



Konza Bison: To Market, To Market

By Annie Baker,

Special thanks to Tom Van Slyke and Dr. Gene Towne for contributing to this article.

This year, for bison roundup, uncommonly, the entire herd was successfully corralled. Eleven docents assisted as 412 bison, including 79 calves, were weighed, tagged, vaccinated and sorted. This year, 99 animals were selected for sale (18 yearling bulls, 22 yearling heifers, 27 two-year old bulls, 7 two-year old heifers, 9 six- and seven-year old bulls, and 16 nine years or older cows). Since no cow-calf pairs are sold, the 2008 overwinter herd size, until spring calving, is 313 animals.

You may not realize planning for the annual three-day November bison roundup takes place year-round. The herd is observed two to three times each week and more intensively during calving in April and May, to confirm cow-calf pairings. By mid-October, the bison begin to be conditioned, with range cubes and hay, to follow a truck honking its horn. During the two-week process, the animals are moved into Phase 1 and then the corral in time for roundup.



Though roundup allows the bison to be inspected, culling the herd to maintain the proper stocking rate is a central goal. The herd structure is maintained at approximately 213 animal units for the 2480-acre grazing enclosure (1 animal unit = 1000 pounds). This selection process begins before roundup by a committee of Konza Prairie staff and ecologists who choose bison to cull based on their previous year's weight and field observations from throughout the year. The general criteria for culling the herd are as follows: bulls 7 years and older, open cows (without calves) 15 years and older, as well as lightweight two-year old and yearling bulls and heifers. As a substitute for natural predators, lightweight young bison and old bison are culled. The final decisions are made during roundup as each animal is weighed and inspected. Culled animals are sorted in separate pens by age and gender for veterinary work in preparation for sale.

Immediately following roundup, interested buyers are given information on the bison for sale, including each animal's age, weight and gender. Buyers are primarily interested in bison for meat, though they are also sold for private herds. Bidders return a price per pound for each group of animals they are interested in buying. This year the ranges of bids were as follows: for two-year old bulls, \$0.92-\$1.10 per pound; for yearling bulls, \$0.70-\$1.02 per pound; and for six- and seven-year old bulls, \$0.60-\$0.65 per pound. Bids for groups of heifers and cows were slightly lower. The highest bidder takes the entire group of animals, although the Konza Prairie committee reserves the right to reject a bid if it isn't reasonable for the current market. In 2007, the highest bidder took all groups of animals, but in 2008, three bidders were accepted as buyers for different groups.

The sale of bison is very important to Konza Prairie's operating budget, contributing approximately 25% annually, depending upon the market. The committee attends the State of Kansas auction at Maxwell Wildlife Refuge in mid-November and the Kansas Buffalo Association (KBA) auction in Salina the first Saturday in December to gather information (prices, sellers, buyers) about the current bison market. Recently the meat market has been driving prices and it's hard to get a premium price on a quality animal at auction.

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Prairie Patter

by Dr. Valerie Wright, Environmental Educator and Naturalist

This has been perhaps our busiest fall season ever. There have been 1,142 people (mostly students) visit through KEEP. That includes 463 in September and 679 in October (but does not include Visitors' Day). There were 44 docents helping with these groups, including five of the new trainees. Many thanks to those docents who stepped up to Annie's calls for help. Because of their willingness the season went smoothly.

Twenty-three SLTER groups collected data during this time frame. On October 8 Randy McFall's 8th grade class from Junction City Middle School collected a species new to KPBS during the Fall Grasshopper Inventory. It is the Restless Bush Cricket, *Hapithus agitator*. One of a few species common to the southeastern United States, Konza Prairie is on the far western edge of its distribution.



Docent training was completed on three Saturdays, September 6, 13 and 20. Graduation for eight new docents was September 26 before the FOKP Annual Meeting. Nearly 80 people were in attendance. The graduates are **Abby Crouse, Carol Gadbury** (co-Docent Trainee of the year along with **Sue Smith**), **Joanne Gallaher, John Henry, Colleen Hampton, Sue Smith, Dean Stramel, and Dennis Toll**. The Docent Committee voted **Charlie Given** Docent of the Year and made **Dr. Eva Horne** an honorary docent. **Joe Gelroth** was given the Leadership Award.

