

Ranching Traditions and Landscapes (1680 to present)

Our common ground – our ranchlands – are what have best preserved, as well as shaped, the vast natural and cultural landscape of the Santa Cruz Valley. Our sweeping open spaces, our recreational areas, our refuge from the city, and home to sensitive biological systems and traditional rural communities are all the result of ranching, an extensive rather than intensive use of the land in the arid Southwest. Since the introduction of cattle, horses, and other livestock in the 1680s and 1690s, with the first Spanish *entradas* to establish ranches, mission communities, and military forts in the Santa Cruz Valley, ranching and farming have continued to be two mainstays of the rural economy for more than 300 years. Most of the earliest cattle ranches in the Santa Cruz Valley was established at mission communities, but the Spanish and later Mexican governments also offered substantial land grants to civilians in an attempt to create wealth and a tax base by attracting settlers to increase the population and productivity of the region and to expand their claims. Despite these efforts to develop the ranching potential of the area, few settlers actually lived on their land grants for long due to the ongoing threat of Apache attacks. Instead, many ranchers lived in military or mission communities for defense, only venturing out to visit their ranches and to assess their livestock on occasion. This pattern of settlement and ranching persisted until the American Territorial period, when ranchers began to move onto their ancestors' land grants. With the opening of the West after the Civil War, American and Mexican ranchers established new ranches and homesteads throughout the region, often sharing labor and mutual assistance. Today, the interplay of Hispanic, American, Mexican, and Native American ranching continues this historical and living tradition, providing a link to the past and to the future.

Description of Theme

Spanish Colonial and Mexican Periods & Land Grants

Ranching traditions in the Santa Cruz Valley derive from ancient traditions of domesticated cattle and livestock raising, which originated in the Old World from nearly the dawn of history. Remarkably, little is known of early Old World cattle. While they became basic to the economy of Eurasian civilizations, few writers found much to record about these mundane beasts. One thing that can be said with certainty is that by the early modern era, European cattle, while of one species, had attained a great variety of regional variation.

It is to the Spanish, adapting to conditions of the New World, that we owe much of the character of ranching in the American West. Although changed in numerous ways, ranching today that serves a modern American market is also shaped physically and culturally by traditions brought by those first Spanish settlers. The institution of cattle ranching developed quickly in New Spain. The Spanish government knew, that by encouraging cattle raising, its colonies would have a strong economic base. By 1600, cattle in the New World numbered in the hundreds of thousands. The first cattle ranch in the Santa Cruz Valley was established about 1680 by José Romo de Vivar, near San Lázaro in what is now the Mexican state of Sonora.

In 1591, missionaries of the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits, began their slow efforts at Christianizing the Indians in New Spain's northwestern frontier, also known as Pimería Alta, which includes the Santa Cruz Valley. The most famous missionary in this region was Father Francisco Eusebio Kino, who brought cattle in large numbers to his missions. They would be the mainstays of the mission economies and a major attraction for Indian converts. He set up numerous *visitas* in northern Sonora and Arizona between 1687 and 1711, including **Tumacácori**, **Guevavi**, and **San Xavier del Bac**. Later, following the Piman Revolt of 1751, cattle ranching became focused at the military presidios of **Tubac** and **Tucson**.



National Heritage Areas
celebrate working landscapes
and traditional land uses.



Another unique theme for our area will
be cattle ranching, one of the primary
land uses in the Santa Cruz Valley for
more than three centuries.

In 1769, California was threatened by Russian settlement and in 1773 and 1775, Juan Bautista de Anza led two expeditions to California from Tubac. Sixty-five cattle provided food on the hoof for the first expedition along the Camino del Diablo, or "Devil's Highway." The second expedition included some 240 people, 695 horses and mules, and 355 cattle, who made the long journey to establish San Francisco along a different route, now commemorated as the **Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail**.

