

Houdini Bison

I hope you are enjoying winter and a slower pace of farming. We are.

Many of you know we sell meat by the quarter and half. I try to work things so that chores are at a very minimum in winter. By Mid-December the hogs are all gone, the beef herd is down to just a few animals and the bison herd is in winter pasture.

Aside from taking care of a few chickens, the only required chore is to haul round bales out to the bison every week or so.

I like that work load.

The November Buffalo Association Auction was a big success. Thanks in large part to Dave Griffin and the many members who work so hard to make it so.

Gail W. and I were sidetracked by some issues at home. Those issues kept us from most of the activities around the auction this year. I did make it to the actual sale. As in previous years I did buy some animals.

Last year I wrote about the adventure of hauling 12 bison home in a 16 foot stock trailer. It turned out ok but in case you did not read the story, I do not give advice on bison transport.

I did not intend to ever write about bison hauling again. But I am. We had an interesting experience getting home with the three bison we bought this year. Let's call this, a benign escape story. Read on, because this could happen to you. Maybe it already has.

I bought three nice two year old heifers. Average weight 713 pounds, horns intact. Both size and horns are relevant to this story.

My trailer is in good shape. Not a fancy rig like some of you pull but a decent, 16 foot, four wheel trailer. It is a ball hitch set-up that I pull with my old F150.

The trailer like all others, has a divider. The divider makes two separate compartments in the trailer. .The divider helps to balance and control the load.

I told the guys at the loading chute that I would like to get two in front and one in back. They were pretty accommodating. The bison not as much. Ryan Straw, a young man who helps me farm was assisting. My plan was for Ryan to swing the dividing gate from his side while I pulled it with a rope from my side. Three young bison tend to hold together awful tight. The first two times the bison ran in, bounced off the far end of the trailer and ran out as a unit. The third time we got it right and caught two in the front. The third one shot all the way back into the sale barn. The crew sent her back and we slammed the tail gate behind her.

She seemed a little worked up, they all did, but they were in the trailer. Two in front, one in back.

I chained all the gates, checked the latches and drove to Albany to fuel up. It is about a five minute drive. There was some activity in the back but I expected that.

I have yet to drive with a load of calm buffalo.

I pulled up to the gas pump and inserted my credit card. Ryan walked back to check the load.

The rear compartment was empty.

The front compartment contained all three heifers.

The problem in my mind is not the height of the divider, which is 62 inches. The problem is the incredibly small space between the top of the divider gate and the roof. That space is 13.5 inches.

The trailer was not damaged. The gate still swings true. The bison were unhurt. In fact, since I had not checked ear tags, I am not certain which of the three made the move.

Just in case you are wondering, there is no possibility that the gate opened and then closed. The space between the bottom of the gate and the floor is 2 inches. That bison got up on the gate and then crossways enough to crawl over. In 13.5 inches.

It is hard to picture.

I don't think I would even tell this story if Ryan were not there to back me up.

Here is the scary part. The opening over the tail gate is of identical size to the opening over the divider. The roof ends as you leave the trailer. That would make a rear exit an even easier escape. It is a good thing this bison wanted to be with its herd mates in the front compartment rather than herd mates we were leaving behind.

I think I am going to modify my trailer.

Have a good winter.

Plan to attend the Annual Meeting, April 20-22, 2012, at Prairie Edge Casino, Granite Falls, MN.

Tom Barthel, Secretary, Director at Large.