POINTS WEST

JOURNAL OF THE BUFFALO BILL HISTORICAL CENTER ■ CODY, WY ■ FALL 2000

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Cover (detail): George Catlin (1796-1872), *Buffalo Hunt: Chasing Back*, 1844, hand colored lithograph, 17 3/4 x 13 in. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Gift of Mrs. Sydney T. Miller. Also shown on p. 20.

POINTS WEST

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The Buffalo Bill Historical Center is a private, non-profit educational institution dedicated to preserving and interpreting the cultural history of the American West. Founded in 1917, the Historical Center is home to the Buffalo Bill Museum, Cody Firearms Museum, Plains Indian Museum, Whitney Gallery of Western Art and McCracken Research Library.

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CALENDAR

OF UPCOMING EVENTS

OCT 10	NATURAL HISTORY EXPEDITION (COE AUDITORIUM)
OCT 19 – 21	FRONTIER JUSTICE SYMPOSIUM
NOV 9	PLAINS INDIAN MUSEUM SPECIAL EXHIBITION ARAPAHO AND SHOSHONE OF WIND RIVER, PATRONS PREVIEW
NOV 11	AMERICAN INDIAN HERITAGE CELEBRATION
NOV 23	THANKSGIVING DAY – MUSEUM CLOSED
DEC 9	ANNUAL HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE & MUSEUM SELECTIONS GIFT SHOP SALE
DEC 12	NATURAL HISTORY EXPEDITION (COE AUDITORIUM)

Crafted by

An Ecological Profile of

Charles R. Preston, Ph.D.
Curator, Draper Museum of Natural History

The modern bison is perhaps 30% smaller than its recent North American ancestors. Photo copyright C. R. Preston

Nature

the North American Bison

Through the early evening mist and across the broad valley, we could barely make out eight to ten large, dark forms casually milling about near the forest edge. Upon closer inspection with our spotting scope, we were able to distinguish three smaller, reddish animals virtually surrounded by the larger figures. A cool, light breeze filled the valley, causing us to turn our collars up and tug our wide-brimmed hats down a notch. It was early June 1995, and this was Lamar Valley in the northeastern portion of Yellowstone National Park. My wife, Penny, and I were eavesdropping on a small nursery herd of bison, including the three recently born, cinnamon-colored calves. Suddenly, a large female on the periphery of the herd became alert, raising her head and directing her nose and eyes first one way and then another. As if choreographed by Baryshnikov, the individual animals deftly merged into one dense mass with some 20 eyes and nostrils surveying the scene. Without warning, the large cow broke formation and began a brisk march toward the woods. The rest followed in single file, with the calves near the center of the column. They slowly disappeared from view, melting into the forest and the mist, and left us to question whether these behemoths were real or only ghosts of our imagination.

UNIQUE EXPERIENCE

We never saw the wolves or bear that, in all likelihood, inspired the bison behavior that evening. However, we returned to the same area early the next morning to observe six wolves feasting on an overnight elk kill and harassing a pair of coyotes. What we witnessed in 1995 could easily have been witnessed 150, 250, or even 5,000 years ago across much of the lower 48 United States. But, due to the decline and near extinction of the

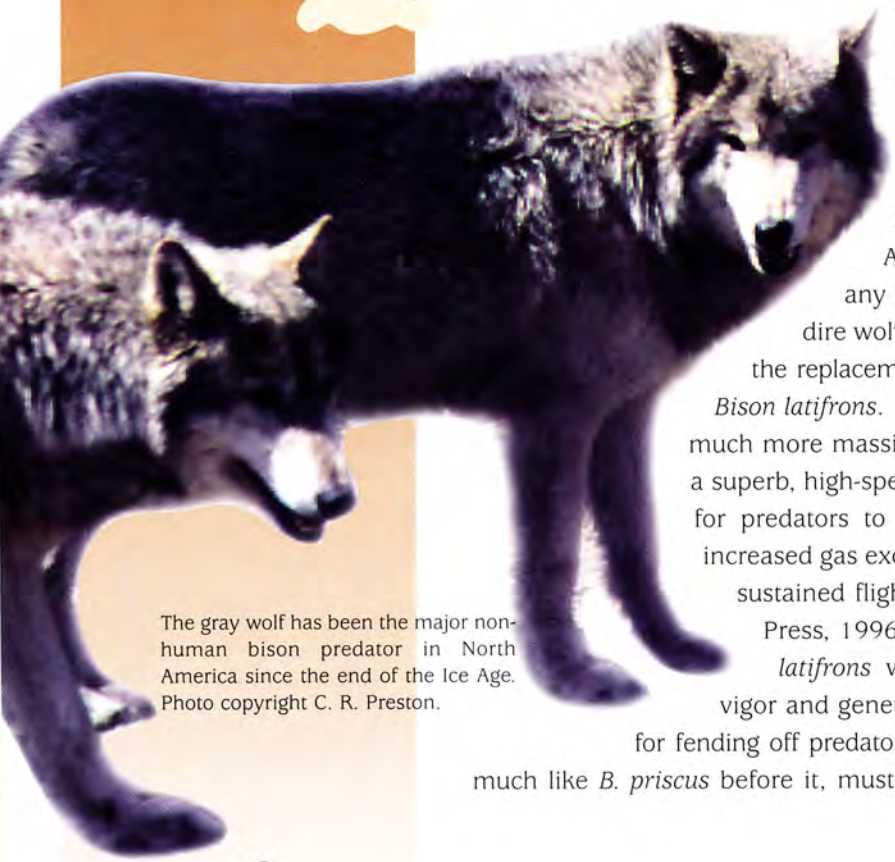
"North America, its landscape, and the animals that live in it have undergone, and continue to undergo, tremendous change. The challenge for the future of our planet will be our ability to manage this change."

