

Buddy Bison in the Tallgrass Prairie

by

Rob Cohen

Buddy Bison was used to the surroundings of his home in Yellowstone Park among the tall mountains, the rambling rivers and the deep green pine forests.

But today, Rancher Roy was taking Buddy Bison on a trip through the Great Plains in search of other bison families.

The plains were quite unlike Buddy Bison's home. The land was nearly flat and treeless.

The sky was BIG. Buddy Bison thought the cluster of small white clouds looked like a flock of sheep floating over the plains.

Tall grassy fields spread out for miles beyond the highway. Other than a few distant farm buildings, there was nothing else to be seen.

“This may look like a lot of nothing, Buddy Bison,” Rancher Roy said, “but this is just the type of land bison herds love.”

Buddy Bison wasn't sure. He preferred a cozy barn with fresh, hot meals provided by Rancher Roy.

As they rode through Kansas, Buddy Bison began noticing low grassy hills.

“We are entering the Flint Hills of Kansas,” Roy announced, “and this is one of our newest national parks, the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve.”

“The prairies once stretched unbroken from Canada to Texas to Indiana. Most of that land has been plowed for farming, but this park preserves a part of the prairie.”

Roy parked the trailer and led Buddy Bison to a trail. Buddy Bison tried to imagine a time when thousands of bison were grazing across these rolling hills.

“This is the Bottomland Trail,” Roy explained. “As we walk, look closely at all the different types of grasses and wildflowers.”

At first, Buddy Bison saw only one endless field of knee-high grass. But then he looked closer. There were shorter grasses mixed in. Some grasses were bluish, some greenish and some brownish. Some had feathery tips, others were narrow and pointy.

“You’ll see *Bluestem* grass and *Indian Grass*,” Rancher Roy explained. “There’s wispy *Canada Wild Rye* and the sharp-edged *Prairie Cordgrass*. Don’t cut your legs!”

And there were many different wildflowers! Some were so tiny that Buddy Bison took out his magnifying glass to examine them.

There were *Blue Verbena* and orange *Buffalo Gourd*, *Violet Prairie Flox*, red *Indian Paintbrush*, fuzzy *Milkweed* and white and yellow *Daisies*. So much color was hidden among the grasses!

The bison was also surprised to see many different colorful butterflies flitting from flower to flower.

“*Monarchs, Red Admirals, Zebra Swallowtails*—they’re all here in the Prairie,” Roy said. Buddy Bison tried to imagine what a Zebra butterfly would look like.

Then, Buddy Bison saw what looked like a field of dark brown bushes scattered on the hillside. As he got closer, he saw the bushes were walking!

Rancher Roy said, “Here is what I really wanted you to see, Buddy Bison. Maybe they are some old friends of yours?”

Buddy Bison now realized he was approaching a small herd of bison! He trotted ahead of Roy to greet them.

The herd nodded and snorted to welcome their new friend. Buddy Bison whirled his tail ‘round and ‘round in response. Rancher Roy took several pictures of the reunion.

Roy spread out a picnic blanket and set out a basket of food. The other bison seemed to prefer to graze on the grasses, but they stayed close by while Buddy Bison and Roy chowed down on PB & J sandwiches.

“Centuries ago, bison roamed the great plains by the millions,” Roy explained. “Now there are only a few places where bison still roam free.”

Buddy Bison tried to imagine a time when bison were everywhere. He pictured bison walking down city streets and riding tractors down dusty prairie roads!

Roy unfolded a large map of the United States. “Of course, your home in Yellowstone Park has the most free-roaming bison, but smaller herds live in several parks in South Dakota, including Custer State Park, Wind Cave National Park, and Badlands National Monument.”

Roy circled the locations on the map and continued, “Bison also live in Niabara National Wildlife Refuge in Nebraska and Theodore Roosevelt National Park in North Dakota.”

Buddy Bison was happy that free-roaming bison lived in other parks and nature preserves and hoped that their numbers would increase.

As the sun set over the Flint Hills of Kansas, Buddy Bison waved once again to his bison friends and hopped in the trailer for the long ride home.

About Buddy Bison® and National Park Trust

Buddy Bison is the mascot of National Park Trust (NPT), the nation's only organization dedicated to the completion and full appreciation of the American system of national and state parks through the identification of key land acquisition needs. In addition, NPT's Buddy Bison School Program is designed to fulfill our vision that everyone will have an American park experience, especially those from underserved communities. For more information visit:

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About the Author

Rob Cohen of Potomac, Maryland is the author of several original children's musicals which have been performed by elementary school students around the country. He has recently turned his creative efforts to writing picture books which capture the same spirit of youthful discovery, humor and imagination of his plays.