



The Konza Prairie — The Home Where Our Buffy Roams

By Glenn M. Busset



About four years ago, one of the bison heifers delivered a calf, and like a number of the human types, she was inexperienced and confused in this whole business. So, she rejected her first-born and refused to let it nurse. Fortunately, some of the ranch hands noticed the forlorn little butterscotch-colored female orphan and brought her to the home corral for some more personal attention.

Director David Hartnett's kids substituted their 4-H concerns for the misinformed mother bison and raised the newly christened **Buffy** on the bottle. Soon she was a healthy and happy member of the Hartnett household. End of Phase I.

Phase II begins as the 'orphan' Buffy is released into the Konza herd, some 240 of them, to find a place for herself in the matriarchal society of bison. Buffy must find a place for herself, without the benefit of joining her mother's clan, led by a dominant female. She is now a rootless pariah, of sorts. Since bison have a strong tendency to look alike, and to assist in future identification, she is released with a large, yellow tag affixed to her right ear. Her name **Buffy** is stenciled on the tag, easy to read at a distance. It was hoped that she could sluff off her early identification with *Homo Sapiens* and become a well-integrated member of a bison family. How well she has completed this metamorphosis is the subject of Phase III.

A couple of years ago, more or less, we were on the Konza with family friends who had not been there before. They were excitedly photographing a small group of some 15 bison who were scattered along, a bit away from the fence. Presently a half-grown female, who was just beginning to show evidence of her 'maturity' (her hump was becoming apparent), detached herself from the group and came directly to the 'tourist' who was photographing through the fence. The large yellow tag in her ear identified her as **Buffy**. She seemed eager to have her ears and 'buttons' rubbed. She would soon begin to develop her horns. The visitors were enchanted with this close and friendly identification, so we were obliged to fill in the story of her past (and be somewhat amazed ourselves).

Now, leap forward another span of a couple of years, more or less. It is the 24th of March 2001, a miserably cold, windy day on the Prairie. I and several other docents were escorting a group of Topeka Boy Scouts and their leaders, parents, et al. through the bison loop. Near a gate stop on the return, most of the vans stopped to look at a cluster of bison, perhaps 50 yards from the fence. I was outside the van along the fence, vainly attempting to interest the boys and their leaders to leave the warmth of the vans and look at the group. Then, a handsome, fully developed bison cow detached herself from the others and came over to the fence. I was surprised at this unexpected movement and being on her left, could not see her ear tag. When I moved down along the fence, then I could see the familiar name **Buffy**.

I reached through the fence and scratched her behind the ears (something I would *NEVER* have attempted if we were both on the same side of the fence). This handsome bison female rubbed against my hand and when I pulled her horn, she moved as close as she could to the wires. I could not get anyone else out to greet her, so I gave her poll a final scratching and said goodbye. End of Phase III, which leaves more questions than it does answers.

All I could think of out there on the prairie in that cutting wind was what a surprising thing I was realizing. I could only wonder what this handsome, fully developed bison cow was thinking — or could she only feel and not think? She was, in a clearly definable way, different from her fellow bison. Was William Cullen Bryant onto something when he examined that dimly seen unknown as he wrote *Thanatopsis*? All I can say is, that on that cold and windy day, I had a heart-warming experience.

Glenn Busset is a retired state 4-H leader. He has been a devoted Konza docent since 1993.

Buffy Bio:
Born- 1996
Weighs- 850 lbs.
Offspring-
2 calves in 2000
and 2001

Prairie Patter

by **Dr. Valerie Wright, Environmental Educator and Naturalist**

One of the best ways to learn more about the tallgrass prairie (besides spending time on the prairie itself) is to read about it. There are so many wonderful books about everything from wildflowers to pioneer experiences and some of the best are in the Hulbert Library, right here at Konza Prairie. Come out on some winter afternoon and enjoy the sunny reading room at Konza. Each year we add books to the KEEP portion of the library. These are amended to the list of books handed out to the docents as an update. This year some titles are worth mentioning including a geology text with articles about our region (donated by Page Twiss).

