

I posted several photos and an article on this subject a month ago. I realize this is redundant but some of you may be interested in the article and video that were in the Jamestown Sun. The article is directly below. Best regards Tom

Ancient bison skeleton finds a home in Jamestown

By [Tom LaVenture](#) on Oct 31, 2016 at 6:36 a.m.

Ancient bison skeleton finds a home in Jamestown

By Tom LaVenture on Oct 31, 2016 at 6:36 a.m.

The National Buffalo Museum is now home to Samantha, a complete bison skeleton that is estimated to be 8,000 years old.

Samantha is one of two complete bison skeletons found beneath the Snake River Farm owned by Tom and Gail Barthel. The area in Sherburne County, Minnesota, southeast of St. Cloud, is in the Anoka Sand Plain that was created by sand deposits of receding glaciers around 12,000 years ago.



Samantha was assembled in 1998. She is a mature cow skeleton with a 28-inch horn span and measures 6 feet high at the hump. That is about 25 percent larger than modern bison.

"Sam" was on display at the Sherburne County Courthouse in Elk River, Minnesota, then for 15 years at the Becker Public Library where Gail is employed.

"It needed to have a permanent home someplace," Tom said about why they brought the skeleton to Jamestown. "It's a little big for the living room, and it ought to be someplace where people can see it."

Tom said they visited the Smithsonian Institution and other museums to learn how ancient skeletons are assembled for exhibition. He learned about building displays and using glues along with sealants to protect the old bones.

"It was a lot of fun to have Samantha in the Public Library," Gail said. "Kids would bring their parents and grandparents and when they see it from the window outside they want to come in." The process to bring Samantha to Jamestown began when Gail met Ilana Xinos, executive director of the National Buffalo Museum. The two were attending the National Bison Association conference in Denver earlier this year. Tom is a board member of the organization. Tom agreed with Gail and Xinos that the National Buffalo Museum is an appropriate permanent home for Samantha. The Barthels said they will complete the donation process soon.

"I've been wanting a skeleton here since I started working at the museum, and that we have an 8,000- or 10,000 year-old skeleton is really amazing," Xinos said. "We are hoping to use this donation as a jumping-off point to get a modern-day skeleton to show the differences in size and things like that."

Samantha will be the oldest artifact at the museum, Xinos said. There is also a 10,000-year-old skull on loan and a replica of a 5,000-year-old skeleton. Samantha will help bring a biology and science component to the bison story to go along with the history and culture story, she said.

The second bison skeleton that was assembled by the Barthels in 2006 is a bull named Tatonka. It is now a permanent exhibit in the main hall of the Sherburne County Historical Society.

Samantha and Tatonka are unique in that most or all of the bones from the same animal were found in one location. The bison were likely trapped in wet sand or quicksand, Tom said, and over time around 10 feet of peat developed on top of the sand.

The swampy area trapped many bison in one place, he said. Numerous bones make it difficult to locate a complete skeleton.

Tom said the bison have thick bones that did not waste away in the peat. The bones are very dark from the peat, and bleached areas are likely from exposure to sunlight before the bones wound up under the sand and peat.

The 225-acre Snake River Farm is grazing land with about 1 mile of the Snake River running through it. The natural meandering of the river in high water years tends to expose new sand and unearths more loose bones and skulls, Barthel said.

There are likely hundreds of complete skeletons under the peat but they will remain undisturbed for posterity with the exception of university digs.

We hope that some educational institution will someday be interested and use the site as a teaching experience for children and students in general," Tom said.

The Snake River Farm raises and sells grass-fed bison, beef, and pastured hogs in a prairie and woodland setting. The ranch also adopts mustang horses and trains them to ride and work.

