The Western Regional Button Association is pleased to share our educational articles with the button collecting community. This article appeared in the August 2007 WRBA newsletter, *Territorial News*. Enjoy! And consider joining WRBA! Go to [www.WRBA.us](http://www.WRBA.us)
and left where they fell.

Buffalo Bill Cody boasted of killing over 4,200 bison in an 18-month period. Railroads even advertised that passengers could “pник” as many bison as they could from the train.

When gold was discovered in the Black Hills, fortune seekers flooded the area, despite the fact that Indians legally owned the area. When conflict arose, President Grant sent in troops to put the Indians on reservations and take the land. To drive them out, his troops slaughtered all bison herds they could find to destroy the Native Americans’ food supply.

Hide hunters killed thousands each year for the $1.25 per pelt. Bison tongue was a popular item on restaurant menus during this time. By the late 1800s their huge herds were hunted almost to extinction, with the only remaining 600 bison in parks and zoos.

When Yellowstone National Park was formed in 1872, bison were protected within its borders. However, poachers decimated bison numbers and U.S. troops had to be called in to protect the Park’s animals. In 1902, only 20 bison had lived despite the poachers.

From 1913 to 1938 the U.S. minted over 1.2 BILLION nickels.

With a bison on one side.

Today two sub-species survive: the plains bison and the wood bison. The bison’s only serious threat, other than man, comes from wolves and grizzly bears.

The American Bison Society was formed in 1905 to protect the bison. Today, bison herds are maintained by 17 States.

Cow birds are welcome visitors to bison and feed on the bugs thriving in the bison’s long, thick fur. The insects cause itching, which the bison combats in two ways: by wallowing in the dust and by scratching against trees and rocks. In the plains, tickling sites are few and far between. In Kansas in the 1800s, the railroad chases spikes into their posts to protect them from buffalo rubbing. It backfired, though, because the buffalo liked the spikes even more.

Bison herds are composed of cows, calves and young adults, and are led by an old cow. Herds routinely move 10-15 miles per day as they graze. Bulls stay in their own herd part of the year.
While a herd may number in the thousands, it is comprised of small bands of from 3-50 members. As the herd spreads to graze, the bands stay together.

Cows stand about 5-feet tall at the shoulder and weigh more than 700 pounds. Bulls can stand 6-feet tall at the shoulder and weigh 2000 pounds. Both cows and bulls have horns.

They become independent at about one year, and are fully mature when they are two to four years old. Buffalo live to be 15-25 years old.

Bison are recognized by the large hump above the shoulder and thick hair on the head, neck and shoulders. The skin on the bison's neck and head can be an inch thick. Indians used this tough skin for shields. Calves are born with a light-colored coat that darkens through its first year. Rarely, a bison can be born, and remain, completely white. Bison eyesight is weak.

Bison have a protective instinct to stampede when danger threatens. They can run 35 miles per hour and sustain that pace for the full hour. If one bison starts to run, other bison will join in the stampede, and the whole herd may run for many miles. This behavior was used in hunting, as Native Americans would drive the stampeding herd toward a cliff, called a "buffalo jump."

Bibliography
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