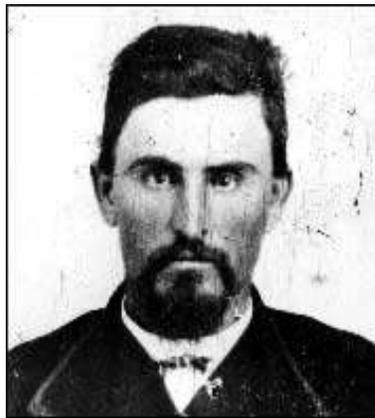
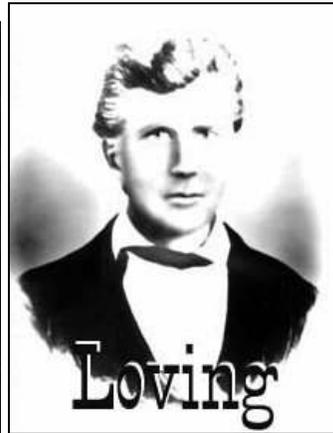


# The Goodnight-Loving Trail

By Tom Ashmore

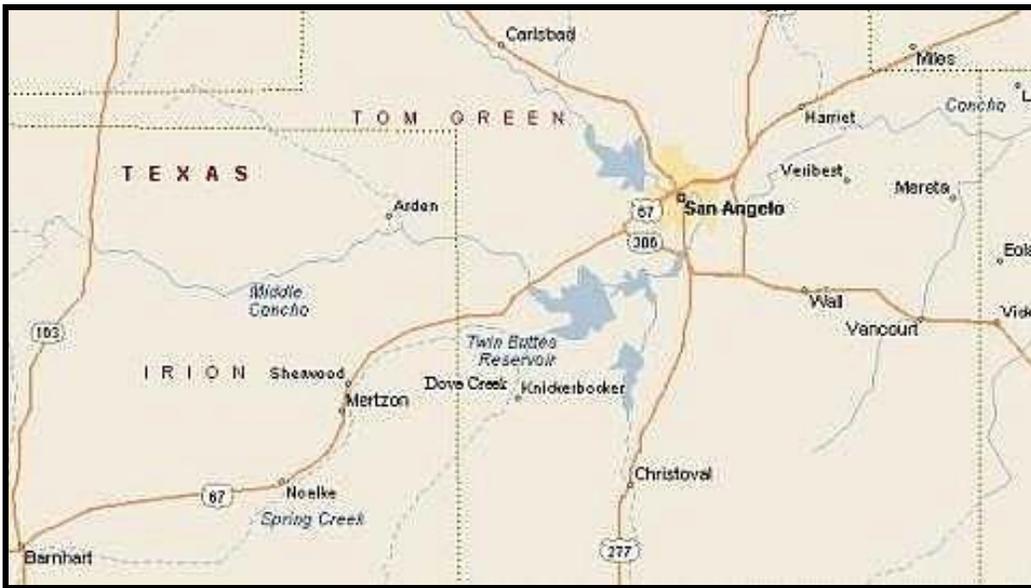


Charles Goodnight



Oliver Loving

Today, just south of San Angelo, the Middle Concho River meanders into Twin Buttes Reservoir. From there it empties into Lake Nasworthy before continuing on down to eventually merge with the Colorado River. On June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1866 two thousand head of longhorn cattle grazed and drank along the Middle Concho, in an area then known as Johnson's Station. Johnson's Station was a stopping point used by the old Butterfield Stage line before the Civil War and often by troops during the Civil War period and after. It sat near what is now Arden, Texas.



**Middle Concho into Twin Buttes Reservoir, Lake Nasworthy and on east**

Those two thousand head belonged to Charles Goodnight and Oliver Loving and were about to begin a brutal drive to open a new trail nobody believed could be done - nobody but two of the greatest cattlemen in the history of Texas.

Goodnight and Loving spent their formative years working cattle and cattle drives in eastern and northeastern Texas. In fact they met years earlier in early 1860 when Charles helped Oliver drive a herd through Indian Territory to Colorado mining camps. As the Indian marauding increased Goodnight joined the Texas Rangers as a scout and guide. It was Charles Goodnight who found Peta Nocona's Comanche encampment in December 1860, which led to the return of the famous white girl captive, Cynthia Ann Parker. He spent most of the Civil War years ranging across Texas to help keep the Indians from raiding the mostly defenseless settlers. After leaving the Texas Rangers in 1864 Goodnight returned to the cattle business looking for a way to compete in the burgeoning industry. Goodnight knew that come springtime every cattle drover in Texas would be trying to move their herds north from Fort Worth, jamming up the trails and, more importantly, bringing down the price of beef at the end of the line. He had also heard of a great need for cattle to the west, in New Mexico at army posts and

Indian agencies. He came up with a daring plan to move the cattle west along the old Butterfield Stage route, abandoned at the start of the Civil War. To do this he would first move them west to Fort Belknap and then down to the Middle Concho River before heading due west to the Pecos River and then back up into New Mexico. This would take them across the southern border of Comanche territory and hopefully away from marauding Indians.



