

## A Chapter in Texas History and Buffalo

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When one considers the development of Texas within the lifetime of one generation, it appears marvelous. There are men living today, ~~whole~~ and hearty, who were in the State when the first stretch of railroad was laid in her borders 90 miles from Houston to Millican - and to remain as the only mileage for more than ten years during which time the Civil War intervened.

And, there are numerous people living who were in the border countries of civilization, when indians raided Cooke, Montague, Wise, Parker, Jack, Stephens, Comanche and the long stretch of frontier counties to the southwest, plying the scalping knife and carrying off white captives (women and children) and driving ~~xxx~~ horses, whose numbers annually run into thousands of head.

Beyond this frontier line, about one half of the Territory claimed by Texas, was territory dominated by savage indian tribes - and grazed by buffalo ~~xx~~ whose numbers were almost inconceivable. In 1874, General ~~Cook~~ Crook in command of U. S. troops in Kansas and Nebraska, estimated that there were 50,000,000 buffalo in the western U. S. and 15,000,000 south of the Arkansas and north of the Canadian River. Many persons have estimated bodies making up a single herd at 1,000,000 head. In the winter of 1866 and 1867, I saw herds on the level valley country to the south of Red River and on the Witchetaw River and westward to the Pease River - in the ~~country~~ country that is Wichita and Wilbarger Counties - herds of buffalo that were inestimable in numbers. They grazed in bunches of half dozen to fifty - a little way apart - but looking over them appeared to be a solid herd stretching for miles. When put in motion the herd became ~~solid~~.

I was once in the track of such a herd in motion where they split and passed round our wagons, coming together a hundred yards or so after passing. There were thousands - and a long time passing in a ~~xxx~~ trot. I do not remember that they were timed or that anyone attempted to estimate their numbers - it was beyond us - but there were tens of thousands.

A few years later a railroad from the east to the west had pierced and crossed buffalo ranges in Kansas and Nebraska, and their hides had become a commercial commodity - and buffalo were doomed. Thousands of men in organized bodies were slaughtering the herds, and hundreds of teams were hauling hides to railroads.

The winter of 1877 was the last profitable hunting season. Then greedy "sportsmen", so called, hunted down the scattering remnants of the great herds as long as one remained outside of a few (buffalo) preserves.

The slaughtered buffalo left the western plains of the Panhandle of Texas, Kansas and other states white with their bleaching frames. This attracted greedy ~~bone~~ bone hunters who scoured the ranges to gather ~~thxxx~~ and market thousands of tons for fertilizer. It was quite an industry for several years.

Some ~~of~~ idea of the magnitude of the slaughter may be had from the fact that 5,000 commercial hunters drew supplies from

Forts Griffin and Concho in Texas during the winter of 1877 - and that one firm of traders, Conrad and Roth, at Fort Griffin that winter, sold to hunters 2½ cars of bar lead hauled from RR. at Denison to make bullets.

The hunters of each outfit used a 16 #(?) Sharps Rifle and moulded bullets and loaded his own shells. Forts Concho and Griffin hunters were only a division of the army that invaded the buffalo range.

Hide hunting was a systematically conducted business. In Texas a regular outfit consisted of six skinners, one hunter, and a cook...and each man drove a team of generally three yoke of oxen, drawing a large wagon and a short tongued trailer coupled to the axle of the front wagon. Supplies consisted of provisions for several months - several thousand wooden pegs for staking down fresh hides, a 16 lb. Sharps rifle, a quantity of empty brass shells for reloading, several hundred pounds of 5 lb. pig lead and several kegs of powder. As it was indian country, the men had side arms and rifles. There was but one horse, a cheap pony, for the hunter. Upon reaching buffalo in herds, camp was made by a stream or pool on smooth ground.

In the morning the hunter hung his heavy cartridge belts over the horn of his saddle, rode out to the buffalo, always approaching on the windward side, to within easy range....perhaps 100 yards. He sat down, spread his rest sticks (a couple of small sticks 2½ or 3 ft. long tied together near one end so that spread at the bottom, they made a fork in which he could lay the barrel of his heavy rifle. The gun carried a slug an inch long driven by 90 to 110 grains of powder - was ~~finest~~ finely sighted and accurate and deadly. The shot was generally through the lungs which were very large.

The grazing herd paid little attention to the crack of the rifle or to the slaughter. A skillful hunter by shooting animals that showed signs of panic, could make quite a killing before a stampede...perhaps a dozen - or twenty five or fifty animals at a stand. This number has been largely surpassed. The hunter followed up the herd until a day's skinning was ~~well~~ secured.

The skinners followed the hunter who were followed by the cook, hitching a yoke of oxen to a wagon and loading the wagon with the hides until it was full, then returning to camp. There the hides were thrown on the ground ~~flask~~ flesh side up, a knife stuck throughout the edges and pegs driven.

The hunter, his kill sufficient, returned to camp, melted lead, reloaded shells and made ready for another day. In the evening all gathered around the campfire for the second meal of the day, of which buffalo meat constituted the larger part. Then pipes and bed.

Hides were marketed at trading posts, or hauled direct to the railroad. During 1874 and up to 1878 ox trains brought thousands of hides to Sherman and Denison for sale and shipment to tannery markets.

The destruction of buffalo, so much deplored, has some justification. A beneficent providence provided them for the sustan-

ance of primitive man. They were the storehouse upon which the plains tribes drew - and could not exist without the buffalo. The western tribes were not agriculturalists and were averse to industrial labor - and the indians and whites could not occupy the same country in peace.

The destruction of the herds broke the spirit of hostile tribes and forced them onto reservations. It also made it possible to stock ranges with domestic cattle. Cattle could not be held on ranges visited by buffalo. ~~xxxxxxx~~ In their migrations the buffalo swept domestic cattle along with them - and fences were no obstacle to their progress. Moving in masses and with their thick ~~xxxxxxx~~ hides and wooly coats, the buffalo would destroy any fence around a pasture or farm.

The savage and the buffalo were admirably adapted to their day and to each other, but they were inimical to civilization. The law of survival of the fittest has prevailed and Texas is moving forward to fulfillment of her destiny.

Note: Buffalo were migratory, grazing north in the spring and summer and south during fall and winter. However, on the ranges a few isolated bunches might be found the year round, principally old bulls.