Lieutenant Zebulon Montgomery Pike Observes Buffalo in the Kansas Country, 1806

... 1st November, Saturday. Marched early, just after commencing our line, heard a gun on our left; the doctor, Baroney and myself being in advance, and laying on the ground waiting for the party; a band of Cabrie [antelope] came up, amongst our horses, to satisfy their curiosity; we could not resist the temptation of killing two, although we had plenty of meat. At the report of the gun they appeared astonished, and stood still until we hallowed at them to drive them away. Encamped in the evening on an island, upon using my glass to observe the adjacent country, I observed on the prairie a herd of horses; doctor Robinson and Baroney, accompanied me to go and view them; when within a quarter of a mile, they discovered us, and came immediately up near us, making the earth tremble under them (this brought to my recollection a charge of cavalry). They stopt and gave us an opportunity to view them, among them there were some very beautiful bays, blacks and greys, and indeed of all colours. We fired at a black horse, with an idea of creasing him, but did not succeed; they flourished round and returned again to see us, when we returned to camp.

2d November, Sunday. In the morning for the purpose of trying the experiment, we equipped six of our fleetest coursers with riders and ropes, to noose the wild horses if in our power, to come among the band. They stood until they came within forty yards of them, neighing and whinnowing, when the chase began, which we continued about two miles, without success. Two of our horses ran up with them; we could not take them. Returned to camp. I have since laughed at our folly, for taking the wild horses, in that manner, is scarcely ever attempted, even

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with the fleetest horses, and most expert ropers (see my account of wild horses, and the manner of taking them in my dissertations on the province of Texas). Marched late. River turned to north by west. Hills change to the north side. Distance 13½ miles. Killed one buffalo.

3d November, Monday. Marched at ten o’clock passed numerous herds of buffalo, elk, some horses &c. all travelling south. The river bottoms, full of salt ponds; grass similar to our salt meadows. Killed one buffalo. Distance 25½ miles.

4th November, Tuesday. This day brought to our recollection, the fate of our countrymen at Recovery; when defeated by the Indians, in the year ’91. In the afternoon discovered the north side of the river to be covered with animals; which, when we came to them proved to be buffalo cows and calves. I do not think it an exaggeration to say there were 3,000 in one view. It is worthy of remark, that in all the extent of country yet crossed, we never saw one cow, and that now the face of the earth appeared to be covered with them. Killed one buffalo. Distance 24½ miles.

5th November, Wednesday. Marched at our usual hour; at the end of two miles, shot a buffalo and two deer and halted, which detained us so long that we foolishly concluded to halt the day and kill some cows and calves, which lay on the opposite side of the river. I took post on a hill, and sent some horsemen over, when a scene took place which gave a lively representation of an engagement. The herd of buffalo being divided into separate bands covered with dust, and first charged on the one side then to the other, as the pursuit of the horsemen impelled them: the report and smoke from the guns, added to the pleasure of the scene, which in part compensated for our detention.

6th November, Thursday. Marched early, but was detained two or three hours by the cows, which we killed. The cow buffalo, was equal to any meat I ever saw, and we feasted sumptuously on the choice morsels. I will not attempt to describe the droves of animals we now saw on our route; suffice it to say, that the face of the prairie was covered with them, on each side of the river; their numbers exceeded imagination. Distance 16 miles. . . .

Chief Sharitarish Foretells the End of the Pawnee Way of Life, 1822

My Great Father:—I have travelled a great distance to see you—I have seen you and my heart rejoices. I have heard your words—they have entered one ear and shall not escape the other, and I will carry them to my people as pure as they came from your mouth.

My Great Father— . . . If I am here now and have seen your people, your houses, your vessels on the big lake, and a great many wonderful things far beyond my comprehension, which appear to have been made by the Great Spirit and
placed in your hands, I am indebted to my Father [Major Benjamin O’Fallon] here, who invited me from home, under whose wings I have been protected... but there is still another Great Father to whom I am much indebted—it is the Father of us all. The Great Spirit made us all—he made my skin red, and yours white; he placed us on this earth, and intended that we should live differently from each other.