### **Butterfield Stage Line Route Through Texas**

Loving spent the Civil War years doing what he did best – driving cattle. He supplied them to the Confederate Army and was well paid for them. However, at the end of the war his sizeable account of Confederate dollars was suddenly worthless and he was looking for a way to recoup his losses. He was building up his herds when he met up with Goodnight again. Both men had settled into Palo Pinto County, just west of Fort Worth.

As Goodnight began hiring hands he happened past Oliver Loving's camp. Loving heard of Goodnight's new and dangerous plan of moving cattle west instead of north and wanted to hear more. Loving waved him over and asked him about it. He tried to tell Goodnight the hazards he faced, but he was still determined to go. Seeing his determination Loving said, "Then if you will let me, I will go with you." Goodnight replied, "I will not only let you, but it is the most desirable thing of my life. I not only need the assistance of your force, but I need your advice." Thus began the partnership of two of the greatest and honorable cattlemen in Texas history.

The two had combined their herds and hired 18 cowboys. Goodnight knew the importance of food for his men that lived a brutal life in all else. It was in getting ready for this drive that he purchased a surplus army wagon because of its durability and rebuilt it to carry all the food supplies they would need so his men could at least have decent meals while on the drive. He designed a chuck box on the back of the wagon with a number of shelves and drawers to hold what the cook would need over the course of the day. So it was for this trail drive that the famous chuckwagon was invented.



### Chuckwagon Camp

Making it to the Middle Concho was the easy part and they knew it. The first 30 miles were not too bad since they could follow the river. But then they reached the headwaters and the drive needed to keep heading west. The next water was 80 miles across the desolate, waterless landscape at the Pecos River. They stayed for a day to let the cattle drink as much as they could hold before heading west.



### Longhorn Cattle Today In the Trans Pecos Region

The goal was Horsehead Crossing on the Pecos River. The Pecos River has few crossing points for animals. The Comanche first found this crossing as they made their raids to steal horses in Mexico. As they drove the horses back they would become so thirsty they would actually kill themselves drinking too much of the briny water or get stuck in the quicksand, leaving the area littered with horse carcasses. Later the skulls were placed among the mesquite trees, giving it its name.



**Horsehead Crossing, Pecos River**

After stopping the first night they found the cattle much too restless and Goodnight decided they must make a forced march without stopping or they would lose the entire herd. So they kept the cattle moving for three days and nights. The cattle became crazed for water and when they passed through a gap in the hills named Castle Gap, 10 miles from the Pecos, they could smell the water and burst into a run.



### Castle Gap

They ran so hard that the ones behind the leaders pushed them right across the river so could not even stop to drink. After the herd crossed the river Goodnight turned them back to the water to get their fill. After a few days of rest they started what remained of the herd up the east side of the Pecos, heading northwest toward the southeastern boundary of New Mexico. Their herd of 2,000 was now down to about 1,500. Hundreds were lost on the three-day waterless trek and hundreds more died in quicksand along the river.

They continued up the Pecos, driving the remaining herd to Fort Sumner in the middle eastern portion of New Mexico. There they were able to sell the steers to the Army for the Indian reservations at 8 cents a pound, which was a very good price. However, the Army would not take the seven to eight hundred remaining cows and calves. So Loving continued on to Denver, Colorado to sell the remaining herd while

Goodnight returned to Texas with about \$12,000 (about \$250, 000 in today's standard) in gold to prepare a second drive across the desolate land.

The second drive went better than the first. Goodnight learned from their initial experiences and lost very few on the second trip across to the Pecos. They met back up in New Mexico and wintered just outside of Fort Sumner, selling off the cattle to the Army in small groups each month. However, word had gotten out about their success and more drives began following the Goodnight-Loving Trail. This also got the attention of the Comanche and Apache. Indian raids started to become a regular occurrence on the trail, especially near the headwaters of the Middle Concho and near Horsehead Crossing. Many drovers lost their entire herds to the Indians and some lost their lives. Both men made a good deal of money that year, but they had to fight their way back to Texas when spring came. They helped both drovers and merchants of various types fight off the Comanche on their way back. After they got to the Pecos they moved only at night and usually walked. Goodnight and his men worried about the rattlesnakes as much as the Indians. They were thick through that area and the men could hear them buzzing all around as they walked in the dark.