Cattle ranching dominated other activities such as farming or mining in the Spanish colonial economy of this era. Large land grants helped establish the Elias, Ortiz, Herreras, and other Hispanic families permanently in southern Arizona. Petitions by settlers to both Spain and Mexico resulted in 18 Land Grants that would later become the focus of land ownership disputes following the Gadsden Purchase of 1854 which brought the Santa Cruz Valley into the United States. Tomas and Ignacio Ortiz received a large land grant at **San Ignacio de la Canoa** along the Santa Cruz River in 1821, and the Ortiz brothers acquired another grant at **Arivaca** in 1833, as shown in the list below.

Spanish Land Grants in the Santa Cruz Valley and other parts of Southern Arizona
(From Walker and Bufkin 1986)

Name of Land Grant	Acreage Claimed	Acreage Approved or Rejected
1. Tumacácori]	81,350	rejected
2. Calabazas]		
3. San Ignacio de la Canoa	46,696	17,204
4. Buenavista (María Santísima del Carmen)	17,354	5,733
5. San José de Sonoita	7,593	5,123
6. El Sopori	141,722	rejected
7. San Rafael de la Zanja	152,890	17,352
8. Aribaca	8,677	rejected
9. Los Nogales de Elías	32,763	rejected
10. San Bernardino	13,746	2,383
11. San Ignacio del Babocomari	123,069	33,792
12. Tres Alamos	43,385	rejected
13. San Rafael del Valle	20,034	17,475
14. Agua Prieta	68,530	rejected
15. Ranchos de las Boquillas	30,728	17,354
16. San Pedro	38,622	rejected
17. Algodones	21,692	rejected
18. Otero (Tubac Claim)	1,199	<u>claim not filed</u>
	<u>850,050</u>	<u>116,416</u>

However, the early years of the Mexican Republic saw turmoil throughout the country. Warfare continued, and by the 1840s most Mexican ranches in the Santa Cruz Valley were abandoned and cattle herds grew wild. American travelers through Arizona in the 1840s reported vast herds of wild cattle, and range conditions were noted as excellent. However, by the 1850s wild cattle were exterminated from the Arizona range. The cause was simply the continuous slaughter of wild cattle by Apaches, American soldiers, civilians, and gold-seekers crossing Arizona in the 1850s that overwhelmed the animals' natural ability to reproduce.

An era had literally come to an end, but it is clear that the introduction of cattle and other livestock during the Spanish and Mexican periods forever changed the Native population and created a legacy of cattle ranching and traditional land uses in the Santa Cruz Valley. While the Spanish and Mexican land grants created numerous legal entanglements to be resolved under American rule, the land grants also shaped land ownership and tenure that continues today.

While ranching was in a period of transition, cattle ranching was about to become an ever more critical industry that would effect even greater change in Territorial Arizona with the advent of the American Period.

American Territorial Period & Homesteading

Through the 1850s, Arizona was a little more than a passageway for gold seekers and emigrants traveling to California. In the late 1850s the Butterfield Overland Stage Company opened regular services across the desert Southwest, followed in 1881 by the completion of the Southern Pacific transcontinental railroad line through Tucson and Pima County. People trailed their cattle and oxen (steers) along with them.

Through the 1850s and up to the start of the Civil War, herds of Texas longhorns passed annually across southern Arizona on their way to California. A popular writer, J. Ross Browne, traveled across Arizona in 1864 and commented that the Gándara or **Calabasas** ranch was

one of the finest in the country. It consists of rich bottom lands and rolling hills, extending six leagues up and down the Santa Cruz River by one league in width, embracing excellent pasturage and rich arable lands on both sides... At present, however, and until there is military protection in the country, it is utterly worthless, owing to the incursions of the Apaches.

Trailing Texas cattle across to California accounted for most of the industry's activities during the 1850s. One of the first Americans to establish a permanent ranch in the Santa Cruz Valley was Pete Kitchen. Realizing the potential of the grasslands along the Santa Cruz River, Kitchen decided to make a go of ranching on Potrero Creek, which empties into the Santa Cruz just north of Nogales. The adobe headquarters he built were practically a small fortress, and defense against hostile Apaches proved a great challenge. When federal troops were withdrawn from the territory at the beginning of the Civil War, Kitchen, almost uniquely, managed to hold onto his ranch.

