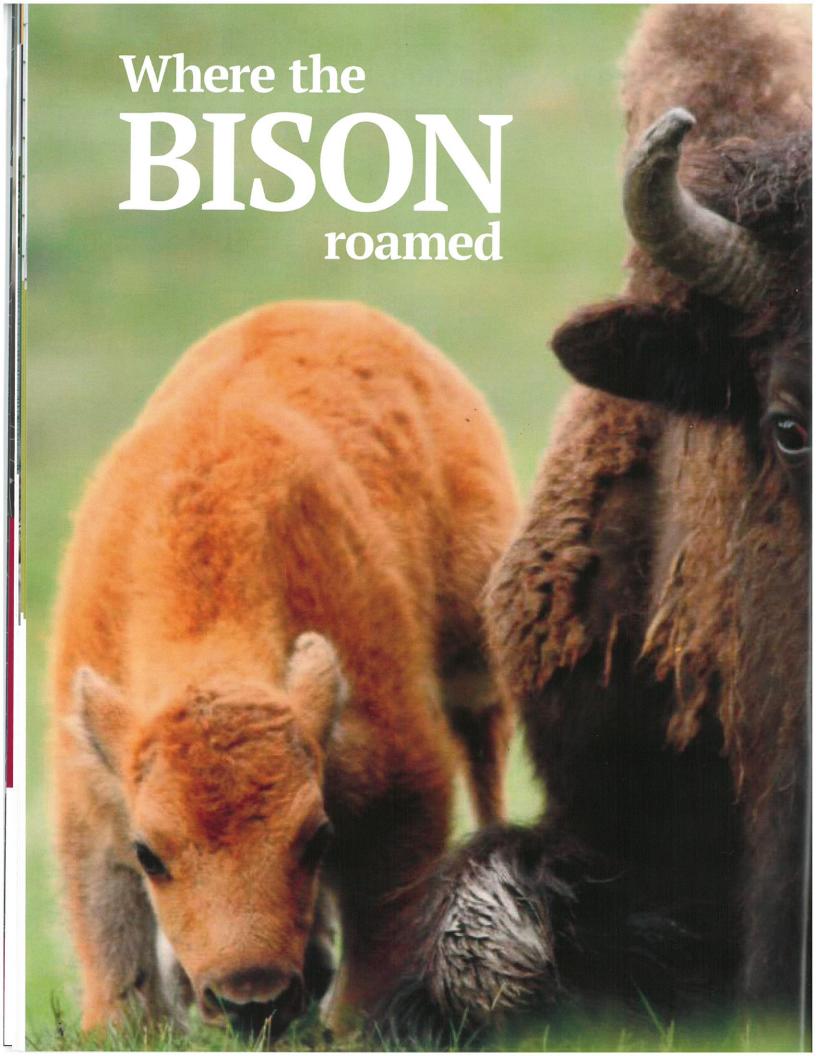
Pickleball: Where, how and why you should play

The life-changing words of incarcerated men

Art, music & food at Haynie's Corner





# A bison at Kankakee Sands stays near its calf. Baby bison are called "red dogs" because of their orange-red color at birth. /Photo by Gary Fua and courtesy of The Nature Conservancy

# Follow in the wake of the bison herds that shaped our landscape.

### By Gillian Fulford and Elaina Wilson

In the early 1800s, a young explorer named Eli Farnham and his wife, Jerusha, look over the landscape of Southern Indiana. They know they're landlocked, but, somehow, they're lost in a sea — a sea of massive, shaggy, brown creatures that stretches as far as they can see and flows steadily toward the great river the Iroquois call the O-y-o.

Jerusha writes in her journal that the furry giants cover the countryside so completely it's dangerous for their cavalcade to break through. They know the Native Americans and settlers depend on the herd for food and hides. But, more important, they know the herd can go from a walk to a stampede in seconds. So they sit quietly until the beasts pass.

