

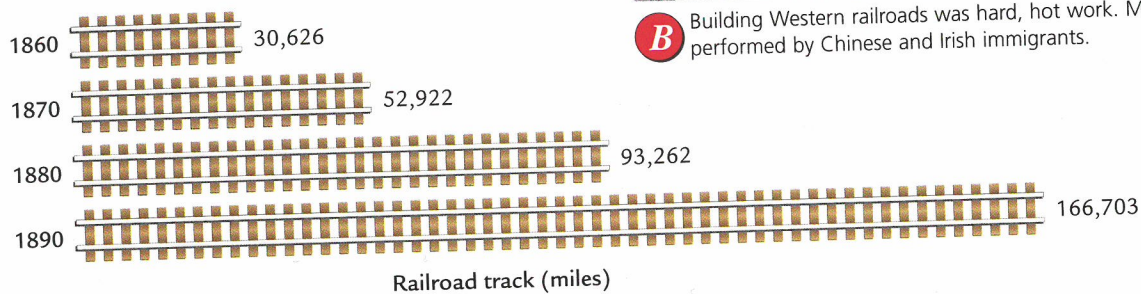
# Railroads Transform the West

The first *transcontinental* railroad was completed in 1869. It cut cross-country travel time from 26 days to 7 days.

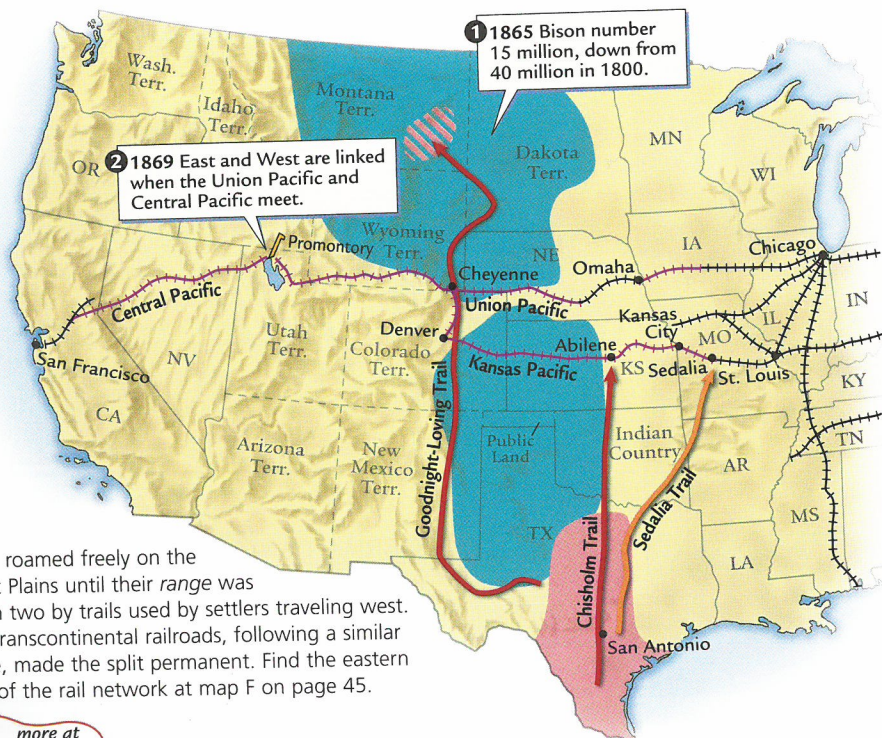
- ★ Federal subsidies helped pay for Western railroads. Railroads, in turn, made it easier to settle the West.
- ★ Trains carried cattle to Eastern markets and supplies to Western settlers.
- ★ Railroad expansion helped destroy the North American bison. Cattle replaced bison on the range and provided meat for fast-growing Eastern cities.



**B** Building Western railroads was hard, hot work. Most of the labor was performed by Chinese and Irish immigrants.



**A** **MILES OF RAILROAD TRACK**  
After 1860 all railroad track was the same gauge, or width: 4 feet, 8½ inches. Now a single train could go anywhere track had been laid. The growing U.S. steel industry provided all the track railroads needed to expand.



