

These photos were taken Saturday at the National Bison Museum in Jamestown, N.D.

Gail, daughter Amy, granddaughter Ella, and I traveled there with Sam the ancient bison. Many of you know Sam (aka Samuel, aka Samantha).

The first photo is of Gail and Ella putting finishing touches on Sam's display.

The second is Ella, Museum Director Ilana Xinos, Sam, and Gail.

We reassembled Sam nearly twenty years ago. Sam was a cow bison. Sam died 8,000 years ago in quicksand along our Snake River. That was 2,000 years after a melting glacier formed the Anoka Sand Plain. The Anoka Sand Plain is a glacial outwash plain that extends from St Cloud eastward to Wisconsin and southeastward to St. Paul.

Sam's bones were in sand beneath six feet of peat. Peat is largely un-decomposed organic matter. The peat layer accumulated gradually over the last 8,000 years.

Sam's bones are well preserved. They are not fossilized. They are simply bones that have been stored under frigid water. The bones are shades of brown, ranging almost to black. That is characteristic of bones stored in a wet, cold, acidic environment.

We initially named the bison Samuel. It was so large that I assumed it was a bull. The skull was found by granddaughter Samantha and a couple of her cousins, one of whom is also named Samantha.

Later, as I gained experience with bison, I realized that the skull is really the shape of a bison cow.

Although Sam is much larger than existing bison, she is the same species. It is common for animals to be relatively larger during glacial periods. That is a simple law of biology relating to body mass and surface area. During cold periods, if food is abundant, it is easier to keep the core temperature of a larger body stable. Bison have gradually decreased in size over the past 10,000 years.

Sam is about six feet tall. Overall, her skull and body would be quite large for a modern bison bull.

She was first displayed in the atrium of the Sherburne County Government Center. Then Sam spent over 15 years in the Becker Public Library. In June, Sam was on display at the Elk River Holiday Inn during the National Bison Association's Summer Conference. The National Buffalo Museum in Jamestown will be Sam's permanent home.

The Executive Director of the National Buffalo Museum is Ilana Xinos. We have talked with Ilana for a year about this. Ilana was very pleased and excited to have Sam. Ilana thinks that Sam will be a main attraction for the Museum. Gail and I are delighted to have Sam in such a wonderful place. If you were a bison skeleton, you could not do better than the National Buffalo Museum.

Stop and visit Sam anytime you pass through Jamestown.

We have built two complete bison. The other is in the Sherburne County History Center. We built that one, also a cow, in 2006 at the request of the Historical Society. That bison is the center display in the main room of the new museum.

Tom