Forty-nine docents, FOKP Board members and spouses volunteered for Visitors' Day. Thanks to **Dennis Toll** and several FOKP Board members, sponsors generated funds toward the cost of busses and vans for Bison Loop tours. People didn't have to purchase tickets or wait in line because of the generosity of several Manhattan businesses, which received great publicity for their help. They were Irvine's Floor Coverings, Don's Stump Removal, Alltel, Claflin Books and Copies, Ray's Apple Market, People's Grocery, Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, Coldwell Banker Real Estate and Chod and Sari Hedinger.

The Fall Docent Roundup took place as a cleanup day for Hokanson Homestead the Sunday before Visitors' Day. **Myron Calhoun, Nancy Calhoun, Gordon Cunningham, Bob Davis, Joye Gordon, Garry Harter, Chod Hedinger (Sari), Sue Hunt and son Alan, Susie Johnson, Larry Loomis, Nan Mueller, Ann Murphy and husband Pat, Cindy Quinlan, Phoebe Samelson and husband Franz, Sue Smith and Dennis Toll** participated.

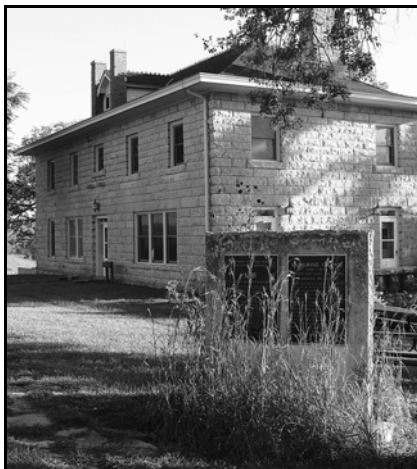
A second Fall Docent Roundup gathered volunteers as a Fall social event on Sunday afternoon, October 12. **Chod Hedinger** baked a chocolate cherry cobbler in a Dutch oven on site. Mmmmm, good! The afternoon was absolutely gorgeous.

New pages on the KEEP web site have been added for the history of the Dewey Ranch by **Charlie Given**, the history of the Hokanson Homestead and part of Lloyd Hulbert's history of KPRNA (www.k-state.edu/konza/keep/about/history.htm). Enjoy!

Here are some of the great things that our volunteers and others have done for us this year. **Charlie Given** finished restoring the old saddle and built a stand for it. **Sue Hunt** refinished the old stool that the saddle used to sit on and it shows beautifully the walnut wood. **Gary Jeffery** thought of KEEP at a book sale and brought us more than a dozen children's books about the prairie for the library.



Chod serving cobbler



Ordway Memorial

Check out the prairie community inside the fence around the Ordway Memorial. Volunteers **Anne Humburg, Adi Angel, Nancy Calhoun, Abby Crouse, Darren and Shelly Gunderson, Sue Hunt, Susie Johnson, Sara Leavitt, Sue Smith and Dennis Toll** helped dig and replant native prairie plants at the monument. There are Big Bluestem, Lead Plant, Purple Cone Flower, Butterfly Milkweed, Yarrow, sunflowers and other forbs. Other grasses and perennials will be added in the future. This fall the Big Bluestem was six feet tall.

Byron and Betty Burlingham built the bison silhouette. You may have seen people taking their pictures by and in it at Visitors' Day. Docent and Konza neighbor **Jan Olewnik** has replaced another door and window shutter on the Hokanson observation lean-to and barn. Jan has made all of the doors for the Hokanson barn and shed. His fine craftsmanship has given us doors to last a hundred years! The local-milled heavy oak planks were donated by **Dave Scott**, another Konza neighbor. **Marcia and Steve Stockham** water-proofed the outdoor seating area that their son, Mark, had built as an Eagle project. **Bill Marshall** cleaned out the Ranch House flowerbeds as he has done for several years in the fall.