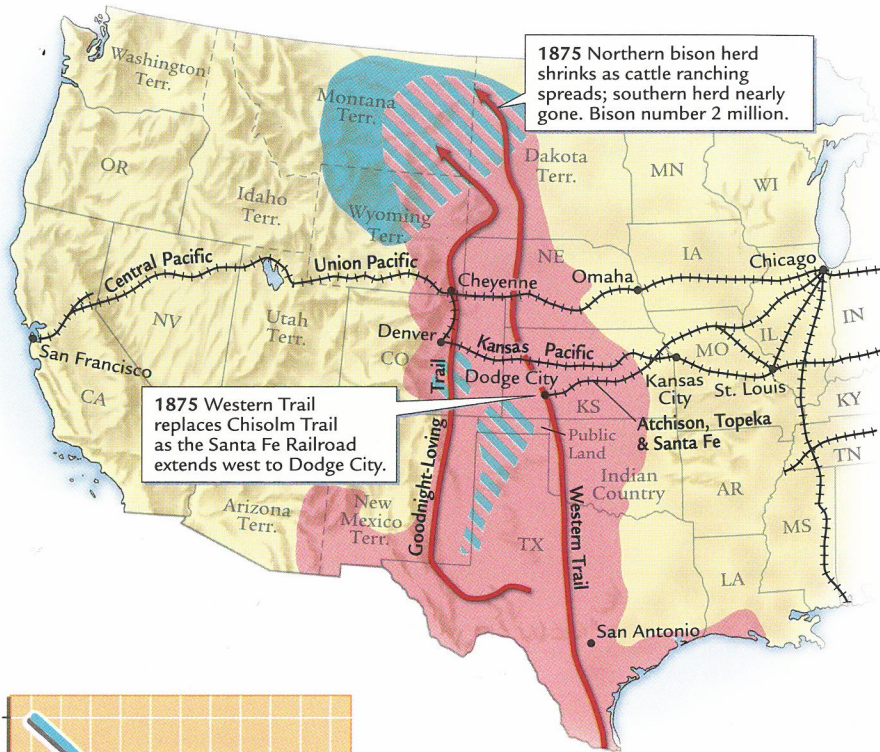
**RAILROADS CROSS THE OPEN RANGE**

- Bison range
- Cattle range
- Railroad, 1865
- Railroad added by 1870
- Cattle trail, 1866 to 1869
- Cattle trail added by 1870
- Final spike of transcontinental railroad

0 150 300 miles  
0 150 300 kilometers

**C** Bison roamed freely on the Great Plains until their *range* was cut in two by trails used by settlers traveling west. The transcontinental railroads, following a similar route, made the split permanent. Find the eastern part of the rail network at map F on page 45.

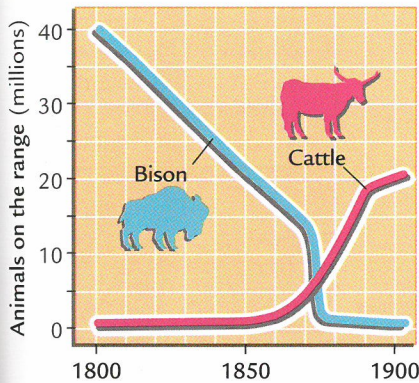
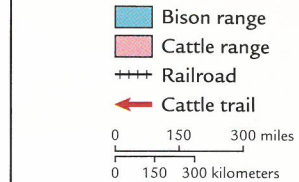




**D**

By 1870 more than 300,000 cattle per year were being driven north to cow towns, where they were shipped to eastern cities. Abilene was the first cow town of the Great Plains, but Dodge City became the most famous.

