

Sept. 27, 2010 - The Great Buffalo Round Up

During the last weekend in each September, there is a mass round-up of the great buffalo herds that spend their entire summer grazing on State Park land located near Custer, SD. The purpose is to gather the herds together at one location in order to prepare them for wintering in an environment that protects the health and safety of the group. At that time all of the young calves are logged, vaccinated and tagged. Some of the older cows and bulls are sorted out and then sold to ranchers in order to replenish or add to their stock. And, alas, some are even sold to area processing plants to be turned into steaks and burgers. Since the harsh South Dakota winters can only support about one thousand of these large animals, almost 500 will have to be weeded out and sold off. The purpose of the round-up is to achieve that end.

Monday, 9/27 promised to be sunny, but early morning temperatures were cool at 6 AM, when I left my motor home located at Custer County's airport. Even though there is a nice paved runway at the State Park's airport, I decided to make my journey in my boss's car, which had been loaned to me for the event. The 20 miles over to the viewing area took more than two hours to drive, due to the tremendous traffic flow to see this event.

Once at the South Viewing Area we had to wait another two hours before the first group of a few dozen buffalo came over the hills. A satellite TV truck from St. Paul, Minnesota was nearby, and sending its video out live. It took about 30 minutes to get the various groups together into a "holding pattern" of over a thousand head. Then, all of the cowboys, on both horses and trucks, began whooping and hollering and the herd began their "stampede" toward the holding pens. So many of the buffalo had been on this run in the past, they seemed to know just what was expected of them. They flowed, almost like lava leaving a volcano, down the hill toward the gates. Much like a horse race, most of the time was spent in getting them ready and lined up for the move. Once it began, it was all over in less than 10 minutes. There were instances in which small groups left the mass of the herd and decided to go off in a different direction, but cowboys (and cowgirls) on their horses quickly got them on "the right path" and they soon joined their brethren in the pens.

Over the next week 1200-1500 bulls, cows and calves will be left alone to help them adjust to their new surroundings, and given time to calm down. Then the process of logging, tagging, weighing and vaccinating the new calves will begin. Those to be turned back out to winter pasture will be released from the corals and those that will be slated for auction in mid-November will be retained and fed hay to fatten them up for the sale. It is not unusual for prime breeding bulls to bring over ten thousand dollars each. Feed stock will go for around \$2,000 each.

This was certainly a once in a lifetime type of event, and I am glad that I stayed on long enough to see the Great Custer Buffalo Round-up.

PS--Tonight I grilled myself a buffalo rib-eye steak with fries.



Those many "dots" in the field below are Buffalo



The Round-up began beyond the satellite truck



The herd size grows larger along the way



Cowboys hard at work moving the herd along



The herd enters the coral gates en-mass



My boss made this sign when he worked at the Park



Cowboys, horses and buffalo, all at the corrals



I was told that this State Police car drove the Gov.



Nothing like a good poop after that work-out



US & State Flag bearers along with Miss S.D. Rodeo



No explanation needed



She certainly is a lot more enjoyable to look at