

Longhorn Preservation

By 1920, the Longhorn was nearing extinction and several people stepped forward to preserve the iconic breed. The well-known western author J. Frank Dobie, along with Sid Richardson and Graves Peeler, assembled a small herd in the 1930s and 1940s for the State of Texas. This herd was kept at several state-owned properties, including Fort Griffin. On May 14, 1969, the Texas Legislature designated the Longhorn herd at Fort Griffin as the Official State of Texas Longhorn Herd. One result of this continuing conservation effort is that the Texas Longhorn is no longer listed as an endangered breed by the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy.



The official state herd is jointly managed by the Texas Historical Commission and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. The herd is based at Fort Griffin State Historic Site, although portions of the state herd also reside at Copper Breaks, San Angelo, Abilene, Palo Duro Canyon, and Lake Colorado City state parks. They continue to represent the unique and once abundant animals that made a critical contribution to the development of Texas' economy in the 19th century.

FORT GRIFFIN

state historic site

HEADQUARTERS OF THE OFFICIAL TEXAS LONGHORN HERD

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Daily, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.



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OFFICIAL STATE OF TEXAS

LONGHORN HERD



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Texas Longhorn Cattle

In Texas, few things are as symbolic of the state as the Texas Longhorn. The Texas Longhorn is the official icon for the City of Fort Worth, nicknamed “Cowtown,” and the mascot for the University of Texas at Austin. This breed of cattle is distinguishable by its size, lean build, wide range of colors and markings, and especially its long, curved horns, which can extend to 120 inches tip to tip and are often used to protect their offspring. The Longhorn is hardy, with a strong immune system and stomach—it can eat a variety of plants that other cattle find inedible—and require less water to survive than other breeds.

Longhorn Legacy

Domestic cattle first arrived in the Americas with Spanish explorers and settlers in the late-15th and early-16th centuries. Some of the cattle escaped from the missions and other settlements in Mexico and the southern coastal and southwestern U.S. These animals adapted

well to the rigors of life on the ranges of the southwestern U.S. and multiplied rapidly, finding little competition for environmental resources and few natural predators.

Many early Texas ranches were stocked from wild Longhorn cattle roaming the area, but the breed received little notice until after the end of the Civil War. Texas veterans returned home to a poor state and devastated economy, but they had access to a very marketable commodity—millions of wild Longhorn cattle. However, the distance and transportation north to beef-starved markets presented a challenge. Some cattle were processed and shipped from Texas ports, but most were driven overland to the great rail yards in Kansas, Wyoming, and other northern states. An estimated 10 million Texas Longhorns traveled north by various routes. Cowboys became prevalent in Texas culture as they corralled and drove cattle across the Lone Star State



and forged famous cattle trails including the Western, Chisholm, and the Goodnight-Loving trails. A large cattle drive, containing several herds, could include as many as 15,000 animals and 200 people.

The Longhorn was ideally suited for these harsh drives. They could travel long distances,

swim wide rivers, and thrive on nearly any vegetation that was found, even cactus. By 1895, the great northern trails began closing, effectively ending the era of long cattle drives. Ranchers began breeding Longhorns with other types of cattle, particularly Herefords. This resulted in a more popular beef cattle, but contributed to declining numbers of purebred Longhorns.