**RANCHING EXPANDS, BISON HERDS SHRINK**



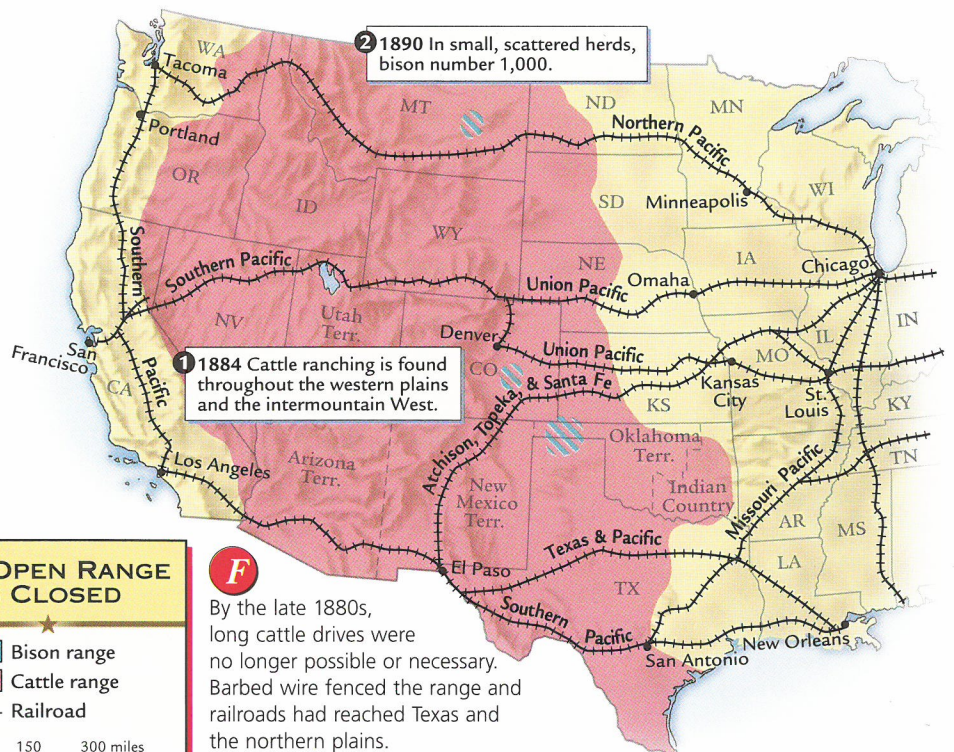
*"A couple of years before it was nothing to see 5,000, 10,000 buff in a day's ride. Now if I saw 50 I was lucky."*

—FRANK H. MAYER  
1870s BISON HUNTER

**E CHANGING HERDS**

As Americans exterminated the bison, Plains Indians lost their main source of food. They were forced onto reservations by the loss of food and land and by losses in their battles with the U.S. Army.

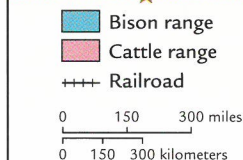
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**F**

By the late 1880s, long cattle drives were no longer possible or necessary. Barbed wire fenced the range and railroads had reached Texas and the northern plains.