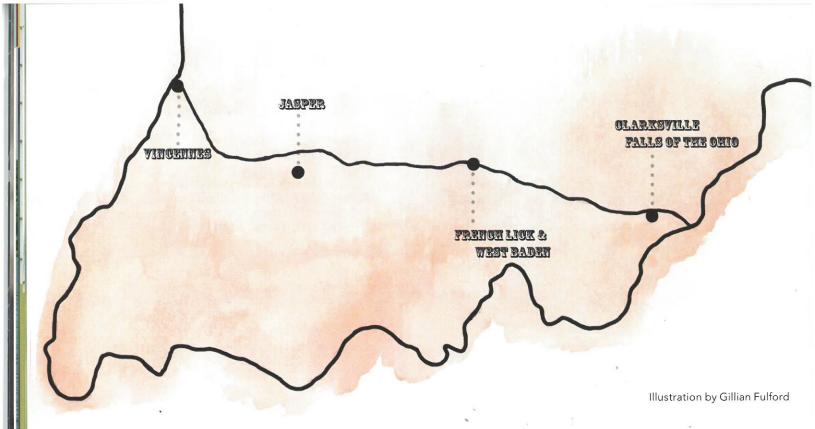
By the mid-1800s, this vast sea of bison was gone — all dried up. In 1830, the last free-ranging bison east of the Mississippi was shot in nearby French Lick.

But for hundreds of years, the nation's largest mammal roamed freely across Southern Indiana. Each year, herds trekked from the open prairies of Illinois to the Big Bone and Blue salt licks in Kentucky, shaping our landscape and our history as well. The trail — or trace — they left behind helped early European settlers find their way through the wilderness to set up fur-trapping camps that would eventually become towns.

The free-ranging bison's path from Vincennes to New Albany, known today as the Buffalo Trace, is still visible in several places. And Indiana's Historic Pathways, a coalition of passionate and dedicated history buffs, are working to mark its history along modern roadways.

The group, along with county historians and tourism officials, is breathing new life into the trace, says Mary Ann Hayes, president of the Dubois County Museum and a Pathways member. "The trace became a National Scenic Byway in 2009," Hayes says, "and the IHP is working to celebrate its historical, cultural and archaeological importance."

Inspired by their work, we set out to retrace the steps of Indiana's bison herds, both to explore the trace's past and to find new attractions that make this historic road trip worthy of any sunny day.



# Vincennes: The trace begins

Before our journey begins, we need to get one thing straight. Although we are trekking along the Buffalo Trace, the mammal that carved its way into Indiana's history and landscape was actually the bison — and, yes, there is a difference. In fact, although we often use the two terms interchangeably, buffalo have never existed in the wild on this continent. Instead, they're primarily found in Africa and Asia. In North America, we had bison.

For hundreds of years, herds of these bison crossed the Wabash River from the grasslands of Illinois into what is now the city of Vincennes. The shallower waters here made it easier for the small-footed mammal to cross, says Frank Doughman, superintendent of the George Rogers Clark National Historical Museum.

Native Americans and bison lived side-by-side in the Hoosier wilderness. The Piankashaw, a local Miami tribe, relied on bison meat as a staple of their diet and frequently traveled along the trace, known to them as "Lan-an-zo-ki-mi-wi," which means "bison road."

But a change was coming. In 1732, Jean Baptiste Bissot, his family and 10 other men settled in the area to trap beavers for fur and founded the first European settlement in the region. "The crossroads of the Wabash and the Buffalo Trace was what initially drew settlers to Vincennes," Doughman says.

Those who followed used the trace,

already worn into the landscape by bison and local tribes, to move westward. Their encounters with the Native Americans weren't always friendly. "When white settlers traveling along the Buffalo Trace encountered the Piankashaw, they shot first," Hayes says.

The settlers also killed bison for food and byproducts like horns and hides. Hayes speculates that the growing number of settlers, plus a particularly harsh winter in the late 1700s, may have caused the bison to stop migrating along their usual trek. By the time Vincennes became the capital of the newly established Indiana Territory in 1800, the bison were mostly gone.

