

Shawnee Cattle Trail

The Shawnee Trail is the oldest of the major Texas Cattle Trails. It was in use from the 1840's and lasted until 1872. It was first used as a migration route to Texas in the 1830's and was known as the Texas Road. When it became known as the Shawnee Trail is not known.

It had three major branches and many feeder lines. The branches were the East Shawnee, the Middle Shawnee and the West Shawnee Trails. Baxter Springs, Kansas seems to be a hub of these trails.

In the 1840's cattle were driven north from Texas to Missouri markets at St. Louis and Sedalia. In the 1850's Kansas City and St. Joseph and Bonner Springs received cattle over the Middle Shawnee Trail. This made Kansas City the largest cattle market in the mid 1850's. In the late fifties angry farmers began to resist and block Texas cattle going through Missouri as they carried a disease called Texas fever. The Civil War shut traffic down over these routes. After the Civil War, it was estimated that 200,000 to 260,000 crowded the trail northward. The Texas drovers found the same resistance up the Middle Shawnee Trail. Some drovers left Baxter Springs, going west to find a way around the troubled areas. In 1867 the West Shawnee Trail was blazed from the Old Shawnee Trail, near the Canadian River in Oklahoma, going almost due north to end at Junction City, Kansas. It carried the bulk of the cattle trade for a several years. The Chisholm Trail at Abilene came later. The West Shawnee Trail competed with the Chisholm Trail from 1867 to 1872 when the cattle markets moved to Newton and Ellsworth, Kansas. In 1872 Abilene, Kansas shipped out 600,000 head of cattle while Junction City, Kansas shipped out 300,000 head, which came over the West Shawnee Trail. In 1872 it was still a major cattle trail.

The National Park Service is at this time doing a study of making the Chisholm and Great Western Trail, National Historic Trails. Why was the oldest of these cattle trails left out of the study? It is politics! The bill to make those trails a National Historic Trails left The Shawnee Trail out of the bill that passed congress, (Sec. 5303 in Public Law 111-11). I have contacted my Congressional Representative, Jerry Moran, who has agreed to try to get the Shawnee Cattle Trails, included in the bill, and if not able to do so he will submit a bill to make the Shawnee Trail a National Historic Cattle Trail.

It is important that you contact your congressional delegation in Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma and Texas to join with Jerry Moran to sponsor a bill. The more congressional support the more likely we will see a positive result.

To meet the qualifications to become a National Historic Trail, there needs to be an organization which has an interest in the trail, to help educate, promote, identify and develop tourist sites along the route. Please contact or send me the names, and emails addresses of communities, museums, historical groups, CVB's, or anyone who may have an interest in the trail. This may serve as the basis of creating a Shawnee Trail organization. Help make the Shawnee Trail a National Historic Trail!

Thanks for your interest and support.

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