—Valerius Geist

bison, gray wolf, and grizzly in the region, our experience took on special significance. We found ourselves in one of the few places left in the entire world that contains virtually all the key elements that spawned and honed the animal we herald as a national and Western icon: the North American buffalo, or bison (*Bison bison*).

FOREBEARS

The earliest, direct ancestors of our North American bison arose in southern Asia in the late Pliocene, some 4 million years ago. These very first bison were relatively small, fleet-footed animals. But, as the global climate and vegetation changed, so too did the bison clan. During the Ice Age, larger, more robust bison began to dominate the northern plains of Eurasia. One of these beasts, known to science as *Bison priscus*, crossed the Bering land bridge from Siberia to Alaska more than 300,000 years ago. Cave paintings of the Upper Paleolithic Era, together with a mummy uncovered in Alaskan permafrost, indicate that this animal possessed long, graceful horns and an ornate fur coat quite different from its modern descendents. Like modern bison, however, *Bison priscus* was a herd animal, gaining some protection from predators through sheer numbers. This bison ran from predators, but must have also confronted them on occasion in social defense formations, using the outward-pointing tips of its horns as weapons. And these Ice Age predators were formidable foes indeed!



The gray wolf has been the major non-human bison predator in North America since the end of the Ice Age. Photo copyright C. R. Preston.

ADAPT TO SURVIVE

Potential bison predators included powerfully-built saber-toothed cats, scimitar cats, American lions, short-faced bears (larger than any living bear species) and large, roving packs of dire wolves. These predators no doubt helped engineer the replacement of the large *B. priscus* with the even larger *Bison latifrons*. *Bison latifrons* had larger, thicker horns and a much more massive shoulder hump than did *B. priscus*. It was a superb, high-speed runner. The large body size made it tough for predators to tackle and accommodated large organs for increased gas exchange and blood circulation needed for rapid, sustained flight. Valerius Geist (in *Buffalo Nation*, Voyageur Press, 1996) suggests that the larger horns sported by *B. latifrons* were more important as a signal of general vigor and genetic "fitness" to potential mates than they were for fending off predators. Nonetheless, *B. latifrons*' defensive strategy, much like *B. priscus* before it, must have included both flight and confrontation.

Bison latifrons was extremely successful on this continent, remaining a characteristic species of western North American fauna for well over 250,000 years. The last *B. latifrons* populations disappeared about 22,000 years ago. Succeeding *B. latifrons* as an important herbivore in North America was the slightly smaller-bodied *Bison antiquus*, which subsequently died out about 10,000 years ago.

The bison's future, like its recent past, will be crafted largely by human choice. Photo copyright C. R. Preston.

TRANSFORMATION CONTINUES

Today's *Bison bison*, rising to prominence in North America only during the last few thousand years, is roughly 30% smaller than its massive ancestors. Climate change, bringing cycles of drought and associated food shortages in North American grasslands, encouraged downsizing of the bison. But other factors were also important.

Dale Guthrie (in *Frozen Fauna of the Mammoth Steppe*, University of Chicago Press, 1989) suggests that recent bison morphology and behavior evolved primarily in response to a changing cast of predators. During the Ice Age, bison were confronted with ambush predators, such as the short-faced bear and saber-toothed cats, and large packs of pursuit predators, such as dire and gray wolves. Thus, there was pressure for bison to be able to stand and fight (against sudden ambush) and run fast and far (away from pursuit predators). But, when most of the big ambush predators disappeared by the end of the Ice Age, the primary threat remaining was the gray wolf, a pack-hunting, pursuit predator. Although bison may occasionally confront an attacking grizzly, standing ground to face a large pack of attacking wolves is not generally an adaptive strategy. Consequently, according to Guthrie, small-bodied, small-horned bison, more suited to fleeing than fighting, evolved in the post-Ice Age environment.