Goodnight and Loving almost didn't get started on their third trip before losing their herd and their scalps. Several times before even getting down to the Middle Concho they had to fight off Indians trying to kill them and steal their horses. One of their hands took an arrow behind the ear, but was sent back to Goodnight's ranch and survived. The cattle they bought were also wilder than before and they had to deal with several stampedes. But they finally got it under control and pointed the herd southwest once again. They once again made it across to the Pecos River without losing many and were soon headed up the west side to New Mexico. Indians were

a serious problem throughout the drive and they were constantly watching for attack. When they were south of the Texas-New Mexico border Loving decided he should go on ahead of the drive so as to make it to Santa Fe as quickly as possible. The contracts were about to be let and they needed to have a representative there or lose out on their potential sale of the herd. Charlie didn't like the idea of him going on by himself because of the Indian threat but Oliver said he would ride only at night and would take Bill "One Armed" Wilson, their best and most experienced man, with him.

After crossing at Pope's Crossing Oliver and Bill's route took them northwest close to where the Guadalupe Mountains jut out toward the Pecos River, not far from what is now the town of Loving, New Mexico. They had not seen any Indian sign and Loving hated riding at night. He told Bill he saw no reason why they could not travel in the day to make better time. Bill had no say in the matter so they began moving through the area in the daylight. When they were at the closest point to the mountains they saw a large band of Apache Indians charging them from the direction of the mountains. They raced back to the river to find cover and held up in a draw with their backs to the river. Although the band of Indians was large and very hostile both men were well armed and good shots. The Indians began calling to them in Spanish to propose terms of letting them go. They suspected a ruse but had no choice but to try to talk to them. As they stepped out to talk a bullet caught Loving through the wrist and went into his side. They fought off the subsequent charge and then the Indians began a new tact. They started shooting arrows high into the air so as to come down into the draw they were taking refuge in. They hung close to the wall of the draw while hundreds of arrows dropped all around them. As the siege kept up through the night and Loving's condition worsened he implored Wilson to slip out and down the river to go for help. Finally Wilson agreed and in the darkness quietly slipped into the river and let the current take him downstream, right by an Indian sentry sitting on a horse

in the middle of the river. Loving had five revolvers and one rifle to hold the Indians off until Wilson returned with help.

They figured that based on the speed of the herd that Goodnight was probably a day and a half away, but the herd had stopped for a day and a half to rest and they were actually almost 80 miles away. Wilson, dressed in only his drawers and a hat, walked through the rocky, cactus-ridden land for three days and nights but never saw the dust cloud in the distance to indicate the herd was coming his way. Finally, exhausted and without food for three days he had to hold up in a cave overlooking the trail to wait.

In the next day or so the herd finally arrived near Wilson's cave hideout and Goodnight was told the terrifying story. He immediately took six men and rushed to the location described by Wilson. They fully expected the Indians to still be there in siege, but only found the arrows littering the ground. Goodnight figured Loving had probably shot himself and was swept away by the river because there had been heavy rains recently and the tracks in the area showed the Indians continued hunting all around for him. They gave up and headed back to the herd.