Annie Baker as prize bison

Last but not least is a generous donation from Alpha Delta Kappa given to KEEP in appreciation of a wildflower program by **Mike Haddock**, FOKP Board member. **TGG**

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SPOTLIGHT! on Susie Johnson

By Annie Baker

Even before graduating from the Docent Program, Susie Johnson had already volunteered for twelve events. For her willingness to jump in and for her leadership, especially during science activities, Susie was honored as Docent Trainee of the Year in September 2007. Susie continues to enjoy volunteering and has guided over 32 tours since graduating!

Growing up in Junction City, Susie often explored the Flint Hills with her father, sharing his love of hunting and nature. While hunting, they would observe wildlife and wildflowers and take notice as the seasons changed. On a memorable summer night hunting coyote with their trail hounds, Susie remembers laying back on top of the dog box, gazing up at the night sky and listening to the echo of the hounds as they worked. Susie credits her father for her respect and honor of nature.

Susie continues to explore the Flint Hills prairie; walking and hunting for upland game birds with her Gordon Setters, Aggie and Mac. "Sometimes we even shoot," she jokes. Susie devotes three to four days each week in the field training her dogs to find, point and retrieve birds. She competes with Aggie in Hunt Tests through her Gordon Setter Club twice a year. Aggie recently achieved Junior Hunter status and is working toward becoming a Senior Hunter.

Susie's educational background includes a BS in Secondary Education and Spanish and MS in Secondary Education from Kansas State University. She taught Spanish for 28 years at Junction City High School and Fort Riley Middle School, including 10 years as head of the Foreign Language Department. During this time, Susie feels honored to have been nominated for Who's Who Among America's Teachers three times by former students (students can nominate only one teacher from K-12 who made a significant difference in their lives).

Since retirement four years ago, Susie helps with Red Cross blood drives and the election board, and is a substitute teacher. She also spends time with her daughter Tori, who lives near Kansas City.

Susie discovered the Docent Program when chaperoning a field trip to Konza Prairie. With her love of the prairie and children, she felt the Docent Program was a "perfect match". Surprising herself, Susie enjoys interacting with elementary-aged children most. Hiking Nature Trail or Butterfly Hill, she asks children to experience the prairie using all their senses, and often incorporates poems, songs, props, and pictures to help visitors visualize the prairie before settlement time. She finds these strategies help children remember the most important themes.

Susie is grateful for the Docent Program's challenging experiences and on-going learning opportunities. Susie writes, "I love being able to be an ambassador for the Konza". **TGG**



Susie and Aggie recognized for Hunt Test achievement

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In the past several years, Konza Prairie used a combination of public (KBA) and private bid offerings to test each marketing method. For example, in 2007, half of the two-year old bulls were sent to KBA and the other half sold through private offering. In 2008, culled animals were sold privately. There are certain advantages using the private bid offering method. Taking bison to auction requires Konza Prairie to corral and feed them until the auction, haul them to Salina, and pay commission and other fees when the bison are sold. The bison typically lose four to five percent body weight from roundup to auction, and at the auction, buyers place bids based on how much the animals weigh that day. In addition, the risk of disease or injury is greater for bison taken to auction. Instead, using private bids, the buyer pays per pound based on the animals' weight the day of roundup, and is responsible for picking up their group of animals from Konza Prairie as quickly as possible.

Read more about Konza Prairie's roundup and find the bison database from our website, The Docent's Notebook, <http://www.k-state.edu/konza/keep/docents/private/resources.htm> . **TGG**



Tallgrass Gazette

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Return Service Requested

Konza Docent Calendar - Save the Date!

Dec 14, 2:00pm-4:00pm - FOKP Holiday Gathering, Hulbert Center

Jan 10, 9:00am - Docent In-service: Dr. Lauren Ritterbush, Prehistoric Plains Indians

Jan 31, 9:00am - Docent Roundup: Dr. John Briggs, KPBS Director

Feb 21, 9:00am - New Docent Orientation: Dr. Eva Horne, Introduction

Feb 28, 9:00am - Docent Training begins, every Saturday

Jan or Feb, Plan for a Winter Workday in the Education Center

March 15, Prairie Chicken viewing begins, daily through April 15

Every Friday, 3:30-5:00pm - Meet at the Education Center for KONZA QUEST.