“*The Sibley Guide to Bird Life and Behavior*” is illustrated by David Allen Sibley and contains an overview of bird biology including information on habitats, evolution and conservation by many experts. There are sections on flight, feathers, aerodynamics, migration, communication, reproduction and more. In the second part the families of birds are described with information on taxonomy, forging and breeding. Each family has a section on conservation and management with population trends and impact of human activities. There are a glossary and checklist at the back. What an amazing compilation of facts is here! It’s not a field guide but a source of additional information about the birds that interest you.

The second is called “*Stories from where we live: The Great North American Prairie.*” It is edited for the middle school reader but because it is a compilation of short stories, excerpts and poems from well-recognized authors, such as Willa Cather, Hamlin Garland, William Least Heat-Moon and many others, it is a good read for anyone. I enjoyed it by reading one or two authors whenever a few minutes were available.

The following is a list of our newest acquisitions:

- Brown, Lauren, *Wildflower and Winter Weeds* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1976).
- Forrest, Louise R., *Field Guide to Tracking Animals in Snow* (Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books, 1988).
- Glock, Jenna, Susan Wertz, & Maggie Meyer, *Discovering the Naturalist Intelligence: Science in the School Yard* (Tuscon, AZ: Zephyr Press, 1999).
- Hayward, O. T., *South-Central Section of the Geological Society of America, vol.4* (Boulder, CO: The Geological Society of America, 1988).
- Sibley, David Allen, *The Sibley Guide to Bird Life & Behavior* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001).



Jean and Jim



Loren

Docent Coorindators:

Jim and Jean Craig were honored for their wonderful years of service. We look forward to Jim’s continued good help and Jean’s nice cookies. Loren Alexander joins Veryl Richards as 2002 coordinators.

Tallgrass Gazette Editors:

Gordon Cunningham- cunningham@networksplus.net, Gerry Snyder- gsnyder@oznet.ksu.edu

New Docent Orientation:

Orientation for new docents is on February 27 in Ackert, Room 116 at 7:00 p.m.

With spring just around the corner, the search is on for members of the Docent Class of 2002. Since past surveys have shown that word of mouth is the best way to find new docents, we are asking all our enthusiastic docents to help us locate possible candidates. If you know someone with an interest in the prairie, we would like to extend an invitation for that person or persons to join our elite group.

Send their name, phone # and/or email address to:
Dr. Valerie Wright at www.konzaed@ksu.edu or
Doris Burnett at www.burnett@kansas.net
or call 785-537-2502.

Five Tips for Better Interpretation ⁽¹⁾ by Dr. Ted T. Cable

The profession of interpretation is a noble one in that interpreters serve others by providing them with life-enriching gifts of knowledge, beauty, happiness, and hope. Interpreters give these gifts with little expected in return - mostly out of the joy that comes from the giving. Interpreters are blessed with many gifts, and it is their blessing to share them with others.



Docent Sue Hunt

1. To spark an interest interpreters must relate the subject to the lives of the audience. Interpretation for local and nonlocal people, children, teenagers, and seniors should follow fundamentally different approaches. Target your specific audience with your message. An advertiser would not play the same commercial on MTV and A&E. You cannot expect to effectively give the same program or hike to children and adults. You must relate to lives of the audience or your interpretation efforts will be sterile. Interpreters are meaning-makers, not just disseminators of information. There is no shortage of information today. But meaning-makers are scarce and valuable. To make messages meaningful you must know and target your audience.

2. Don't overload people with many facts. People can only remember about 5 or 6 things in short term memory. Trying to teach more than that and you are wasting your time. (Think about going to the grocery store with only a mental list. How many things can you remember you need to buy without having to write them down?) Instead, have a few memorable themes. As my colleague Dr. Sam Ham says, "People remember themes, but forget facts." Giving people the names of 20 plants on a hike will be mostly meaningless. Instead have an important theme, reinforced by just a few facts or sub-themes.