Along Cienega Creek, a tributary to the Santa Cruz River, is a broad expanse of rolling hills, and good grass and permanent water that attracted cattlemen and sheepmen early. Sanford, Kane, and Gardiner started some of the first small ranches there. The **Cienega Ranch** in 1880 ran 1,000 cattle and 23,000 sheep. Big money and big ambitions moved into this area in 1876 when Walter Vail, in partnership with two Englishmen, bought the 160-acre **Empire Ranch** and 612 cattle. Vail bought up surrounding ranches until his spread lived up to its name. Up to 50,000 cattle grazed on the Empire at its height, and Vail controlled nearly a thousand square miles of range stretching from the Mexican border to the Rincon Mountains. Vail understood that to get a good return in Western ranching, one had to make sizable investment in land, cattle, and improvements. The Empire and Cienega ranches continue as working ranches today.

Another of the great cattlemen of southern Arizona was Colin Cameron. He and a brother made a fortune in banking and railroading, and, in 1882, they started ranching in the Santa Cruz Valley in a big way, purchasing the San Rafael land grant. He built a veritable palace on the range, and from it Cameron ruled

over a ranch that dominated 600,000 acres. Today, the San Rafael, too, continues as a working ranch, with part of it being developed as **San Rafael State Park and Natural Area**.

It is important to note that the arrival of American ranchers into the Santa Cruz Valley did not end the importance of Hispanics in the ranching business. With the decline of Indian warfare, the Otero, Pacheco, Elías, Ruelas, León, Ortiz, Ramírez, Amado, and other old families returned to ranching. Newcomers coming up from Mexico included the Carrillo, Aguirre, Robles, and Samaniego families. Many others earned their living working on ranches all across Arizona.

While there had been many relatively dry years from the 1860s through the 1880s, the great drought of the 1890s was particularly tragic and had a significant effect on the landscape. The number of cattle, as well as other forms of livestock, increased to record highs by 1890. After 1893, the number of cattle declined, but overgrazing had significantly changed the landscape.

The Start of the Modern Cattle Industry

The disastrous drought of 1891-93 forced ranchers wishing to stay in the business to reorganize and take a different approach to cattle raising. In the 1880s ranchers tried to raise and feed the largest herds for sale to the beef markets of California and other parts of the nation. In the new cattle business, Arizona ranchers increasingly specialized in breeding superior beef animals and then shipping them to other states for fattening. On the range, a system of paying grazing fees for use of the public domain institutionalized the stockman's right to use the land. With his long-term use of the land assured, ranchers could make capital improvements by building water tanks and fences. By limiting the number of cattle, investing in the land, and practicing good management, ranchers ultimately created the conditions for a gradual recovery of the land and their herds in the decades ahead.

The open range gave way to stock raising as a modern business enterprise. Ranches in the Santa Cruz Valley continued in operation, despite earlier setbacks, by using a mosaic of grazing leases including private homesteads, Forest, State, and Bureau of Land Management lands. Numerous small ranches were consolidated, and some of the large ranches operating in the Santa Cruz Valley include the Empire and Cienega ranches, the Babocomari Ranch, Sopori, and San Ignacio de la Canoa land grants, San Rafael, Buena Vista, El Potrero, Rhodes Ranch, Reventon, Amado, Moyza Ranch, Rancho Seco, Santa Lucia, Arivaca Ranch, McGee Ranch, Santa Rita Ranch, Steam Pump, and others. Many of these ranches continue in operation today.

Both World War II and the postwar years saw a great boom in the cattle industry. The typical ranch in the Santa Cruz Valley was a cow-and-calf outfit, producing calves and yearlings for fattening elsewhere in the country. On the land, both private and government efforts and ranchers themselves had developed springs, wells, concrete dams, and thousands of earthen tanks to assure a ready supply of water. Where range cattle in the pioneer era relied on natural sources of water, by 1950 it was said that cattle rarely had to travel more than two miles to find water.