**THE OPEN RANGE IS CLOSED**

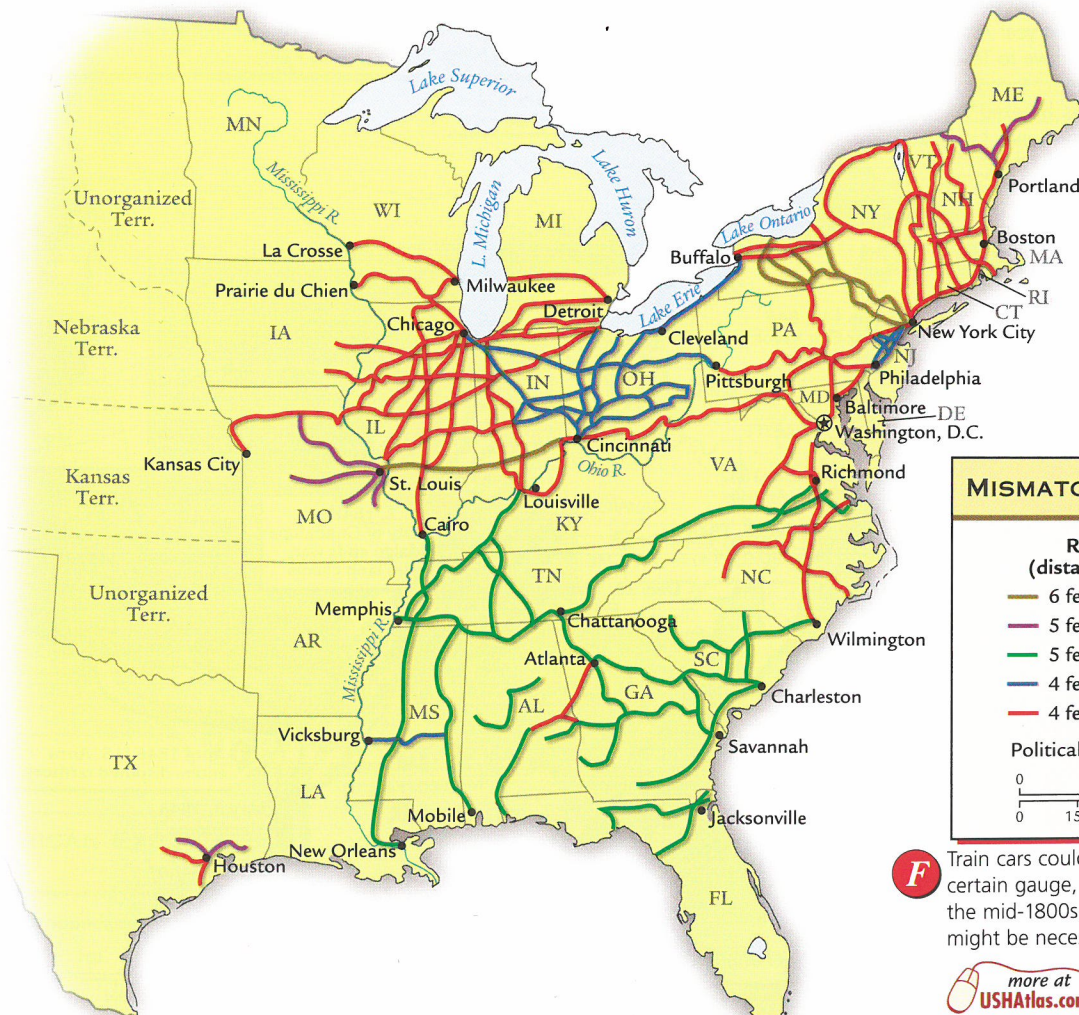
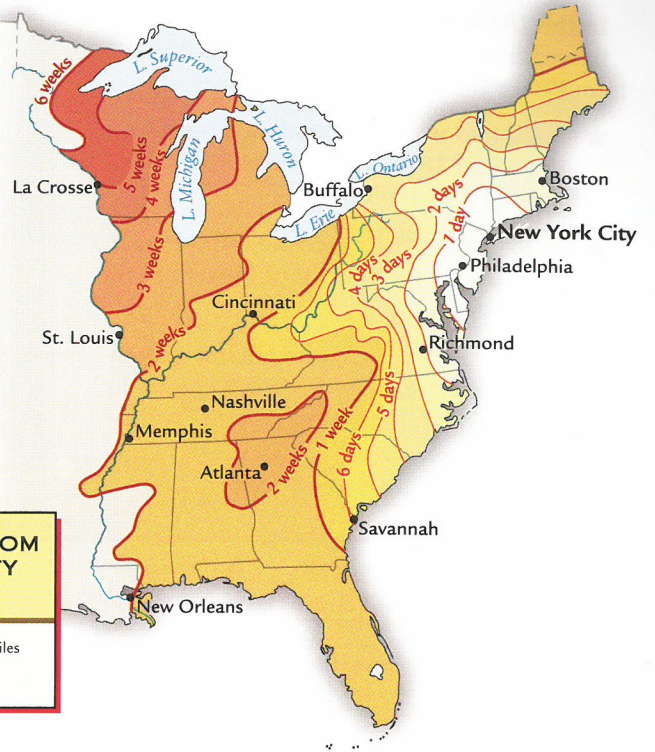


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**D** Americans relied on horses for most long-distance travel in the East until the 1830s, and in the West for at least a generation longer.

**E** Improvements in transportation, especially by water, cut travel times in half between 1800 and 1830. As a result, more Americans traveled west to settle or do business.



**MISMATCHED RAILROADS**

Railroad Gauge (distance between rails)

- 6 feet
- 5 feet 6 inches
- 5 feet
- 4 feet 10 inches
- 4 feet 8½ inches

Political boundaries of 1860

0 150 300 miles  
0 150 300 kilometers

**F** Train cars could run only on rails of a certain gauge, or distance apart. In the mid-1800s, several changes of train might be necessary on a long trip.

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