

Bison Antiquus, Snake River Farm and The Mammoth Site of Hot Springs, South Dakota.

I am not sure how to start this story. It is over 20 years long.

Stick with me for a few minutes. It might get interesting to you.

Over 20 years ago we discovered ancient bison bones on our farm.

Six to nine thousand-year-old bones.

Buried under the deep layer of peat that beds our little Snake River.

There are countless individual bones but we have also found complete skeletons.

The complete skeletons are from animals that succumbed in quick sand. Quick sand that is now buried under thousands of years of accumulated organic matter. Peat.

We assembled a skeleton almost 20 years ago. That animal is now on permanent display at the National Buffalo Museum in Jamestown, N.D.

About a dozen years ago we assembled a second animal at the request of the Sherburne County Historical Society. That skeleton is on permanent display at the Sherburne History Center in Becker.

The above information is old news to some of you, background info for others.

The events that prompt this article started about two years ago. It started with inquiries from experts seeking Bison Antiquus bones.

The bones we find are of a recently extinct bison species named Bison Antiquus.

"Bison Antiquus" is the immediate ancestor of modern bison. Modern bison are identified by paleontologists as "Bison Bison".

As it turned out, we apparently had the world's largest stock of Bison Antiquus skulls in the world, casually resting on a shelf inside our garage. Many of you have viewed that shelf of skulls.

We were contacted by scientists from the Mammoth Site in Hot Springs.

Chief Scientist Dr. Jim Mead and COO Preston Gable visited us for a brief exploratory "dig" here last spring. They were in the planning stages for a new display and program based on Ice Age mammals.

They intended to anchor that work on North American bison which evolved and proliferated through the Ice Age.

There have been many communications and visits since then.

During the past year, that major new display has been built at the Mammoth Site. The educational display includes all the significant Ice Age species of bison. The largest element of the new display is a replication of a typical dig from our farm.

The replica is about 18 by 14 feet in size. It is incredibly well done and realistic.

The Antiquus bones in the display all came from our farm. Either from the front of our garage or from the large stock of bones I have in the barn.

The second BIG thing is that a full crew of paleontologists and helpers will be here in May for a scientific dig. Paleontologists, not just from the Mammoth Site but from across North America will spend a week doing multiple scientific digs in our pasture, along the Snake River.

There will be a team of 16 or more experts.

During that week, one whole day will be set aside for education of local students.

Young or old. There are many excellent teachers among this group of scientists.

We can handle buses. Besides, it will be springtime at the Farm with all new life that entails.

Gail is the contact for school tours with help from her sister Jo. Email me and I will put you in touch.

What a big deal this is. And a wish come true for Gail and I.

Since we first discovered these bones, we have hoped for an educational organization to take interest so that students can learn from this gift.

If things work out as intended, the lowland on our farm will be a scientific and educational site for years to come. Best regards. Tom Email me. [tom@snakeriverfarmmn.com](mailto:tom@snakeriverfarmmn.com)



This is a close view of the replica dig site in Hot Springs. The Snake River is on the left. Reduced in size to fit a display. Boots, trowels, bucket, caliper, bones and tools represent a careful scientific dig. Dr. Mead plans to start with four such dig squares. Each will be slowly excavated down to sand. Roughly five feet of peat overlays the sand at the chosen location. It will be wet digging, of course.



A wider shot of the display area.  
Granddaughter Ella on the left, Gail, Dr. Jim Mead, Sandy Mead, Dr. Sharon Holte, Science Educator, Preston Gable, COO.