With the close of World War II, Tucson and the Santa Cruz Valley entered a new time of transition — from a small Southwestern city with an agricultural base to a growing metropolitan area, whose growing population was estimated to increase at a rate of 1000 people per month. With a population of 32,500 in 1930, the Tucson metropolitan area has grown to about 213,000 in the 1960s, or 555 percent in 30 years. Today the Tucson metropolitan area has a population of about 850,000; however, it is those remaining ranches, their grazing leases, and public land preserves that form the urban boundary and preserve our ranching traditions in the Santa Cruz Valley and our natural and cultural landscape — our common ground.

National Distinctiveness of Theme

While ranching is certainly a way of life that continues throughout the West, the high desert grasslands of the Santa Cruz Valley has always been a cultural crossroads on the frontier of settlement, where ranching has so profoundly shaped our cultural and natural landscape, our land use patterns, our economic development, our urban form, our cultural composition and traditions, and our self image. Deeply rooted in the Spanish Colonial, Mexican, and American Territorial periods, ranching has been the primary land use of the Santa Cruz Valley for 300 years, whether along the actual course of the Santa Cruz River or along its tributaries and mountain uplands. Ranching today persists as testimony to those Spanish missionaries who introduced cattle, horses, and other livestock, Hispanic and Mexican settlers who established land grant ranches, American families who homesteaded lands that continue in family ownership today, and to all those who endured the many hardships of ranching on the frontier in a harsh environment. Descendants of these explorers, pioneer settlers, adventurers, soldiers, and even the descendants of Spanish horses and cattle, continue a living tradition and a living landscape in the Santa Cruz Valley that is like no other.

Related Resources

Santa Cruz Valley residents and visitors can learn about the long history of ranching in this region, and experience working ranches, by visiting the **Empire Ranch** in the Cienega Valley and **La Posta Quemada Ranch** at Colossal Cave Mountain Park near Tucson. Pima County is restoring historic ranch buildings and developing interpretive exhibits at **Canoe Ranch**, and Arizona State Parks is restoring the historic Cameron ranch house at the new **San Rafael State Park**. The **Ranchers' Heritage Center** in the 1904 Courthouse in Nogales has exhibits about the history of ranching in this region. The **Sonoita Quarterhorse Show** and the **Museum of the Horse** in Patagonia showcase the famous horse breeds of this region. The rodeo traditions of the Santa Cruz Valley are celebrated at the annual **Fiesta de Los Vaqueros Rodeo and Parade**, and also the **Sonoita Rodeo**, among the oldest rodeos in the country.

For Further Reading

Bahre, Conrad Joseph

1991 *A Legacy of Change: Historic Human Impact of the Arizona Borderlands*, Tucson, University of Arizona Press.

Collins, William S.

1996 *Cattle Ranching in Arizona: A Context for Historic Preservation Planning*. Phoenix, Arizona State Historic Preservation Office.

Officer, James E.

1987 *Hispanic Arizona, 1536-1856*, Tucson, University of Arizona Press.

Pima County

1998 *Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan* [Draft], Pima County Board of Supervisors, Tucson, Arizona, October.

1999 *Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan Fact Sheet*, Volume 1, No. 5, Tucson, Arizona.

Sheridan, Thomas E.

1995 *Arizona: A History*. Tucson, The University of Arizona Press.

Sonnichsen, C. L.

1987 *Tucson: The Life and Times of an American City*. Norman, The University of Oklahoma Press.

United States

1994 *1992 Census of Agriculture, Volume 1, Geographical Area Series, Part 3, Arizona, State and County Data*, U.S. Department of Commerce, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Governments Printing Office.

Wagoner, Jay

1952 *History of the Cattle Industry in Southern Arizona, 1540 – 1940*. Tucson, University of Arizona.

Walker, Henry P., and Don Bufkin

1986 *Historical Atlas of Arizona*, 2nd Ed. Norman, University of Oklahoma Press.

Wilson, Marjorie

n.d. *Empire Ranch National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*.