BUILT TO RUN

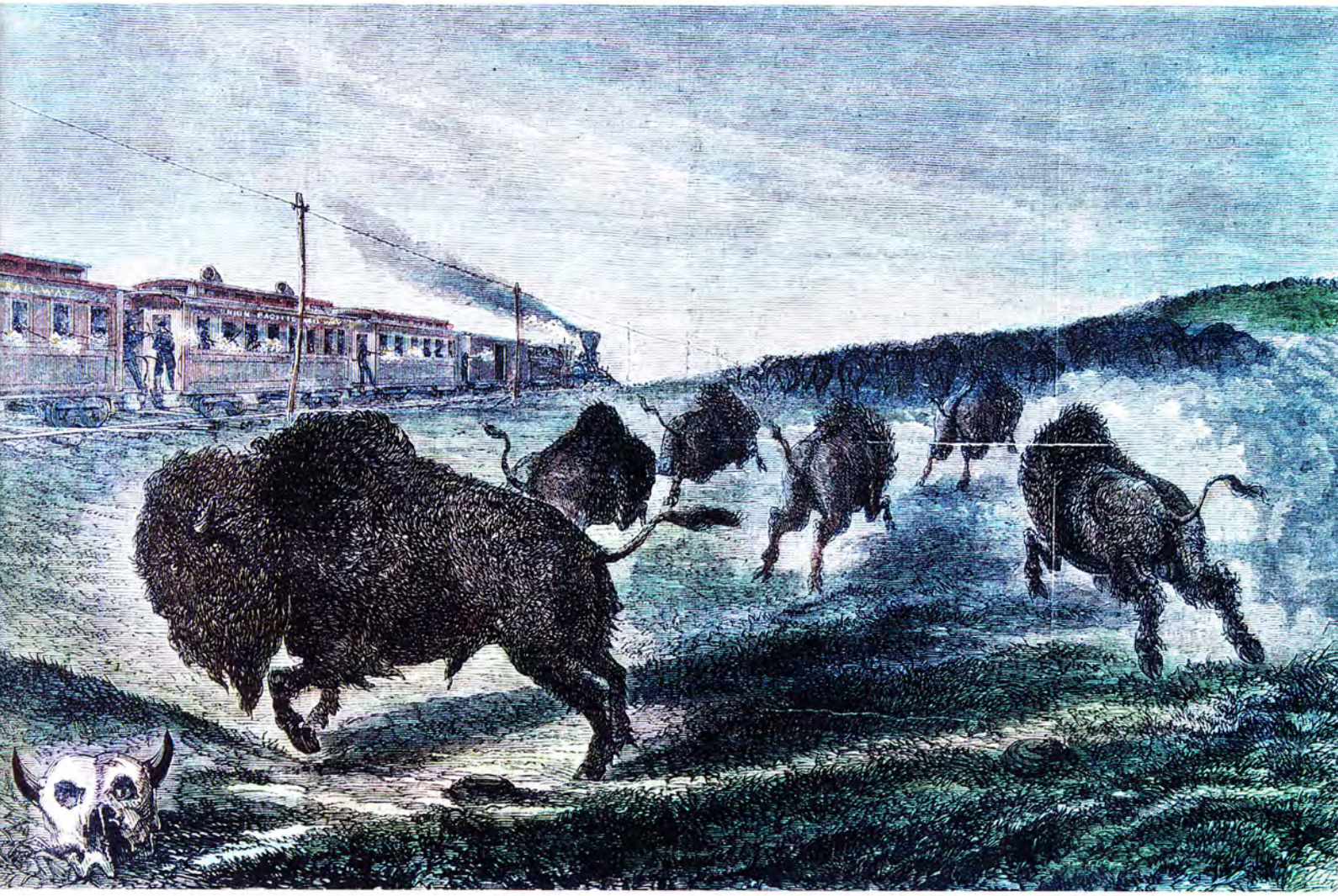
Valerius Geist has extended the argument to suggest that modern bison are able to outdistance wolves through power and endurance, in addition to speed. He

points out that, although smaller in size, modern bison are built for power running, up and down varying terrain. They are thus able to take advantage of gullies and hillsides to put distance between themselves and pursuing wolves. Geist further suggests that human predators helped shape the modern bison. Bison that stood their ground to confront Paleo-American hunters armed with hand-held spears were quickly eliminated from the population, whereas those individuals that were predisposed to run away from these two-legged predators survived to contribute their genes to future generations. (Two-legged tourists who have approached bison too closely might attest, however, that these modern beasts do not always choose flight over aggression.) Of course, running away did not prove effective in avoiding near extinction at the hands of later predators equipped with weapons that could kill at great distances.

THE SHOE FITS

The modern bison is widely regarded as an American icon, but it also serves as a model of the evolutionary process that helps shape living things to fit their environment. Charles J. (Buffalo) Jones, quoted in Colonel Henry Inman's *Buffalo Jones' Adventures on the Plains* ([1899], 1970) gives this colorful account of how well the North American bison is matched to its environment: "Nature is never more persistent in any of its creations than in that of the buffalo's anatomy, or in its habits so suited to its wild environment. A more perfect animal for the strange surroundings of its habitat could not have been constructed. It is ever prepared for the severest blizzard from the far north, or the hottest sirocco of the Torrid Zone. It is so constructed that it faces every danger, whether it is the pitiless storm from the Arctic regions or its natural enemy, the gray wolf of the desert."

Jones may have overstated his case just a bit. After all, the present-day ecological systems of western North America are relatively young, and their inhabitants are not as well adapted to this place as they might be after a longer period of environmental stability. Nonetheless, the bison, crafted by nature through eons of change, represents a unique solution to a unique suite of environmental challenges. As with all other species, the future of the bison will continue to be shaped by changes in its environment. Increasingly, those changes will be directed by human choice. ■



Several million years of evolution did not adequately prepare the bison for the dominant two-legged predators of the 19th century. T. R. Davis (1840-1894), *Shooting Buffalo From The Trains*, 6 1/8 x 9 1/8 in., Buffalo Bill Historical Center. Gift of The Coe Foundation.

Buffalo and

Emma I. Hansen
Curator, Plains Indian Museum

The great herd running away,
The buffalo running,
Their drumming hooves
Send dust clouds billowing to the sky
  And promise good hunting.
The buffalo and her child approaching,
Mother and Calf coming,
Turned back from the herd,
  Promise abundance.

