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Ten year old herd buffalo Lakota, belonging to Lyle Hutchens of Hendley Nebr. He roams the 30 acre pasture outside Lyle's kitchen window with his harem of two cows and their five offspring. Lyle has been raising his herd since 1985 having had only one other herd buffalo.

Private operators to go out and hunt

By Dana Paxton

*The Norton Telegram
dpaxton@nwkansas.com*

American bison have been hunted throughout our history and while their numbers have greatly decreased over the past 150 years, people continue to hunt these magnificent beasts.

That there is a buffalo hunt is thanks to private herd owners throughout the U.S. For the hunt to survive to the hunt of a lifetime, here's a look at the past and present hunt of the great American Buffalo.

In 1870, the Great Plains teemed with bison, as many as 30 million roaming a vast expanse of grassland. These great animals were the main food source for the Native American Indian tribes, who used every part of the animal. Hides went for bedding, clothes and shelter. The meat, of course, was dried and consumed. The bones and hulls from the horns were made into tools. The tendons were dried and used as sewing string, called sinew, while the stomach became a water container. The natives left nothing to waste.

At this time, the government realized that an industry could be developed to exploit the buffalo. In doing this they would not only reduce the numbers, but they also knew that it would have a great negative impact on the Plains Indians.

Bison were slaughtered for their meat, hides, bones and senseless sport. By 1883, there were fewer than 500 wild buffalo left on the prairie. In a 12-to-13-year period, almost 30 million buf-

falo were killed. On average, it took three shots to kill one animal, and after killing 30 million buffalo, that would have left 3,000 tons of lead scattered across the plains. It wasn't until 1894 that President Grover Cleveland made it illegal to kill buffalo. At this time, only a little more than 300 survived.

Today, the numbers have greatly increased, thanks to private and commercial herd owners. Fifteen years ago, buffalo raising was a commercial industry where the animals would be kept in feed lots and fed grain to fatten them up. The private herd owners of today mostly raise their herds on the native grasses they once lived on with no additives or chemicals introduced into their diets.

The buffalo is still hunted for sport and food through paid buffalo hunts. Big-game hunters are the most common customer. They buy hunts for the nutritional meat, hides, mounts, memories and photographs. The typical hunting season runs from September to February, since the hides are at their prime during these months.

If you haven't ever tried buffalo, you are in for a treat. It has a sweet, juicy flavor with a mild but hearty taste. When comparing buffalo meat to that of 90 percent extra lean beef, pork or skinless chicken, it has less fat, calories, cholesterol and saturated fat. It contains higher levels of protein and iron. You can see the difference when cooking it because there is virtually no fat. Overall, many consider buffalo meat the healthier choice.



Dana Paxton with her first ever buffalo kill. She hunted the animal on her fathers land and killed it with an original 40-90 bottleneck Sharps Buffalo Rifle.

offers rare chance magnificent buffalo

If you are interested in purchasing a paid buffalo hunt, you have several options throughout Nebraska, Kansas, the Dakotas and Missouri. Researching the type of hunt you want and how much money you want to spend is the first step. Outfitters offer hunts from one day to a week.

Most places offer meals and lodging. The hunter needs to decide is the size of animal to be harvested, whether or not they want the hide, the meat, the mount or just the opportunity.

The prices for hunts can vary, depending on the size and sex of the animal to be taken. A prime cow weighing 900 to 1,100 pounds averages \$1,350. A 2 1/2- to 6-year-old bull weighing 1,350 to 1,500 pounds ranges from \$2,250 to \$2,800. A trophy bull 7 years or older weighing 1,800 plus pounds can run anywhere from \$2,950 to as high as \$6,500.

To look at it in another way, the meat would cost \$1 to \$3 per pound live on the hoof. If you go to the store to buy buffalo meat, the average cost of ground burger is \$5 a pound where a T-bone or rib-eye will run \$14 to \$16.

Tanning the hide is another expense to be looked at. Average cost to tan a small 1,000 pound cow buffalo hide is \$10 a square foot. The average size is 40 square feet. To tan a large bull hide, the average cost is \$15 per square foot, with the size being around 60 square feet.

Several area ranches provide paid buffalo hunts, including:

- The Homestead Ranch, north of Goodland operated by Ken and Laurie Klemm can be

reached at 785-899-5804 or at ken@homestead-ranch.com or at www.thebuffaloguys.com.

- The Hawes Ranch Outfitters in Ford, south of Dodge City operated by Lee Hawes can be reached at 620-369-2204 or at hunt@hawes.org or at www.hawes.org/hunt

- Bluestem Buffalo Ranch in Sterling can be reached at 1-866-296-2583 or at www.bluestembuffalo.com

- Buffalo Bill Hunts north of Scott City can be reached at www.buffalobillhunts.com

- Dave Chalfan, Hill City, at 785-421-2731

The state also has breeders who just sell meat. Two area examples would be Larry Radcliff, Hill City at 785-421-2835 and Lyle Hutchens, Hendley, Neb., 308-265-7476.

Anyone interested in the hunt of a lifetime should shop around. There are many options and places to choose from. Nothing can beat the experience and memories that you will take away with you, not to mention the large amount of healthy meat, a beautiful robe, an impressive mount and a story to tell.

Dana Paxton, general manager of The Norton Telegram, says she has been hunting since she was twelve years old with her first kill being a mule deer on her fathers land. She got her first buffalo in 1995 out of her father's buffalo herd using an original 40-90 bottleneck Sharps Buffalo rifle like the ones used by the buffalo hunters of old. She says it was one of the most thrilling hunts of her life, "Not everyone can say they have killed such a magnificent beast."



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