

THE GREAT FLORIDA CATTLE DRIVE OF '16
PRESENTED BY THE FLORIDA AGRICULTURAL MUSEUM
www.greatfloridacattledrive16.org

Dear Parent or Educator,

On January 23th 2016 this organization will drive 500 head of cattle through some of the last of our state's historic cow country. The reason for this effort is to celebrate Florida's great contribution to the cattle industry and vice versa. The first cattle and horses to set foot on this continent did so in the area of Ft. Myers in the year 1521. From that day to this, Florida has been a leader in America's cattle production.

Floridians can take pride in the fact that cowboy'n began in our state. We are the inheritors of a rich tradition and a "cow culture" which has given much to our state. Floridians are known as Crackers because of the sound of the whips of the cowmen. Florida cattle fed the starving sons of Dixie during the Civil War. Florida cattle traded for Spanish Doubloons allowed our economy to expand faster than most of the southern states during and after the reconstruction period.

Our Drive and the "Trails End Celebration" will highlight the history of the Sunshine state from pre Columbian times to the present. We will have historic encampments each night upon the trail, including Spanish Colonial, 1880 cow camp, Civil war and Timucuan. We will feature historians and storytellers, artists, authors and interpreters of Florida history. The Seminole Tribe of Florida will have a large contingent of their members demonstrating native arts, cooking, dancing, and sharing their history which dovetails very closely with the cattle culture.

It is recommended that school age youngsters keep a journal and report back to fellow students and teachers, on their adventures during this wonderful reenactment. Camping will be primitive; transportation will be horse, wagon or walking. Clothing will be period to the 1880's. Skills, arts and crafts of the pioneers will be taught and explored.

Please consider excusing the absence of these students so they may avail themselves of this once in a lifetime opportunity.

From the Kingdom of the Cracker, I remain,
Your Obedient Servant,

Doyle Conner Jr
Chairman,
The Florida Cow Culture Preservation Committee



Cow Hunting

circa 1860s - 1930s

Open range prevailed in Florida until 1949. Cattle roamed the range seeking food and water. The cow hunter rode the range on his marsh pony. These small, but sturdy cracker ponies, sometimes called marshtackies, also ran wild on the range. Tamed, they were ideal for herding cattle through the swamps, palmettos and woods. Well-trained cur dogs, usually with hound and bulldog mix, were used to gather, herd and sometimes even catch the cattle.

The cow hunter with his pony and dogs would trail the cattle, keeping an eye out for predators: wolves, panthers and bears, not to mention the rustlers. Seasonally, cowboys hunted, penned, cut, marked and branded the cattle. Local families worked together at roundup times, bedding cattle down for the night on high land at least a mile from the water. The steers to be sold were separated, while calves were cut and branded. Then the herd was released to the range. The cow hunters moved to another 10 to 15 mile area and repeated the process. At the end of the hunt, the steers would be herded to market.