—Pawnee Song

Buffalo, Fort Belknap Reservation, Montana. Ken Blackbird, Assiniboine, 1999.

The People

From the beginning, the lives of Native people of the Plains and the buffalo have been culturally, economically, and spiritually intertwined. Before the horse became available to Plains tribes in the 17th and 18th centuries, bands hunted buffalo on foot using buffalo jumps, surrounds and other resourceful means to gain advantages over the herds. By the end of the 1700s, the Plains equestrian hunter/warrior tradition was established and embellished as additional tribal peoples entered the Plains. By 1880, the once vast herds of buffalo were destroyed along with the people's lives as Plains buffalo hunters. Once again, as tribes restore herds to reservation lands, Native people remember and celebrate the essential role of the buffalo in Plains cultural and spiritual life.

From the buffalo — the meat, hide, horns, bones, hooves, hair, and organs — the basic necessities of life were creatively produced. Women worked long hours with implements of sharpened bone and horn to clean, soften, and tan hides that could be used as tipi covers, clothing, robes, and bedding. Pieces of rawhide were painted with pigments to be used as parfleches to transport the family belongings when traveling. Bones and horns were used for hoes, digging sticks, hide working tools, cups, and spoons. The paunch and bladder served as containers that could be suspended over cooking fires or filled with hot stones to boil meat. The meat itself was eaten fresh or preserved for later use by cutting it in strips that were dried in the sun. Dried meat was also pounded and mixed with buffalo fat and chokecherries to make pemmican, which could be stored and kept for several months.

Native people of the Plains respected and honored the buffalo, sustainer of life, through songs, dances, and ceremonies. Buffalo communicated with the people through dreams or visions and were called upon during hunger, war, illness and other times of need. Images of the buffalo were painted on shields and drums, carved in pipe bowls, or beaded on clothing. Men recorded buffalo hunts in stories, songs, ledger drawings, and paintings on robes and tipi covers. Members of warrior societies wearing bonnets made of buffalo hide and horns performed dances to capture the sacred power of the buffalo. Such power assisted men in


Pawnee. 3.

attaining success as warriors and providing meat for their families as well as protection in battle. The words to a Lakota song refer to the protective power of the buffalo:

You cannot harm me,
You cannot harm one, who has dreamed a dream like mine,
One who has seen the buffalo in their mighty lodge
And heard them say,
"Arrows cannot harm you now."

Among the Mandan people of the Upper Missouri River, the Okipa ceremony dramatized tribal origins and the creation of the earth, its plants, animals, and people and emphasized the importance of the buffalo. The four-day ceremony took place each summer after the corn was planted and before the tribal buffalo hunt. A part of the ceremony was the Buffalo Dance in which men wearing masks of tanned buffalo hide and horns, hide breechcloths, and wrist and ankle decorations of buffalo hair impersonated buffalo bulls. The Okipa ceremony ensured an abundance of buffalo and brought the herds closer to the villages in order that they could be hunted.

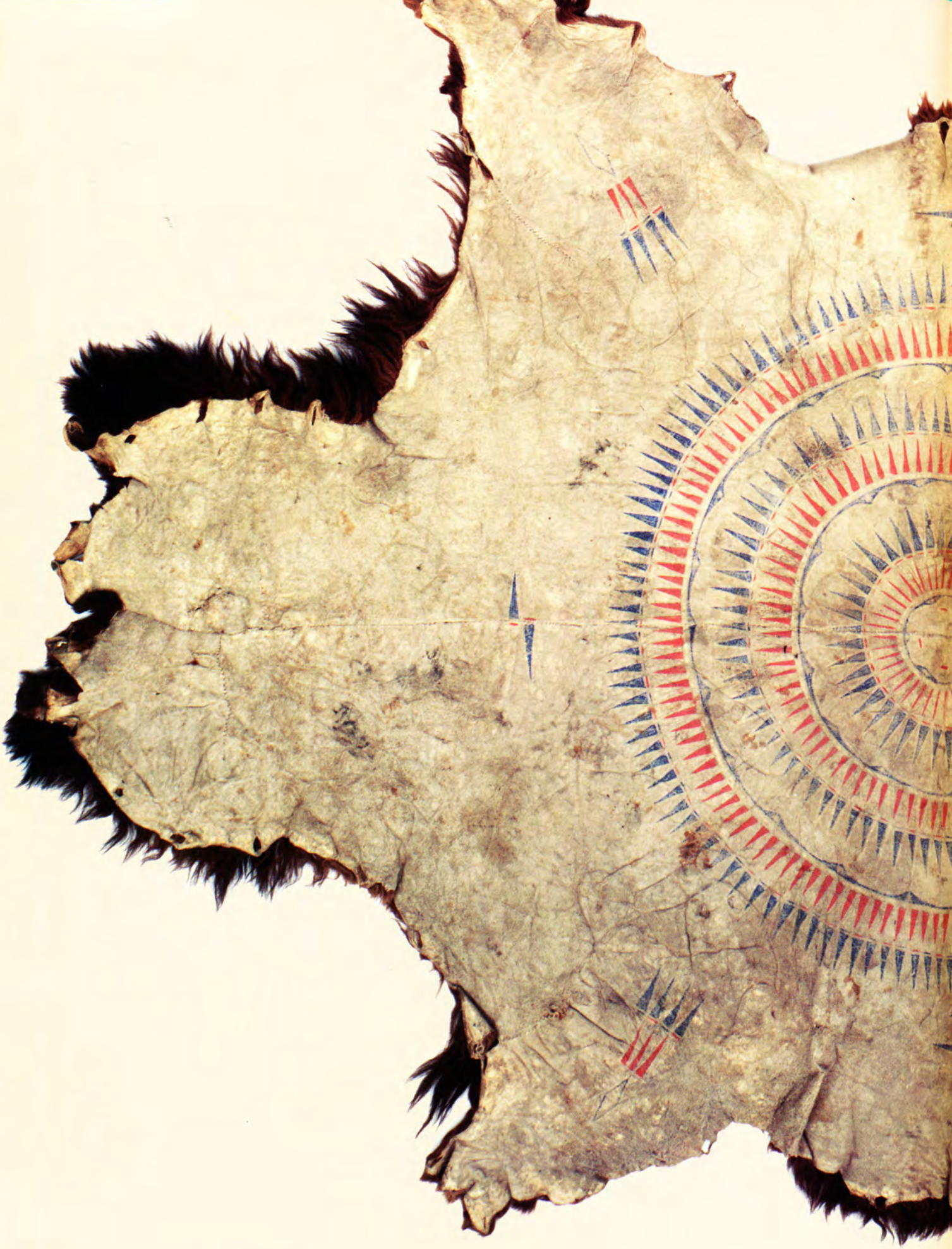
The primary spiritual relationship between the Lakota and the buffalo is embodied in the story of the White Buffalo Woman who brought the sacred buffalo calf pipe and the buffalo hunting way of life to the people. In the story, the White Buffalo Woman first appears as a *wakan* (holy) young woman, but also represents the buffalo who gave his flesh in order that the people might live.