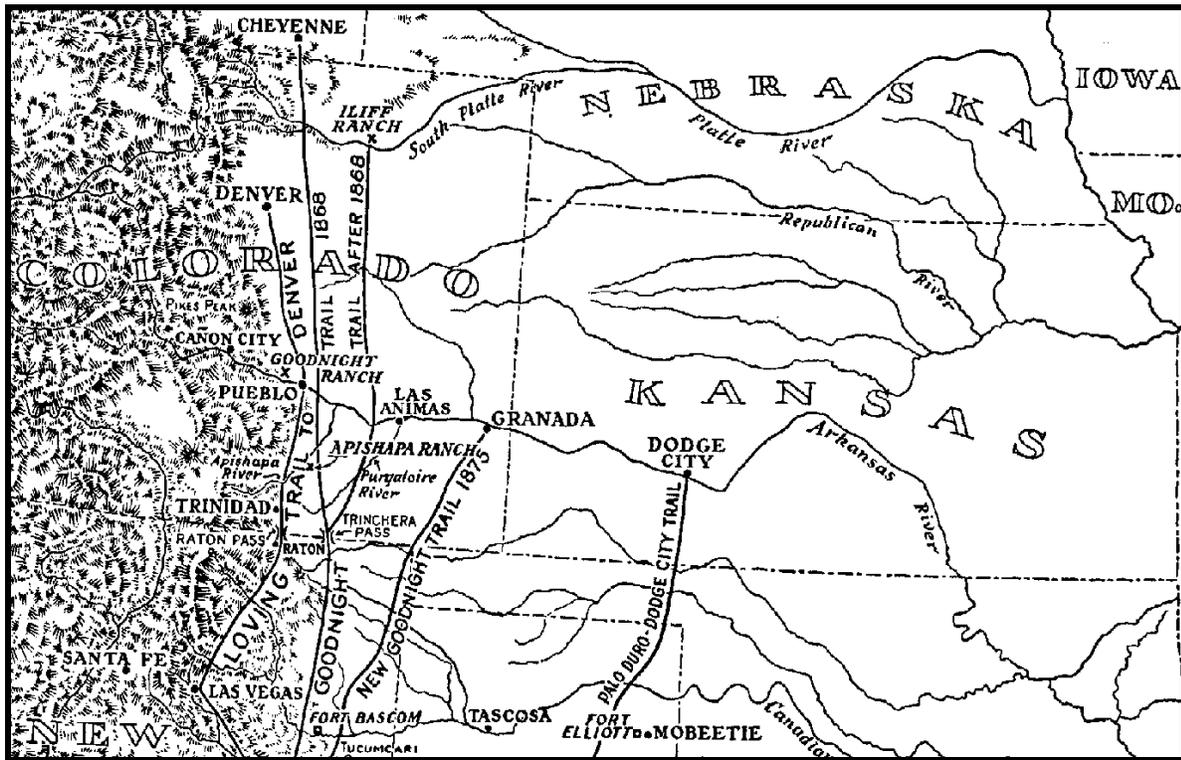
Loving had not shot himself though. After two days he also slipped into the water and headed up river instead of down. He made it six miles to a crossing point he knew of where someone might discover him. After three more days some Mexicans with a German boy on an Ox cart discovered him. The boy stumbled upon him while fetching water. They nursed him as best they could and he offered them \$250 to take him to Fort Sumner, which they did.

Goodnight heard about Loving's unbelievable survival from the owner of a herd behind him who had come down from Fort Sumner and he rushed to the fort to see his friend. The wound in Loving's side healed but the arm became gangrenous, requiring amputation. There were complications that ensued and Loving died on September 25<sup>th</sup>, 1867.

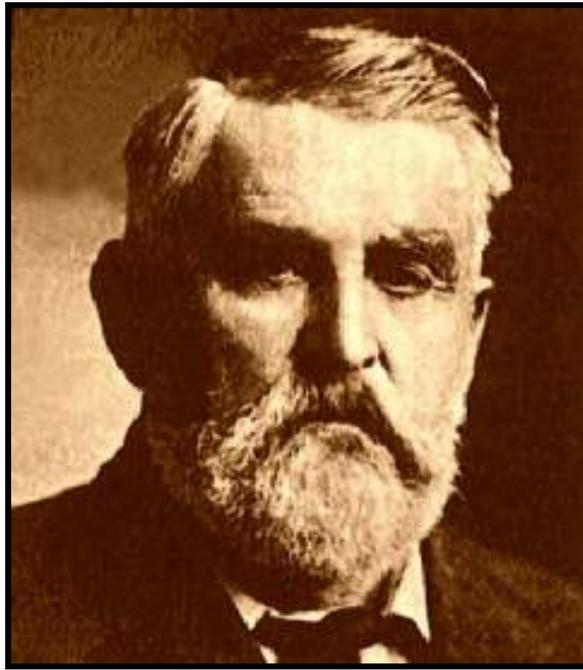
While on his deathbed Loving asked Goodnight that he be buried at his home in Texas and Goodnight promised. He temporarily buried him at Fort Sumner while the duties with the

herd were completed. He returned in two months to exhume the body for return to Texas. The cowboys made a tin casket from old tin cans soldered together and placed the wooden casket inside and encased it in charcoal. They crated that up for the long funeral procession back to Palo Pinto County, Texas.

Subsequent trail drives by Goodnight made it all the way up to Colorado and Wyoming and helped start ranches in the new western territories. Goodnight continued to carry Loving as a partner in the business for the next two years, sending half the proceeds to Loving's family.



Goodnight-Loving New Mexico & Colorado Trails



**Charles Goodnight**

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