

Nebraska catching up on marking cattle trail

Written by Wauneta Breeze

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After a metal post was planted, those directly involved gathered around. They are, from left, Tom Kraus of Madrid, Great Western Trail; John Osler of Imperial, landowner; Ted Tietjen of Grant, Great Western Trail; Carol and Jack Maddux of Wauneta, landowners; Charley Colton of Imperial, Chase County Historical Society; Marvin Large of Imperial, Great Western Trail. (Imperial Republican Photo)

By Carolyn Lee

The Imperial Republican

The Great Western Cattle Trail, which stretched from Texas through Nebraska and on to Montana and points north, has been well marked in most states. However, Nebraska has been slow to recognize the historic path.

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Not any more. Saturday members of the Great Western Trail organization and landowners in the area where the trail passed through held ceremonies in Perkins, Chase and Hayes Counties.

Each of the nine ceremonies included the placing of a post and a brief history of what happened in the area.

In addition, Marvin Large of Imperial, a member of Great Western Trail, provided a map detailing the trail through the area.

There was one post placed in Perkins County, three in Hayes County near the Jack Maddux ranch, and five in Chase County.

Those were located on John Maddux, Jack Maddux, Marvin Large and John Osler lands and near the Blanche Church.

The trail crossed through the area between 1874-1886, when cattle were driven from Texas up to Ogallala to be shipped east, or driven further north to Indian reservations, military posts, and into Montana.

The first stop in Chase County Saturday morning was at the John Maddux home, where a rock corral is still located.

Thomas Webster owned open land at the site on the Spring Creek Branch of the Stinking Water River. That was the last water for the cattle before Ogallala, Jack Maddux told the gathered crowd, so “they got watered up good.”

Webster built a dry masonry corral out of rocks and “put together a business,” Maddux said.

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He would take crippled cattle, nurse them back to health, and then trade one good steer or cow for two other crippled ones that came through, Maddux added.

“He was pretty successful at it,” Maddux laughed.

Webster accumulated more land with his funds, and later sold his spread to the Kilpatrick family in the 1890s.

The Kilpatricks operated as a ranch with a horse and mule watering operation, Maddux said.