The White Buffalo Woman disappeared over the horizon. Sometime she might come back. As soon as she had vanished, buffalo in great herds appeared, allowing themselves to be killed so that the people might survive. And from that day on, our relations, the buffalo, furnished the people with everything they needed — meat for their food, skin for their clothes and tipis, bones for their many tools.[1]

"A cold wind blew across the prairie when the last buffalo fell . . . a death wind for my people," said Sitting Bull about the destruction of the buffalo and the parallel depopulation of the Plains tribes during the last half of the 19th century. For Plains people it seemed that nothing was left of their old way of life. Although the symbolic spiritual significance of the buffalo endured, the herds themselves were absent from the day-to-day lives of the people.

Left: Sun Chief, Pawnee, Nebraska. William Henry Jackson, 1868-1871. Nebraska State Historical Society.

In recent years, the relationship of the buffalo to Plains Indian people has entered a new chapter as tribal governments have established herds on



Mandan buffalo robe, ca. 1865. Tanned buffalo robe painted with pigments. Chandler-Pohrt Collection.

Left: Crow buffalo horn bonnet, ca. 1860. Split buffalo horns, eagle and hawk feathers, wool cloth, deer hide, brass bells, glass pony beads, string. Catherine Bradford McClellan Collection, gift of The Coe Foundation.

Right: *Buffalo and The People Gallery*, Plains Indian Museum, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, June, 2000.

reservation lands. The InterTribal Bison Cooperative (ITBC), founded in 1992, supports the building of the herds in keeping with their mission statement: "To restore bison to Indian lands in a manner which is compatible with our spiritual and cultural beliefs and practices." The restoration of the buffalo to tribal lands symbolizes a spiritual and cultural rebirth for Plains people reminding them of their ties to the land and their heritage as free hunters of the Plains. In the words of former ITBC president Fred DuBray, "We recognize the bison is a symbol of our strength and unity, and as we bring the herds back to health, we will also bring our people back to health."[2]

Buffalo and The People, one of the new exhibition galleries in the Plains Indian Museum, interprets the enduring relationship of Plains

Indian people with the buffalo. The Museum collections exhibited in this gallery together with quotations and voices of Northern Plains tribal members bring new insights to this relationship. The *Learning More* computer program provides opportunities for visitors to further explore the cultural significance of the magnificent buffalo, its 19th century decline, and its restoration to the Plains. ■

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[1]Lame Deer, 1967 in Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz, eds. *American Indian Myths and Legends*, 1984. New York: Pantheon Books, p. 52.

[2]Intertribal Bison Cooperative Report, 1998.

CATLIN

Edith Jacobson
Intern, Whitney Gallery of Western Art

Showed Us

By the 1830s America was beginning what is now known as "The Era of Westward Expansion." What did those first settlers know about the West? What did they expect? At that time, the American frontier was the land west of the Mississippi River. Early exploring expeditions such as Lewis and Clark's in 1804 produced many words about the unknown frontier, but few, if any, images. So even though the public read about the West, they still knew very little about what this area looked like.

When George Catlin embarked for the West in 1830, it was the first major attempt by an artist to factually document the West in images. Catlin eventually went on five different trips West, produced over 600 paintings, toured these paintings in exhibitions throughout the United States and Europe, and published over 10 books that included reproductions of his paintings along with a text. Some of these books went through numerous editions. His paintings were also reproduced countless times, legally and illegally, in newspapers and magazines. Because his paintings were the first of their kind, and because they were so widespread, they had a huge influence on the perception of the West.