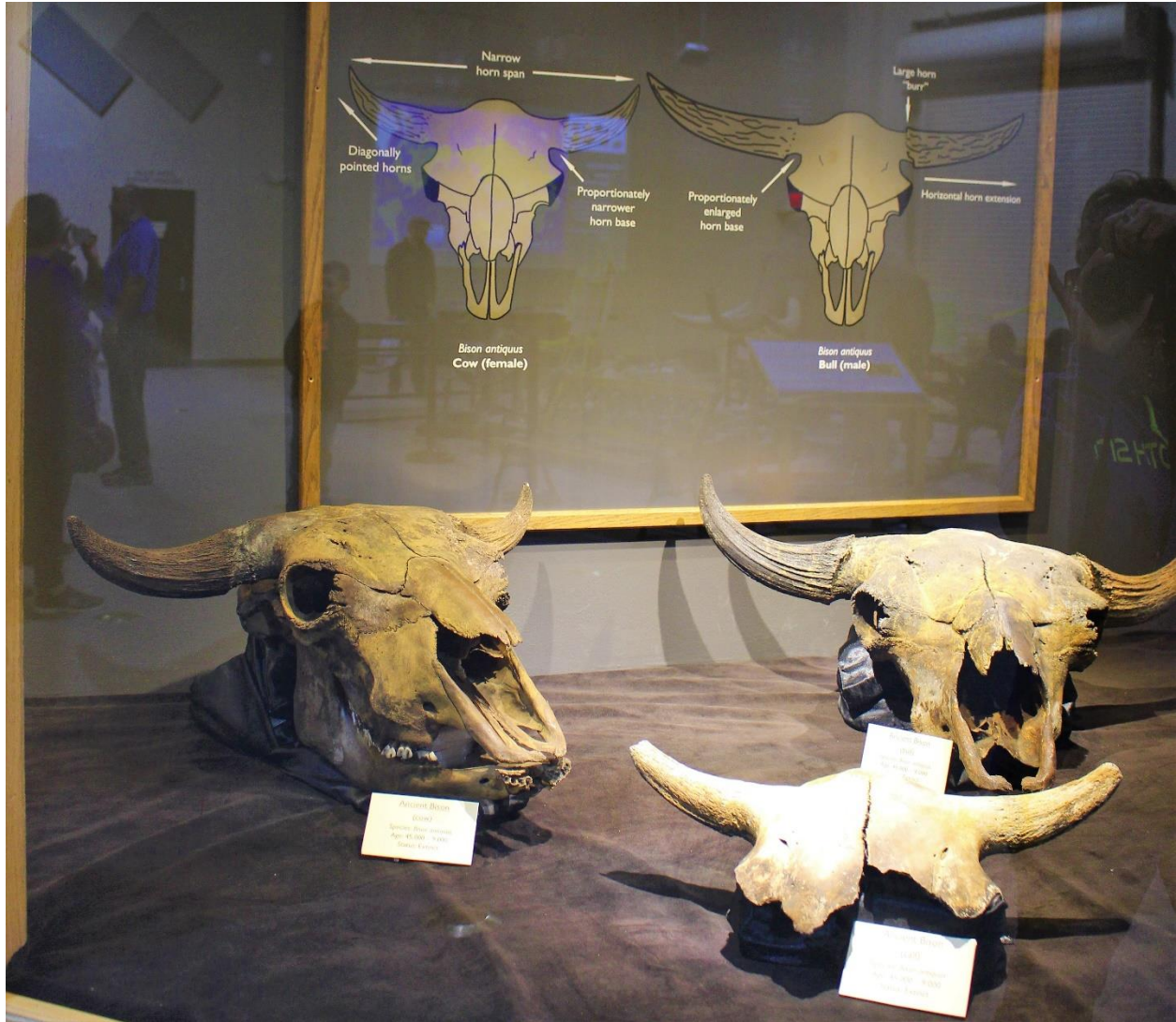
Dr. Holte will prepare and deliver the educational program during the May Dig. Notice the realistic details, boots, trowels, grids etc. that represent a dig.



Dr. Jim Mead is on the right in this photo. There are educational placards in the foreground, and accurate murals on the wall.  
We are the "Snake River Fossil Site".



Notice the terrific detail. A turtle, birch logs, bones partially uncovered and a dig site outlined with orange string.  
A great representation of our Snake River winding through the peat bog.



This Antiquus grouping at the Mammoth Site consists entirely of skulls that used to reside on the shelf in our garage.



This is the second animal we assembled. It is in the entrance of the main room at the Sherburne History Center in Becker.

This mature cow was named Tatanka by the school children of Becker.

It has been on permanent display since the Center opened about 12 years ago.

The museum staff does an excellent job of displaying and caring for this skeleton.

# bison antiquus



This is the display of the first bison we reconstructed at the National Buffalo Museum in Jamestown. Ilana Xinos, the Museum's Executive Director has done a great job with this skeleton. We assembled this mature cow about 20 years ago. It spent several months in the atrium of the Sherburne County Courthouse, then a decade in the Great River Regional Library in Becker. A couple years ago we transported it to Jamestown where it will permanently reside. It has its own small wing-room at the museum.

This bison is named Samantha after our granddaughter who helped us find this animal.

If you look closely at the rib, fourth from the right, you can see that it was broken and healed with a bulbous regrowth of bone. Bison frequently use their horns to enforce social rules. My guess is that a senior cow inflicted this educational wound when Samantha the bison, was a heifer.



This is a photo of Samantha and Tatanka in our barn. At the time we were completing Tatanka, who is on the right. We brought Samantha home for refurbishing, based on techniques we learned building them both.

Both skeletons are mature cows. They are very close in size.

The brown dappling is characteristic of bones that are buried under water-logged peat.

Bison Antiquus are significantly larger than modern bison.

These skeletons are the size of large bulls in modern bison.





A view of the Mammoth dig at Hot Springs.  
A former sink hole, filled with animals.  
Incredible to see.