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Jack Bailey: A Texas Drover's Diary, 1868

David Dary

Jack Bailey

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CHISHOLM TRAIL WIND
Chyoko Myose

JACK BAILEY: A TEXAS DROVER'S DIARY, 1868

In the late nineteenth century, thousands sought adventure and fortune on the cattle trails. Unfortunately, few committed their experiences to writing. The journal of Jack Bailey, which records the activities of a Texas cowboy from August 5 to November 8, 1868, is the earliest known daily account of life on the trail in the years following the Civil War.

The journal, which surfaced in 2001, debunks many common misconceptions about the lives of the cowboys. First, there were people of all stripes on the trail—men, women, and children. According to some accounts, in fact, as many as 25 percent of cowboys were black, and many cowboys and “guides” were Indians and Mexicans. At the age of thirty-seven, Bailey was, in the words of journal editor David Dary, “an old man doing a young man’s job.” There were women and children in his party, including a baby who, remarkably, was uninjured after a dramatic fall from a wagon.

The journal also has a lot to say about the role of the Flint Hills in the early cattle drives. The route Bailey’s party followed into Kansas in 1868 did not follow the Sixth Principal Meridian line through Wichita to Abilene. It followed an alternate, yet seemingly well-travelled, route through the Walnut River Valley,

passing through Cowley, Butler, and Chase Counties, sparking the hopes of boosters from El Dorado to Cottonwood Falls. Bailey often began his daily accounts with reports on the essential fuel of the trail—water and grass. The party left stock on shares to winter in the Flint Hills, where cattle thrived, and cultivated farms, fencing, and trees were scarce. It was an arduous journey to a place that an aging cowboy from Jack County, Texas, sometimes found hard to understand.

WEDNESDAY AUG 5TH 1868
[CHICKASAW NATION]

The lake was about ½ mile long one hundred yards wide about 4 feet deep sandy bottom. ... The water is very clear but has a bad taste and is full of little insects. Women getting supper. Children playing on bank of lake. Martin + Frank fishing. I + Bud Ham lying on a pallet. Bud deviling Tisha (his little girl).

WEDNESDAY AUG 12TH
[INDIAN TERRITORY]

We had the hardest time last night imaginable. I got up at 10 o'clock. Never got off of my horse no more until day light.

As I predicted we had 2 of the worst kind of Stampedes. The first time they made a break about 9 [?] o'clock. Run about ½ hour. Got them to running around in a circle. Dont Sanders on herd with his guard + they managed to stop them. They rested then until about 2 hours before day, then jewhlikens how they run. It was raining, came a loud keen clap of thunder. They turned all loose.

TUESDAY AUG THE 18TH 1868
[INDIAN TERRITORY]

Had the devil last night in the shape of a storm which lays over any thing of the kind I ever witnessed. The wind came in whirls down this hollow, tremendous rain. Keen loud claps of thunder and the most vivid, forked, scariest pretiest + fastest lightning I ever saw. It came up while the first relief was out which was mine. We turned the cattle towards a point of timber and went to camp, in a hurry too. Just did get in, in time. It came with a vengeance. Clouds came every way. Met over us, and such a clash. I thought once or twice we were done for. Some of the boys badly scared. Our tent blew down. The old lady holered for help to hold her tent down. We let ours rip and every fellow for himself. Some went to wagons. Some to other tent. Everything soaking wet. Finally abated. Children got to crying. Women scolding.



CREEK CROSSING
Shin-hee Chin

Some of the boys singing and all talking about the storm. Not much sleeping going on. All cold wet + mad.

THURSDAY AUG THE 20TH
[CREEK NATION]

Cattle done fine last night. Fixing to start in a very large prairie. Good grass but I dont think there is much lasting water in this country. No settlements.

FRIDAY AUG THE 28TH
[INDIAN TERRITORY]

While the boys were eating supper last night Mrs. Adare called Negroe Lewis + invited him to eat supper at her table. He accepted, + it made some of the boys mad of course ... while we were eating breakfast this morning she sent Ben (Negroe) over a plate of milk gravy which was quite a luxury to any of us.



TRAIL NORTH
Dale Allison Hartley

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 5TH 1868
[BUTLER COUNTY]

Valleys very small, up land rocky, and by the by tis a poor country. I cant see why it is any better or near as good as Jack County Texas, the range is nothing to compare. Timber scarcer. Land only in valleys as good water has a green scum all over it ... They say the cattle does very well here by feeding half the year ... Cattle here are crossed with Durham which gives them a good appearance.

TUESDAY SEPTEMBER THE 8TH
[BUTLER OR GREENWOOD COUNTY]

Saw McCabe boys fine cattle. They are the worst over-rated little bunch of cattle I ever saw. I dont see that they are any better than Jack County or any other musquit

cattle. They are short low bunchy cattle fed half the time. Horns are very short, though they are good for such a country as Kansas.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9TH 1868
[BUTLER OR GREENWOOD COUNTY]

Adare starts to Fall River this morning to let out some of his stock on Shares this winter.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 11TH 1868

Two men here for cattle to keep on shares. I gues they will get some. They only want 60 head to feed this winter. Gus bough a fine saddle from one of them. I think he made a good trade. Witt bought a fancy bridle from the same man that Gus got the saddle. These Kansas fellows would sell their clothes off their back for a yearling. I never saw men want stock as bad in my life.

MONDAY SEPTEMBER 14TH

Been cuting out cattle all day for the 2 men that came first ... Have cut out 100 head of mother cows for him. They are to keep them three years on shares.

TUESDAY SEPTEMBER THE 22ND 1868

Our hack berrys gave all of us the whats name last night. John Adare took on awfully awhile. He thought he was going to die. No such luck.

MONDAY SEPT THE 28TH

We are at the junction of Whitewater one of the pretiest creeks I ever saw. Are in sight of Dr. Stewarts formerly of Wise County. This is in a thick settled country, and by the by one of the best countrys I have seen since I left Texas. Some of the pretiest valleys I ever saw. Plenty water grass + timber. We got some flour meat + Irish potatoes. Rained on us last night. I got wet consequently ... Got to Eldarado a little town situated on Walnut Creek. A new place it is the county seat of Butler County.

WEDNESDAY SEPT 30TH

Done fine last night. After we stoped a man from Emporia stoped to camp also. He has a wagon. Gave us a peach a peace. Have not passed a field with more than 20 acres in cultivation. Land seems to be rich but subject to drouth.

THURSDAY OCTOBER THE 1ST 1868

Fenceing is very sorry. Made of three rails to the panel ... In five miles of Emporia came to Cotton wood a large creek bottom very muddy and boggy. Got to Emporia Sundown ... Fences nothing to compare but they say it is easier to herd stock out than it is to build fences.

FRIDAY OCTOBER THE 2ND

Emporia is about as large as Weatherford, a very flourishing place, in the prairie. No timber nearer than 3 miles.

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 8TH 1868

I have left out some things that I wish I had put in but my paper run short before I got to Kansas. I dont force you to read this so if you dont like it, just lay it down.

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