Left: George Catlin (1796-1872), *The Buffalo Hunt "Surrounding the Herd,"* mid 19th century, chromolithograph on paper, 13 1/2 x 17 5/8 in., Buffalo Bill Historical Center. Gift of William J. Holcombe.

First Look

Although George Catlin is best known as an early American artist who documented the American Indian, he also painted a number of buffalo scenes. And just as Catlin's paintings of Indians were the first glimpses of an Indian for most people, Catlin's paintings of buffalo were the first images of buffalo seen by most people.

Probably the most well-known of Catlin's buffalo paintings were 13 buffalo scenes included among the 25 prints in his *North American Indian Portfolio: Hunting Scenes and Amusements*. This portfolio of hand-colored lithographs was first published in 1844 in England, directed mainly to well-to-do British who could afford, and whom he hoped would buy, his works. In the portfolio there are 13 prints with buffalo. Of these 13, 12 portray hunting, 7 portray dying buffalo, and 9 portray the chase of the buffalo. Only 3 out of the 13 prints portray any kind of grazing buffalo.

George Catlin (1796-1872), *American Buffalo Hunt, Chasing Back*, oil on canvas, 1846, 25½ x 32 in. Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, OK.

It was a romantic time

These highly romanticized scenes were popular among the culture of the day. This does not mean they were not factual, but rather that Catlin chose to portray the exotic and wild over the daily and mundane.

Despite Catlin's extensive works, he struggled financially throughout his life. Catlin's income depended on the public's acceptance of his work. Even if Catlin would have personally chosen to depict the buffalo in different situations, his paying audience wanted more dramatic scenes. So Catlin's art reflected the romantic tastes of the time: the 1830s and 40s. Thus, the buffalo was portrayed as a beast of prey, sometimes with the Indian, white hunter, or wolf in pursuit, other times in its final stages of death.

In romanticizing the buffalo, Catlin also romanticized the West. His hunt scenes produced an image of an animal meant for hunting and the use of man. *Buffalo Hunt, Chasing Back* (cover) offers an image of a powerful, unpredictable, and untamed animal. This is not unlike the popular image of a wild, unpredictable, and untamed West.

Catlin cared

Although Catlin often depicted the buffalo in a dramatic hunt scene, sometimes even including himself in the painting, he was concerned about the reckless and wasteful killing of the buffalo. In *Letters and Notes*, first published in 1841, Catlin openly criticized the mass killing of buffalo precipitated by fur companies. He wrote, "It seems hard and cruel, that we civilized people with all the luxuries and comforts of the world about us, should be drawing from the backs of these useful animals the skins for our luxury, leaving their carcasses to be devoured by the wolves . . . the buffalo's doom is sealed."[1] Catlin's doomsday prophecy that the buffalo would disappear in "eight or ten years"[2] didn't come to pass, but his concerns were valid. The buffalo did disappear from most of the United States and was in danger of extinction.

Fact or convention?

Part of Catlin's fame originates from his claim that all of his paintings were factual, firsthand experiences unlike most of the earlier images of the West. However, one of the controversies surrounding George Catlin today is how factual his paintings really were — especially his winter scenes. All of Catlin's western expeditions took place during the summer so it does not seem likely that he ever witnessed any snow scenes. There is the chance, however, that he was caught in

George Catlin (1796-1872), *Buffalo Hunt: Dying Bull in Snowdrift*, 1844, hand colored lithograph, 17 3/4 x 13 in., Buffalo Bill Historical Center. Gift of Mrs. Sydney T. Miller.

an early or late winter storm, which was not entirely unusual for the prairie. Thus stems the controversy.

One of these winter scenes was published as print no. 17 in *Hunting Scenes and Amusements*, "Buffalo Hunt: Dying Buffalo in a Snowdrift." This print is remarkably similar to Catlin's 1863 oil painting, *Buffalo Hunting*. The Indians in the paintings simply switch from being on horseback to snowshoe while snow replaces prairie grass and flowers. But besides these differences, the compositions are almost identical in placement of hills, buffalo, and Indians. Based on these paintings, it seems that Catlin could easily take a summer composition, alter it a little, add snow, and claim that it is authentic.

Not just seasons

But searching a little further, one realizes that Catlin also used the same compositions from one summer scene to another such as print no. 12 in *Hunting Scenes and Amusements*, "Buffalo Hunt: Chasing Back," and the (ca.) 1846 oil painting, *Buffalo Hunt, Chasing Back*. Both of these scenes are set during the summer, but this time Catlin switches his friend, Charles Murray, with an Indian, while leaving the composition basically the same. This additional example shows how Catlin often

George Catlin (1796-1872) *Buffalo Hunting*, oil on board, 1863.
16 x 21 1/4 in. Autry Museums of Western Heritage, Los Angeles, CA.

reused a successful composition. Although he had first-hand experiences, he frequently composed his paintings and prints in his studio from memory or invention.

Information and inspiration

Whether or not every image was a statement of fact, Catlin's art still remains an invaluable source of first-hand information about not only the early West, but also about buffalo of the early West. He was the first artist to give people back East and those who would settle the West an authentic idea of the West in more than words. This idea not only helped shape the romantic image of the West that still lingers with America today, but inspired countless adventure-hungry souls to leave their homes behind for new lives in the American West. ■

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[1]Catlin, George. *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of North American Indians*, Vol. I. Minneapolis: Ross & Haines, Inc., 1965 (first issued 1841), 263.

