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The rustic landscape has remained relatively unscathed since 1878, with the exception of cell phone towers and electricity wires winding over the plains.

Despite some aesthetic changes to the scenery the memory of a cattle trail that went from Mexico to Canada is not forgotten.

Not forgotten at least by the members of the Nebraska Chapter of the Great Western Cattle Trail Association (GWCTA). Members met on Saturday, Sept. 7 to plant the first series of markers in Chase and Perkins counties to signify the contribution the region had to this awesome trail. Two markers had previously been installed in Hitchcock County.

One marker was placed in Perkins County on the Lee family ground, three in Hayes County and five in Chase County.

“It’s exciting,” said Ted Tietjen, a founding member of the Nebraska chapter of the GWCTA. “This is history and we are still digging up more information all of the time.”

The Great Western Cattle Trail, also known as the Texas Trail, crossed through Nebraska (and other midwest states) starting in 1874. Captain John T. Lytle and a group of cowboys left South Texas with 3,500 head of longhorn cattle and a herd of saddle horses.

Lytle and his crew would essentially blaze the trail through Nebraska to Ft. Robinson, making it one of the most traveled cattle trails in history. The GWCTA was longer in length and carried cattle two years longer than the Chisholm trail.

Seven million cattle and horses passed through Texas and Oklahoma to railheads in Kansas and Nebraska.

Ogallala was an important stop because it was a crossroads which allowed cattle to be shipped via rail to Omaha or driven north into Indian reservations, military posts and into Wyoming, giving cattlemen numerous options to turn a profit.

Jack Maddux, whose family owns the property where one of the markers was placed in Chase County, and a member of the GWCTA, relayed some history of the region and how it related to one of the largest cattle trails in the world.

The Maddux family owns what was once Rock Corral, which was the last stopover before

Ogallala for cattlemen moving herds up from Texas.

“They would spend several days here before the long trip to Ogallala,” Maddux said.

Thomas Webster, a local businessman in the area and one-time owner of Rock Corral, had a lucrative deal with cattle drivers that reached the corral. He would trade two crippled cows for one good cow that could make the trip to Ogallala.

Webster ran the business until the 1890s, when the Kilpatrick family purchased Rock Corral.

The Kilpatrick family had a horse and mule watering operation and also had a railroad right-of-way construction business.

Some of the buildings built by the Kilpatrick family and Thomas at Rock Corral are still on the property today.

The trail began to wane after settlements moved west and ranchers began to breed their own cattle, reducing the need for Texas cattle as well as the development of barbed wire, giving ranchers an opportunity to keep more cattle. In 1885 legislation calling for a quarantine of Texas cattle, due to ‘Texas Fever,’ which also contributed to the decline in the trail.

Tietjen and other members of the GWCTA scour family history documents and look up stories in newspaper archives from Grant, Elsie, Madrid and Venango, among other sources. Tietjen reports that he recently downloaded the 1885 plat book for the region and the trail is located on the map.

Plans are to have all of the marker locations put on a Global Positioning System (GPS) for use online. GWCTA chapters in Texas and Oklahoma already have markers allocated on websites.

Chapters include Kansas, Texas, Oklahoma, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming. Nebraska’s chapter, which officially started in November 2012, has been working diligently on catching up to the progress made by the other chapters.

On November 8-9 a national GWCTA convention will be held in Ogallala to commemorate the progress made by Nebraska and look to the future.

The future of the GWCTA includes having the trail designated a national monument.

“Getting the markers put up created a lot of interest. We’re filling in gaps on information all the time and things are really moving quickly,” Tietjen said.