3. An interpretive presentation should be designed as a story that informs, entertains, and enlightens. Stories are powerful forms of communication. The greatest teachers throughout history have used stories to teach profound truths. Often traditional stories are indigenous to the landscape making them especially poignant and powerful. Each day we are surrounded by stories. Indeed they are omnipresent in our lives. Much of what we say in conversations involves story-telling, even if it is only about how we spent the week-end. People find a story, delivered in a conversational style, easy to listen to and learn from. Make your interpretive story meaningful, memorable, and moving.

4. Provoke action. Interpretive programs should provoke people to broaden their horizons and act on that new found breadth. Be provocative by asking yourself "so what" when you are finished planning your talk or hike. Have an application to offer. Encourage some specific action, even if it is only to encourage further thought or study of the subject. Or provoke an emotional response. "Emotions are superior to facts," wrote Freeman Tilden the father of the interpretive profession. Educational psychologists and practicing interpreters agree that affecting emotions is a key factor in increasing learning, enhancing experiences, and changing attitudes and behavior - all goals of most interpretation. If you have no good answer to the question "so what" you are probably not applying the first tip of relating the subject matter to the lives of the audience members.

5. The key to being a good interpreter is passion. Passion not just for nature, but passion for the people in your audiences. Tilden called *love* (of both people and resources) the "priceless ingredient" of good interpretation. The best interpreters exhibit a missionary-like zeal in enthusiastically telling others about their site. This passion even applies to interpretive writing. Tilden quoted an axiom of good writing as saying, "Whatever is written without enthusiasm, will be read without interest." Inspired interpreters treat the public as welcome guests and consider it a privilege to serve them. At Konza, perfect interpreters would be a prairie-lovers who also care for people and feel compelled to share their prairie passions with the guests who visit. They share their prairie passions with wisdom, humility, and love - the priceless ingredient.

Dr. Ted Cable is a professor in the Department of Horticulture, Forestry and Recreation Resources at KSU. Ted teaches the environmental interpretation classes. He has co-authored two widely used books about interpretation and has published many articles on the process and profession of interpretation. Ted served as the first Editor of the Journal of Interpretation Research. In 2000, Ted was named a Fellow of the National Association for Interpretation and in 1996 received their Master of Interpretation award.

(1) Footnote: Adapted from "Interpretation for the 21 Century" by Larry Beck and Ted Cable, published by Sagamore Publishing. Urbana, IL. 242 p.



Docents News

Docent In-Service Training - Mark your Calendar!

Jan. 22: Annual Docent Round-up. 7pm at 221 Ackert Hall (KSU). Guest speaker Dr. Brett Sandercock, "Birds on the Konza Praire." Handouts, wildflower refresher, and more.

Feb. 9: Winter Tree Identification. 9am at the Education Center. Overview of native trees and horticultural plantings identifying buds, branches, bark and shape of trees.

March 2: Invertebrates of Kings Creek. 9am at the Nature Trail. We'll collect critters in the stream and identify them at the Education Center. This is a SLTER science activity.

March 9: Fire Reversal Study. 9am at the Nature Trail. Learn and participate in this new research project that carries out prescribed burning on the various Konza plots.

Announcement:

Konza Prairie Biological Station (KPBS) is taking reservations for its Prairie Chicken Blind for March 15 to April 15, 2002. Viewing the courtship behavior of the Greater Prairie Chickens will be allowed with a guide assigned by KPBS with a charge of \$5.00/person. The blind will accommodate nine persons plus a guide. Smaller groups will share the blind with others.

Meeting times are generally 4:30am with several details and guidelines for participants.

For more information or to make a reservation, please call Dr. Valerie Wright, Environmental Educator/Naturalist, KPBS, at 785/587-0381 or e-mail keepkonza@ksu.edu.

We are offering two days to view the prairie chickens for docents free of charge. The dates are April 17th and 18th at 5:00 a.m. Reservations are first come, first serve. We are limited to nine spots per morning. Please contact Jan Evans to reserve a place at jevans2@ksu.edu.



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