[2]Ibid, 263.

Return of the Buffalo:

Robert B. Pickering, Ph.D.
Deputy Director of Education and Collections

Perhaps you've noticed. Every week, sometimes more frequently, bison are in the news. Sadly, it is often related to bison leaving the safety of a national park or private ranch. Usually, they are shot out of fear of brucellosis infection or that the great shaggy animal will rampage through fences or overturn cars.

As sad as these reports are, in a strange sense, they point to some very good news. Bison are coming back in great numbers. They are outgrowing lands that have been set aside for their safety. Today, bison live in virtually every state in the Union and over most of Canada. Although numbers are difficult to estimate, there are probably 260,000 bison alive today. Over 80% of them roam private lands. Federal, state, and city lands host the remaining 20% of these magnificent grazers.

If we were living at the beginning of the 20th Century rather than the 21st, our view of the fate of bison would be very different. In the 1890s bison were at their lowest point. There were no more than a thousand living animals in the US and Canada. The time of the great slaughter resulted in the near extinction of bison. Fifty years before that, the North American bison population was estimated at 40–70 million animals.

WARNINGS

In 1875, the naturalist William T. Hornaday wrote about the impending extinction of the bison. His only hesitation was whether the last bison would be killed within five or ten years of his writing. That dire prediction and the thought that bison — the great icon of the West — might become extinct ignited public sentiment, particularly east of the Mississippi. Hornaday, William P. Wharton and Martin S. Garretson, and other notables including Theodore Roosevelt, channeled their prodigious energies into activism to create one of America's first environmental organizations, the American Bison Society. Founded in 1905, the ABS helped to buy rangeland to provide protected habitat for the buffalo. They also purchased private herds of bison and lobbied congress for support.

THE FIRST SUCCESS

Bison may be the first American environmental success story. At the time that the total destruction of the buffalo was near, the American public acted decisively. Even a hundred years ago, eastern sentiment and money were the major forces in western conservation. Most of the original members of the ABS were from the East; few actually lived on the Plains. On reflection, perhaps this condition is not so odd. It was for the Eastern audience that the dime novels, the tales of the ol' West and the romantic ideal of the West as the last frontier were written. The only live bison seen by Easterners were in places such as Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show or the Brooklyn Zoo.

An American Success Story

Denver Museum of Natural History Photo Archives, Van Wormer Collection.

This emerging environmental movement forced Congress to buy the land that then became the National Bison Range and Yellowstone National Park. Conservation clubs such as the Boone & Crockett Club and the Campfire Club began raising money and lobbying state and federal legislatures to set aside land for the future. Interestingly, these clubs also were able to convince arms and ammunition manufacturers that conservation was in their best interest. Surely, if all the wild game were killed off, there wouldn't be a future generation of hunters to buy new guns and ammunition. Ducks Unlimited is a good example of a group that combines hunting and conservation. Also near the end of the last century, the Canadian government began to set aside parkland for bison preservation.

Between the times of the many characters who began saving the buffalo from extinction and the National Bison Association of today, The American Bison Society and its dedicated members worked diligently to save the bison from an end that everyone had predicted.

COMMERCIALIZATION BEGINS

In the middle decades of the 19th century, Michel Pablo was a young buffalo

runner who, like his fellow runners, never worried about the herd's demise. Buffalo runner is the term that commercial buffalo hunters used to describe themselves. Late in life, he realized that bison were not an endless resource and that he personally had contributed to their near extinction. He wanted to make amends for the slaughter. He also realized that there was money to be made from live bison as well as dead ones. Michel and his partner, Charles Allard, sold animals to parks, zoos, and other ranchers. Rarely, however, did they sell a breeding pair. They preferred to sell the young bulls and to keep the cows as breeding stock. Besides live animals, Pablo and Allard also sold hides and mounts.

Pablo offered his herd to the American government for purchase and removal to Yellowstone or other protected habitat. Although powerful men such as Teddy Roosevelt were in favor of the transaction, some members of Congress blocked the purchase. They didn't think

Louis Maurer (1832-1932), *The Great Royal Buffalo Hunt*, 1894. Oil on canvas, 34 1/8 x 54 in., Buffalo Bill Historical Center. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ernest J. Goppert.

saving buffalo was a good use of federal money paid in taxes mostly from eastern states. Pablo went to the Canadian government. The Superintendent of Rocky Mountain Park at Banff recognized the great opportunity and lobbied to have the Canadian government purchase the herd. They quickly accepted his advice and approved the purchase.

TO CROSSBREED

Charles Goodnight, the famous Texas rancher, also got involved in raising buffalo. Within a few years after the Civil War, he began gathering calves to start a herd. Both Goodnight and his wife thought that exterminating the buffalo would be a terrible loss to the country. Goodnight also thought there was money to be made off the buffalo if handled properly, but that was not an easy task. Everyone knew that bison had a nasty disposition and were dangerous to men and horses alike. Among others, Goodnight tried to temper the bison's disposition by crossing them with cattle. Like any good rancher, he was trying to get the best combination of behavior, size, and conformation by crossing two related but different breeds. More often than not, however, this experiment had the opposite result — bad tempered cows and sterile bulls. There wasn't much of a market for either one.