By then, the region was home to nearly 4,000 settlers, and the trace bustled with a different kind of activity. Territory Governor William Henry Harrison asked the federal government for land grants "to establish small stations . . . for the accommodation of travelers," according to Wilson's history. The Buffalo Trace became a mail and stagecoach route between Vincennes and New Albany, since the surrounding woodlands were still so dense that they were almost impenetrable, he wrote.

Today, portions of U.S. Route 150 and Indiana State Road 56 follow the bison's original route. While you're in Vincennes, visit the 1804 home of Gov. Harrison, who became the ninth U.S. president. The first brick house in the

state, Grouseland is now a museum. Other historic sites include the state's oldest library and first school of higher learning, Jefferson Academy. The George Rogers Clark National Historical Park commemorates the accomplishments of the Revolutionary War hero with murals, a memorial and exhibits.

If you're looking for a bite to eat, check out Cafe Moonlight, located at 512 Main St. in Vincennes. This modern eatery features nightly specials like smoked-paprika-and-almond-crusted baked tilapia with crème brûlée for dessert. It's the perfect place to dream about the moonlight on the Wabash as you prepare for the next leg of your journey.

#### Bison vs. buffalo

We use the names interchangeably, but what's the difference? Early settlers saw similarities with the buffaloes of Africa and Asia and mistakenly called the bison a buffalo. However, bison have humps, short necks, huge heads and shaggy fur, while buffalo have long horns, smooth fur and cattle-like faces. And buffalo never lived in North America.

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#### What's in the box?

Buffalo Trace Boxes are a key part of the Hoosier fourth-grade public school experience along the trace. The boxes are also in libraries and museums along the trail so homeschooled students can get their hands on Indiana history as well. Here's what you'll find in the boxes:

- Hands-on bison experience: Bison fur, horn caps and pieces of dung give students the chance to experience bison without the danger that comes with being up close with the temperamental and territorial animals.
- Trace artifacts: Students relive the trace experience with artifacts that include rare buffalo nickels (nickels minted in the United States in attempts to add more attractive art to currency), a surveyor's compass and chain and parts of muzzleloaders.
- The Indiana state seal: The earliest version of the Indiana state seal, dating back to 1801,

- displays the story of our bison, fleeing before a settler felling a tree. The bison's back feet are in the air as he jumps over a log away from the woodsman.
- The Buffalo Trace Song: An original song by Charles Moman tells the tale of settlers on the trace so children can learn Indiana history through song.

"Our town is too big.
I'm feeling closed in.
We need to go West
and start all over again
Farewell old friends,
We need to stake our claim
The Buffalo Trace is calling my name."



As the bison moved southeastward from Vincennes, they often stopped in what is now Dubois County. Here the animals wallowed in the mud and found water and sugarcane at the longgone Buffalo Pond, about two miles north of Jasper. Male bison dug their horns down into the marshy earth until they created holes to sit in and escape the flies, Hayes says, leading to the trail's nickname, Mud Hole Trace.

The families of brothers William and John McDonald became the first European settlers when they built their cabin in 1801, creating the first permanent settlement in Dubois County. They plowed fields where the trace crossed the Red Banks Trail, an Indian footpath. The McDonalds were first-and second-generation Scotch, English and German pioneers, Hayes says. The McDonalds' cabin became a stop for weary travelers along the trail, offering food, drink and a place to sleep after a long day traversing the Hoosier wilderness.

Traveling on the Buffalo Trace wasn't easy for the early pioneers. Although the wide trail was easy to pass over, pounded flat by years of bison hooves, Native American raids made travelers wary. Starting in 1812, military rangers patrolled the trail, and their camps sprouted along the trace — one in Dubois County near the mud holes and another in Washington

County, where the path crossed the Big Blue River, Hayes says.

