of Florida in the early 1500s. They are a very hardy and parasite resistant breed.²
- Cracker cows are a *criollo* cattle, meaning born in the New World but originating in Europe.
- Ranching in Florida began with the establishment of Spanish missions in across north Florida. Native Americans in Florida also began tending cattle herds.³
- Florida was a free range state, meaning cows were not branded or fenced in. Cowboys had to rustle the cows out of the scrublands to drive them to port for sale.
- Cow hunters were often paid in Spanish gold doubloons for their cattle, since the ports were taking the cattle to Cuba and other Caribbean ports.⁴
- Florida sold beef to both Confederate and Union troops during the Civil War.⁵
- Cracker cows can be red, gray, black and brindle in coloration. (Brindle is brownish with streaks of other colors.)
- The cracker cow is Florida's official state heritage cattle breed.
- The Florida cracker horse is also descended from Spanish horses. Cracker horses are also known as Chickasaw ponies, Seminole ponies, or prairie ponies. They have high endurance levels for riding and are agile through the Florida scrub and swamplands.
- Cracker dogs are usually the Florida Black Mouth Cur, a working dog with short fur that helps cowboys herd the cattle during the drives. (Old Yeller is a Black Mouth Cur.)

² Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, "Cracker Cattle and Cracker Horse Program," <<https://www.fdacs.gov/Agriculture-Industry/Livestock/Cattle-Bovine/Cracker-Cattle-and-Cracker-Horse-Program>>

³ Florida Memory, "Florida Cattle Ranching," <https://www.floridamemory.com/photographiccollection/photo_exhibits/ranching/>

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Cattle on Gulf Beach, Apalachicola, Fla.

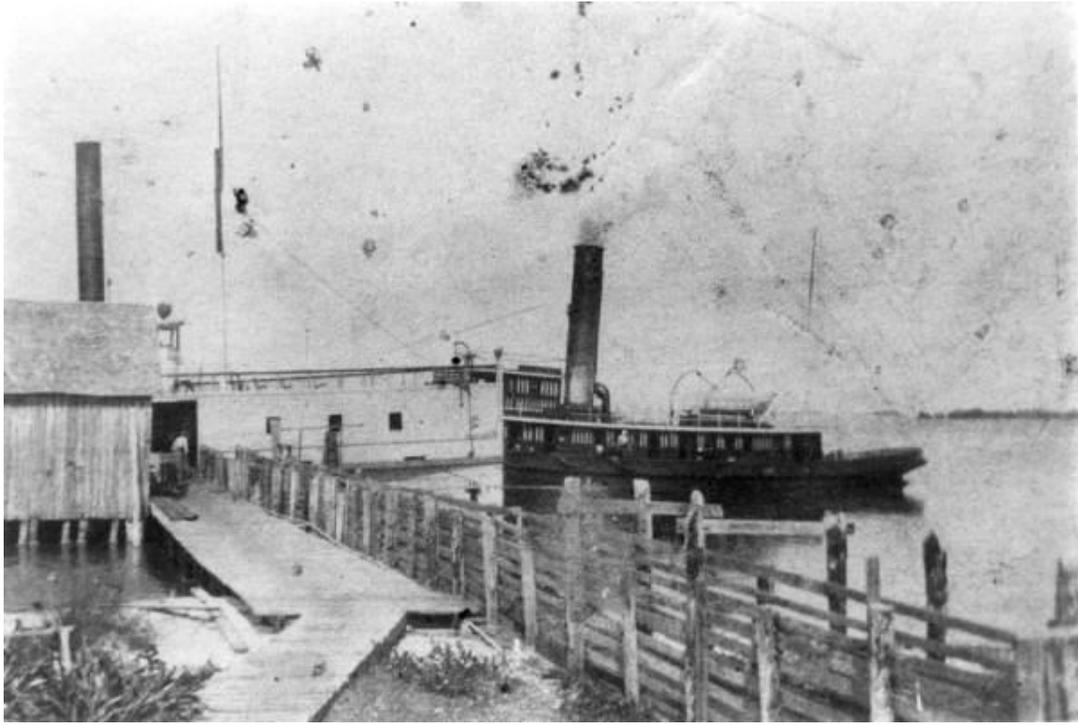


Cattle on Gulf Beach, Apalachicola



A BIT OF COW COUNTRY.

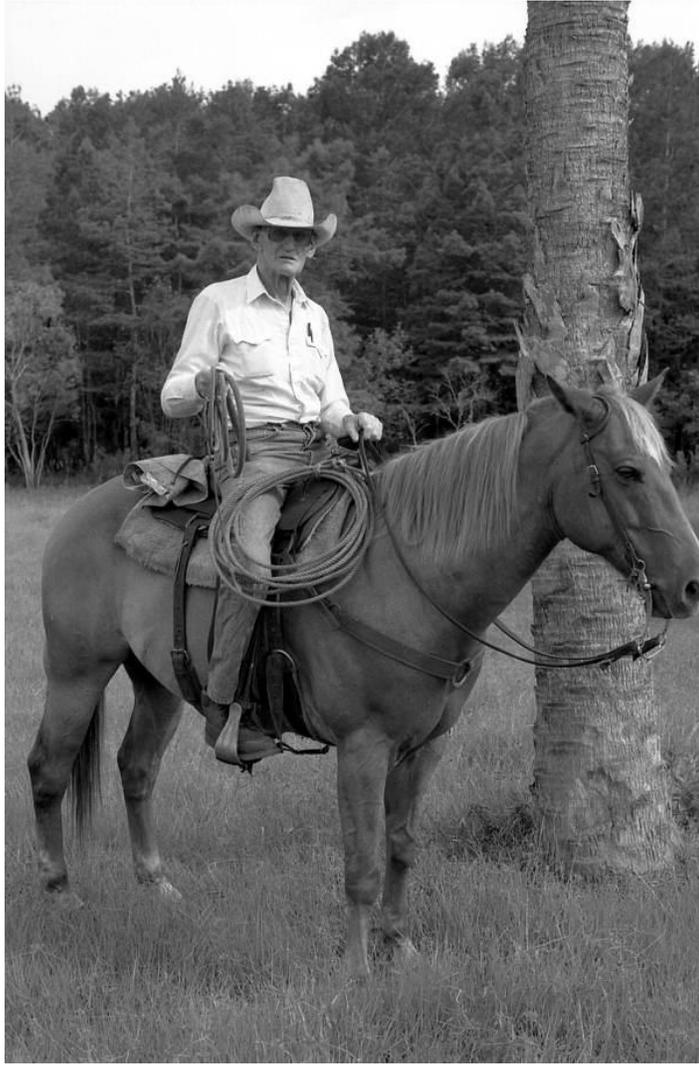
Illustration of a cow camp



Steamship at Punta Rassa Wharf



Man standing at Kissimmee Cow Camp



Cow whip maker George Junior Mills