



These are the two bison that Barthel's Farm reconstructed some years ago. One is now in Jamestown, ND, at the National Bison Museum and the other is at the Sherburne County History Center in Becker, MN. (Submitted Photo).

Bison Dig Day set for May 5

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(Editor's Note: The following article was composed from an email sent to the Patriot).

Tom Barthel and Snake River Farms in Becker will once again be hosting Bison Dig Education Day, May 5, 2021.

About 25 years ago, Barthel and his family discovered ancient bison bones on their farm, estimated to be 3,000 to 9,000 year old bones buried under the deep layer of peat that beds their Snake River.

Barthel says there are countless individual bones but they have also found complete skeletons.

“The complete skeletons are from animals that succumbed in quick sand, deep muck or perhaps broke through thin ice,” said Barthel.

Barthel and his helpers assembled a skeleton over 20 years ago and that animal is now on permanent display at the National Buffalo Museum in Jamestown, N.D.

“About 14 years ago, we assembled a second animal at the request of the Sherburne County Historical Society,” he said. “That skeleton is on permanent display at the Sherburne History Center in Becker.”

Many of the bones Barthel and family 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,” said Barthel. “Many have viewed that shelf of skulls.”

Several years ago, Barthel was contacted by scientists from the Mammoth Site in Hot Springs. Chief Scientist Dr. Jim Mead and COO Preston Gable visited the Barthel farm for a brief exploratory "dig" in 2018. They were in the planning stages for a new display and program based on Ice Age mammals and intended to anchor that work on North American bison which evolved and proliferated through the Ice Age.

There have been many communications and visits between the two parties since then.

In 2018, a major new display was 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 Barthel's 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 Barthel's farm.

A crew of paleontologists and helpers spent a week at the farm in May 2019 for a scientific dig. During the 2019 dig, interesting discoveries were made so the paleontologists are returning again this May, 2021, for another weeklong dig.

During that week, Wednesday, May 5 has been set aside as Education Day.

"This is the day for students, interested adults, teachers, home schooled groups and families," said Barthel. "No charge, of course. Come to the farm, visit the excavations site, talk to the scientists and see some bones."

Barthel says his farm can handle buses and he plans to shuttle people on hay wagons pulled by horses and antique tractors. Also, porta-potties will be on site.

"Email me (tom@snakeriverfarmmn.com) please if you plan to attend so that I can manage traffic flow and shuttles to the site.

Best regards. Tom Barthel.