CAMERON — Cameron’s semi-annual “wild west” cattle drive begins this weekend when Creole area cattlemen and riders drive their cattle back from winter ranges at Johnson Bayou to summer ranges in the Creole area.

This Creole to Johnson Bayou trek started in 1280 when the Creole area cattlemen organized the three day trip to transport their approximately 1250 head of cattle, on foot, to the lush winter range on the eastern marsh range. Many of the cattle were lost on high tides along the way. At night the Cowboys camped out on the beach.

Beats were rented along the many bayous to aid in getting the cattle across.

Some of the old time cowboys who drove their herds in these drives from the lower part of the parish were Johnny Meaux, the late Ojust Richard, Arceaux Miller and Amedy Welch. These drives started in the late 1800s and continued until around 1936.

Before Chenier Teague many of the Creole cowboys drove their cattle to St. Martinville. They followed Grand Lake at Catfish Locks until they reached shore close to Lake Arthur. The drive took about two weeks.

There were sheirs in the herd, and after being pastured over the winter, they were taken to the sale in St. Martinville. There were usually around 600 head.

Lynx Richard remembers his grandfather saying that $17 a head was considered a very good price for a steer. The main cowboys in that drive, all now deceased, were Armel Richard, P. B. Boudoin and Ursin Boudoin.

Richard recalls hearing his grandfather, Armelren, say they were paid for their cattle in gold which they put in money bags to guard their way for the return trip home. The bags were so heavy they blistered the skin. Alligators were so bad in the marshes they had to ride the trip back to “home range” in order to gain momentum as the herd reached the river first with the cattle generation.

He told of Adolph Theriot’s the Calcasieu river for the stirrup being broken in two by swim across from the Hollybeach area to Cameron. There is a period of less than an hour when the tide is at a standstill, twice a day. This is the time the Trail Boss, “Sono” Savoie, must give the order to plunge. While the current is still, cattle can swim straight across.

The cows are brought up to within a half mile of the river where they stop and wait for the drover to give the orders. The cowboys stand watch and take refuge under small scrubby trees.

Large sticks of wood are placed in mud stream, and when their motion comes to a halt the Trail Boss gives the signal to move the cattle forward. They are driven fast tradition in our family for over 175 years and one which we can’t imagine losing.

Two Creole cattlemen combine the lasso of the Old West with more modern methods to round up a few stray steers. The cowboys are working at the Calcasieu River crossing in part of the semi-annual “wild west” drive from Johnson Bayou to summer ranges near Creole.

As the stream of animal bodies moves across the river to the tune of cracking whips and screaming cowboys, they form a living bridge. Cowboys in motor boats on each side of the swimming cattle serve the same purpose as horses do on land. Calves that stray out of line are picked up. The herd also ride herd on cows that stray out of line. A constant vigil must be maintained during the 40 minutes it requires to make the crossing.

The drive continues on to Creole where the cows are cut out by individual owners.

In October the procedure starts all over again, but back in the other direction. As Lynx Richard says, “It has been a tradition in our family for over 175 years and one which we can’t imagine losing.”

Two Creole cattlemen combine the lasso of the Old West with more modern methods to round up a few stray steers. The cowboys are working at the Calcasieu River crossing in part of the semi-annual “wild west” drive from Johnson Bayou to summer ranges near Creole.