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Review of *The Cattle Guard* By James F. Hoy

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The Cattle Guard. By James F. Hoy. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1982. Photographs, tables, illustrations, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. xx + 233 pp. \$19.95.

For anyone who has traveled the back roads and trails of the range country in the Great Plains, the cattle guard is a familiar and welcome sight. It is an open gate that enables cars and trucks to pass through a fence but prevents livestock from getting out of pastures. Although many styles exist, the cattle guard essentially is a pipe, bar, or wooden grid laid over an open pit or trench. The bars are spaced so that livestock will not walk on them for fear their hooves will slip through. No one can say when the first cattle guard was built, but railroad companies were using them as early as 1836 to keep livestock away from the tracks while allowing wagons and carriages to pass over the rails.

James F. Hoy, chairman of the Department of English at Emporia State University, has written a personal account of the history of the cattle guard. For Hoy, the cattle guard has become a symbol of the modern American West, and it is part of the folklore of the range country. Hoy speculates, probably correctly, that Great Plains livestockmen began using cattle guards in the early twentieth century. At that time, automobiles became increasingly popular and Great Plains cattlemen began seeking solutions for the time-consuming and annoying task of opening and closing gates whenever a driver wanted to pass through a fence. Impatience

came with the automobile, and people did not want to be bothered with gates.

Hoy has provided a broad history of the development of the cattle guard and its effect on rural life in the Great Plains. Much of his account has been based on oral interviews. His examples center primarily on the Great Plains, although he includes developments in the Far West and Great Britain in his study as well. Hoy has supplemented his text with photographs that help give a sense of immediacy to his text. His chronicle of the locations and his discussion of the respective histories of various cattle guards, however, are somewhat tedious, if not antiquarian. Although there is too much repetition in the text, Hoy has provided an informative history of a common but important technological innovation in Great Plains agriculture.

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