Photo courtesy of Robert B. Pickering

C.J. "Buffalo" Jones was one of the true characters associated with saving the buffalo. He experimented with cross-breeding and bison domestication. According to some of his contemporaries, Jones was also quite a storyteller, particularly when it came to his own adventures and importance. Regardless of the hype and showmanship, there are two things with which Buffalo Jones can be credited. He crossbred cattle and buffalo and coined the term "catalo." Jones also tried to "break bison to the harness" and use them to pull wagons. He was successful with a few animals. Most notably, Jones was often pictured in a buckboard pulled by "Lucky Knight," a bull that previously had killed its owner, A.H. Cole. The publicity about Jones being able to tame buffalo, particularly the "killer buffalo" was good for Jones' reputation. Many other people also tried to domesticate the buffalo and use them for plowing and pulling wagons. Although occasionally successful, the practice never really caught on as anything more than a stunt.

OR NOT TO CROSSBREED

Scotty Philip was another of the fascinating characters associated with the early bison

conservation movement. Born in Scotland as James Philip, he came to the United States in his teens to build a fortune. After trying his hand at many occupations from gold miner to courier for the U.S. Army, "Scotty" Philip became one of the most influential, if not richest, men in South Dakota. He raised thousands of cattle on his many ranches. His interest in preserving the bison began near the beginning of this century. By 1904, he had 80 buffalo and continued to add more.

Unlike some of his contemporaries, he did not like cattle/bison crosses. He purposely culled them from the herd at roundup time and sold them for meat. His foresight has proven to be a great asset. Many herds today have their origins in the Philip herd. For example in 1914, he sent 60 animals to a newly purchased game preserve of 60,000 acres in Custer County, SD. This group became the nucleus of the Custer State Park herd. Today, excess animals from Custer are sometimes given to different Indian tribes who are building herds, or they may be sold at auction to other ranchers. A man of great will, strength, and loyalty himself, Scotty Philip admired these same qualities in the buffalo. He also spoke about how the buffalo took care of each other. "If a man wants to get a fine lesson in the advantage of 'standing together' he need only watch a buffalo herd in stormy weather."

PLAINS INDIANS AND BISON

For as long as history records, bison have been sacred to the Indians of the Plains. They still are. The near demise of both the bison and the tribes themselves did not break the spiritual link between Indian peoples and bison. For many Indian tribes, bison are not an economic venture or a romantic hobby; they are part of a path to spiritual renewal and tribal identity. For some tribes and many individuals today, the resurgence of bison and the active participation of the tribes is a return to old ways of spirituality, renewed pride in the present, and hope for the future. Arvol Looking Horse, 19th generation carrier of the sacred buffalo calf pipe, says that he has seen bison ranching turn around the lives of people living on reservations. They have been given hope and direction. Some have given up alcohol and are changing their lives.

Bison, South Dakota, Wind Cave National Park, Summer 1992. Photo by N. Jenkins. copyright 1992, Denver Museum of Natural History.

At the same time, some tribes are very aware of the potential economic impact of bison ranching. The Inter-Tribal Bison Cooperative now has more than thirty member-tribes that are either raising bison or are beginning to develop herds. The sale of excess bison meat provides much needed income to the tribes. As one tribal pundit has stated, "This is the first time in 500 years that the Indians have been on the cutting edge of economic development."

Contemporary bison ranching has many roots. It comes from cattle ranching, Native American spirituality, the conservation movement and the romance of the West. While many bison ranchers might see themselves as western, rugged individualist conservatives with well-developed profit instincts, so too, are many of these people very concerned about the environment and the ability to create sustainable agriculture and ranching in the New West.

PROFIT AND PRESERVE

Profit motive and ecological sensitivity usually are thought of as antithetical; yet, here is an emerging industry in which many of its participants are trying to combine the two. I asked Paul Jonjak, former President of the National Bison Association, about the convergence of political conservatism and conservation in bison ranching thinking that I had just hit upon a great but unnoticed truth. Paul's reaction was, "Sure they are related, that's why I got into this business." In Jonjak's view, conservatism requires the wise use of nature's resources so that the value and use are not diminished over time.

Most of today's buffalo ranchers are members of the National Bison Association — the result of a recent merger between the American Bison Association and the National Bison Association. The NBA, based in Denver, CO, has more than 2,300 members who own or manage most of the 260,000 bison that exist today. As any good trade association should be, the members of the NBA are optimistic about their industry. The Association expects that bison ranching will become more common throughout the country in the future. The NBA serves as a trade association for its members; it supports research into bison related issues and promotes education about bison, bison meat, and ranching.

NOT JUST THE MONEY

Along with the economic motive, most modern ranchers believe that raising bison is better than raising cattle. They may tell you that these animals are smarter, more interesting, and provide better meat. If they know you well enough, the rancher also may tell you that pride, the romance of the West, and spirituality also are part of the reason they raise bison. In a sense, many bison ranchers believe they are doing something for the country and for the mythic West as well as for themselves and their families.

Scotty Philip's statement regarding bison standing together embodies much of the attitude of most modern ranchers that I have met. They may ranch for economic reasons but their choice of buffalo over other animals relates to their great respect for bison and their intention to help the icon of the Plains survive. ■

Note: Portions quoted from Bob Pickering's Seeing the White Buffalo *by permission of Johnson Press. This book is available at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Museum Selections.*

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by David A. Dary
The full saga of the American Animal—**$16.11**

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