Despite the dangers, the trace brought even more settlers to the region. Among them were Thomas and Nancy Lincoln, who moved with their children Abraham and Sarah just seven miles south of Dubois County in 1816, the year Indiana became a state. Abraham, of course, would become the 16th president of the United States. The Lincolns' log cabin still sits there today.

More than a century later in 1936, school superintendent, civil engineer and surveyor George R. Wilson determined the route of the historic Buffalo Trace across Southern Indiana and wrote several prominent books about the history and topography of the region. He began surveying as early as 1896 and continued to do so until his death, working to ensure the children along the trace knew about their heritage.

Over the years, the Indiana's Historic Pathways group, and others working to protect the trace's legacy, have used Wilson's detailed research to learn about the history of Southern Indiana and the importance of the trace in modern destinations along its path, Hayes says.

Today, many road trip-worthy activities in Dubois County center around the Buffalo Trace. For starters,

the Dubois County Museum showcases Jasper's history and German heritage. The old factory-turned-museum also features a 6-foot-tall, stuffed bison named Trace, who regularly appeared on a parade float for the annual Strassenfest in Jasper. "You would know the stuffed buffalo was coming because schoolchildren would run down the street yelling, 'Trace! Trace!' Hayes says. Sadly, the tradition ended one rainy year for fear of the drizzle ruining Trace's coat.

Just seven miles of town on gravelly County Road 600, you'll notice a granite monument in Sherritt Cemetery, where the original McDonald cabin stood. William McDonald is buried here, along with many of the county's original families.

"Local people take care of the graveyard," Hayes says. "People here really care about heritage. We stay in touch with the roots here."

Dubois County's German heritage still runs deep today. The Schnitzelbank Restaurant, located at 393 3rd Ave. in Jasper, is a popular stop for visitors and locals alike. It has a variety of German favorites, from bratwurst and knackwurst to the iconic Hoosier staple the breaded tenderloin, which food historians believe originated here.

Next stop: A watering hole for herds of bison and crowds of a very different nature.

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The West Baden Springs Hotel features an atrium, the resort's focal point, that spans more than 200 feet. /Photo courtesy of Visit French Lick West Baden

# French Lick and West Baden: Seeking salt

Patty Drabing, director of the French Lick West Baden Museum, believes the springs near the towns were a common drinking and resting place for bison on their journey to the Ohio. The bison would lick minerals left behind by the evaporating spring water, which bubbled up through the limestone in the valley. Years later, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt would bathe in those famed waters, which were rumored to cure diseases from rheumatism to alcoholism.

When Wilson surveyed Southern Indiana in 1935, he described the plant life along the marshy patches of grass and wildflowers that would someday become Patoka Lake. Here, wildlife thrived. Bison were plentiful during the migrations. At least until the settlers arrived.

Decades later, wealthy people found a place to drink, gamble and rest in French Lick and West Baden. The West Baden Springs Hotel drew visitors from around the world to see the hotel's magnificent dome, the largest in the world at the time of its construction in 1902, and bathe or drink water from the hotel's mineral springs. The resort, along with the French Lick Springs Hotel, both became hotbeds for illegal gambling up until the '40s, when a raid on illegal gambling shut down casinos on the weekend of the 1949 Kentucky Derby. Gamblers returned from the Derby by train high and dry.

Today, you can still stay at either the West Baden Springs Hotel or the French Lick Springs Hotel, both of which are restored to their early-1900s grandeur. The historic hotels offer luxury rooms, fine and casual dining, sprawling gardens, golf courses and spas.

The new French Lick Casino, featuring a 51,000-square-foot gaming facility, was officially opened in 2006 as a part

of the multimillion dollar renovation of both resorts.

The natural area surrounding the resorts also offers plenty of adventure. Nearby Patoka Lake is a popular spot for paddleboarding and swimming. Trails through the rolling hills beckon novice hikers and weathered wanderers. The Buffalo Trace Trail branches off from the French Lick Hotel into dense forest, allowing visitors to experience the remnants of the bison-made path by foot and on horseback, says Kristal Painter, a member of the Indiana's Historic Pathways board of directors and finance manager at the local visitors center.