He made the whites to cultivate the earth, and feed on domestic animals; but he made us, red skins, to rove through the uncultivated woods and plains; to feed on wild animals; and to dress with their skins. He also intended that we should go to war—to take scalps—steal horses from and triumph over our enemies—cultivate peace at home, and promote the happiness of each other.

My Great Father:—Some of your good chiefs, as they are called [missionaries], have proposed to send some of their good people among us to change our habits, to make us work and live like the white people. You love your country—you love your people—you love the manner in which they live, and you think your people brave. I am like you, my Great Father, I love my country—I love my people—I love the manner in which we live, and think myself and warriors brave. Spare me then, my Father; let me enjoy my country, and I will trade skins with your people. I have grown up, and lived thus long without work—I am in hopes you will suffer me to die without it. We have plenty of buffalo, beaver, deer, and other wild animals—we have an abundance of horses—we have everything we want—we have plenty of land, if you will keep your people off of it...

There was a time when we did not know the whites—our wants were then fewer than they are now. They were always within our control—we had then seen nothing which we could not get. Before our intercourse with the whites, who have caused such a destruction in our game, we could lie down to sleep, and when we awoke we would find the buffalo feeding around our camp—but now we are killing them for their skins, and feeding the wolves with their flesh, to make our children cry over their bones.

Here, my Great Father, is a pipe which I present you, as I am accustomed to present pipes to all the red skins in peace with us. It is filled with such tobacco as we were accustomed to smoke before we knew the white people. It is pleasant, and the spontaneous growth of the most remote parts of our country. I know that the robes, leggings, moccasins, bear claws, etc., are of little value to you, but we wish you to have them deposited and preserved in some conspicuous part of your lodge, so that when we are gone and the sod turned over our bones, if our children should visit this place, as we do now, they may see and recognize with pleasure the deposits of their fathers; and reflect on the times that are past.
Old Lady Horse (Kiowa) Tells How the Buffalo Disappeared, n. d.

Everything the Kiowas had came from the buffalo. Their tipis were made of buffalo hides, so were their clothes and moccasins. They ate buffalo meat. Their containers were made of hide, or of bladders or stomachs. The buffalo were the life of the Kiowas.
Most of all, the buffalo was part of the Kiowa religion. A white buffalo calf must be sacrificed in the Sun Dance. The priests used parts of the buffalo to make their prayers when they healed people or when they sang to the powers above.

So, when the white men wanted to build railroads, or when they wanted to farm or raise cattle, the buffalo still protected the Kiowas. They tore up the railroad tracks and the gardens. They chased the cattle off the ranges. The buffalo loved their people as much as the Kiowas loved them.

There was war between the buffalo and the white men. The white men built forts in the Kiowa country, and the woolly-headed buffalo soldiers [the Tenth Cavalry, made up of black troops] shot the buffalo as fast as they could, but the buffalo kept coming on, coming on, even into the post cemetery at Fort Sill. Soldiers were not enough to hold them back.

Then the white men hired hunters to do nothing but kill the buffalo. Up and down the plains those men ranged, shooting sometimes as many as a hundred buffalo a day. Behind them came the skinners with their wagons. They piled the hides and bones into the wagons until they were full, and then took their loads to the new railroad stations that were being built, to be shipped east to the market. Sometimes there would be a pile of bones as high as a man, stretching a mile along the railroad track.

The buffalo saw that their day was over. They could protect their people no longer. Sadly, the last remnant of the great herd gathered in council, and decided what they would do.

The Kiowas were camped on the north side of Mount Scott, those of them who were still free to camp. One young woman got up very early in the morning. The dawn mist was still rising from Medicine Creek, and as she looked across the water, peering through the haze, she saw the last buffalo herd appear like a spirit dream.

Straight to Mount Scott the leader of the herd walked. Behind him came the cows and their calves, and the few young males who had survived. As the woman watched, the face of the mountain opened.

Inside Mount Scott the world was green and fresh, as it had been when she was a small girl. The rivers ran clear, not red. The wild plums were in blossom, chasing the red buds up the inside slopes. Into this world of beauty the buffalo walked, never to be seen again.