

A Spanish Vaquero Driving His Cattle Through the Longleaf Forest to Market

(bolded words in text indicate key words and concepts)

Student Information:

When European settlers arrived in the South, they found longleaf pine trees towering over a carpet of grasses as far as their eyes could see. All of this grass provided a cheap source of food for the cattle. It was these Europeans who brought cows to America. Unlike cattle-farms of today, fences were not used and cattle were simply left free to roam about as they pleased. This picture shows a Spanish **vaquero** (cowboy) in what is now Florida looking after his **vaca** (cows).

Teacher Information:

This picture depicts a Spanish **vaquero** (cowboy) looking in on his **vaca** (cattle) herd in southeastern longleaf pine/wiregrass terrain with an occasional saw palmetto thicket (Florida, South Alabama or Georgia) circa late 1600's to 1763, 1783 to 1821. The long-horned cattle used by the Spaniards in the New World trace back to the estuarine marshes of Andalusia in Southern Spain as well as the more wooded region of Extramadura in Western Spain. It is important to remember that cows were not found in North America before Europeans arrived. Scientists would call cows **non-natives** of North America. These cattle the early Spanish settlers brought with them were allowed to roam freely and became semi-feral, giving birth to offspring which often displayed spotted and speckled color patterns typical of **feral animals**. The system of **brands** and brand registration was three-fold. First, the fierro or iron brand was burned into the animal's flank hide (note picture), second was the senal or ear-mark. Lastly, the venta or sale brand was stamped on the animal's shoulder as a bill of sale. The new brand was burned below the venta brand and the new transaction was recorded. This type of branding may seem a bit over done considering the discomfort the animal must have endured during the ordeal. However, these brands used by the Spaniards were considerably less elaborate than using half the side of the animal required to place the full coat of arms used on Spanish ranches prior to the time of bringing livestock to the Americas.

At the close of the Revolutionary War, it was generally those of Scotch-Irish decent who braved the hardships of the pine barrens frontier and settled the longleaf region of what is today the Carolinas, Georgia and Alabama. The herding practices of these cracker frontiersmen were distinctively Celtic in origin. Typically, fences only enclosed a few acres of "**cowpen**" land on which subsistence crops were grown. **Livestock** were simply turned out in the customary Celtic tradition of **free-range** herding. This cattle culture also encouraged the habitual use of fire to "**freshen**" up of the forest. These people knew from the way cattle gravitated to the fresh burns that the tender grass of the longleaf pine forests would make them grow and fatten. Often, these forests would be burned twice a year to provide adequate areas for the cattle to **graze**.

Key Words and Concepts: brand, cowpen, feral animal, free-range, freshen, graze, livestock, non-native, vaca, vaquero.