Before heading out of town to the final stop along the trace, catch a ride on the French Lick Scenic Railway, which takes passengers on a 25-mile ride through the rolling hills of the Hoosier National Forest.

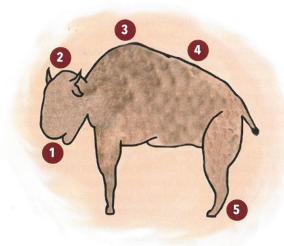


Illustration by Gillian Fulford

#### Parts of a bison

- 1. Mouth: Bison eat grasses, encouraging new growth, but don't eat wildflowers.
- 2. Horns: Bison use their horns to dig into the earth and make mud holes where they can cool off.
- 3. Hump: The muscles in the bison's hump help it use its head to clear snow in the winter.
- 4. Back: Bison wallow in the mud to lose thick fur, ward off flies and keep cool in hotter months.
- 5. Hooves: Bison carved a path into the wilderness that reached 20 feet wide at points.

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## Falls of the Ohio: The end of a journey

For centuries, migrating bison would cross the Falls of the Ohio near present-day Clarksville and venture into Kentucky for the winter season, then cross back when the weather warmed in the spring.

The Big Bone and Blue licks, which are full of minerals like iodine that bison need for bone and muscle growth, attracted the herds. Dense acres of sugarcane and woodlands also provided bison with necessary food and shelter to survive the winters.

As in Vincennes, the water is shallower here. The ridges and watersheds near the Falls of the Ohio make it a good place for the bison to cross, Hayes says.

Alan Goldstein, an interpretive naturalist at the Falls of the Ohio State Park,

says the lack of trees helped, too. "Herds of bison by the hundreds could cross easily here because it well established by bison that came before them, and the land wasn't of high elevation, either."

Ironically, just as the bison were disappearing, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark began their westward expedition, commissioned by President Thomas Jefferson. In 1803, the two explorers left Clark's cabin near the Falls of the Ohio in present-day Clarksville on their way to St. Louis.

Today, the 200 acres of 390-millionyear-old fossil beds at the Falls of the Ohio State Park are among the largest, naturally exposed, Devonian fossil beds in the world.

The gates of the dam are partially

closed during the summer months, which causes the water level fall, so you can expect the fossil flats to be exposed at the last stop on the Buffalo Trace. Temperatures can get quite hot out on the flats, Goldstein says, so remember to bring sunscreen and plenty of drinking water.

Be sure to also stop in the nearby Interpretive Center, which features a full-size mammoth skeleton and a replica of Clark's cabin. Just a mile and a half up the road, Portage House, a charming restaurant serving locally sourced New American fare, overlooks the Ohio River.

After all, a dinner with a view is the perfect way to mark the end of an adventure along the Buffalo Trace.

# A new beginning

Indiana's early history was forged by and around the bison. They swept over our hills and valleys, carving trails like rivers through the wooded wilderness.

Now, Southern Indiana's bison are gone, but the woolly beasts have made it back to the northern part of

the state. In 2016, the Nature Conservancy reintroduced a herd of 23 to the Kankakee Sands Nature Preserve, just west of Rensselaer, where they are helping restore the prairies, eating saplings, wallowing to make mud pits for amphibians and cutting open the dirt for wildflowers to grow where their

hooves have trod.

Tony Capizzo, land steward at Kankakee Sands, says the herd welcomed 11 calves last year. "We are expecting about 15 to 20 more calves this spring, too," Capizzo says. Bison, it seems, aren't finished leaving their mark on Hoosier history after all.



Today, bison graze at the Nature Conservancy at Kankakee Sands, located in the northwest Indiana. /Photo by Jason Whalen/Big Foot Media and courtesy of the Nature Conservancy

