



## American Buffalo: In Search of a Lost Icon

*Steven Rinella*

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**American Buffalo: In Search of a Lost Icon** Steven Rinella  
**From the host of the Travel Channel's "The Wild Within."**

A hunt for the American buffalo—an adventurous, fascinating examination of an animal that has haunted the American imagination.

In 2005, Steven Rinella won a lottery permit to hunt for a wild buffalo, or American bison, in the Alaskan wilderness. Despite the odds—there's only a 2 percent chance of drawing the permit, and fewer than 20 percent of those hunters are successful—Rinella managed to kill a buffalo on a snow-covered mountainside and then raft the meat back to civilization while being trailed by grizzly bears and suffering from hypothermia. Throughout these adventures, Rinella found himself contemplating his own place among the 14,000 years' worth of buffalo hunters in North America, as well as the buffalo's place in the American experience. At the time of the Revolutionary War, North America was home to approximately 40 million buffalo, the largest herd of big mammals on the planet, but by the mid-1890s only a few hundred remained. Now that the buffalo is on the verge of a dramatic ecological recovery across the West, Americans are faced with the challenge of how, and if, we can dare to share our land with a beast that is the embodiment of the American wilderness.

*American Buffalo* is a narrative tale of Rinella's hunt. But beyond that, it is the story of the many ways in which the buffalo has shaped our national identity. Rinella takes us across the continent in search of the buffalo's past, present, and future: to the Bering Land Bridge, where scientists search for buffalo bones amid artifacts of the New World's earliest human inhabitants; to buffalo jumps where Native Americans once ran buffalo over cliffs by the thousands; to the Detroit Carbon works, a "bone charcoal" plant that made fortunes in the late 1800s by turning millions of tons of buffalo bones into bone meal, black dye, and fine china; and even to an abattoir turned fashion mecca in Manhattan's Meatpacking District, where a depressed buffalo named Black Diamond met his fate after serving as the model for the American nickel.

Rinella's erudition and exuberance, combined with his gift for storytelling, make him the perfect guide for a book that combines outdoor adventure with a quirky blend of facts and observations about history, biology, and the natural world. Both a captivating narrative and a book of environmental and historical significance, *American Buffalo* tells us as much about ourselves as Americans as it does about the creature who perhaps best of all embodies the American ethos.

## American Buffalo: In Search of a Lost Icon Details

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## From Reader Review American Buffalo: In Search of a Lost Icon for online ebook

### Madeline says

This book is kindof like meeting a cute guy at a party and wondering why nobody else is talking to him. Then you realize why b/c he keeps talking and talking and talking and rambling and entertaining noone but himself with his limitless amount of detail and running off on tangents that you definitely don't want to follow him off on but there is just no time to break in and even mention needing a bathroom break. Finally you manage to get that bathroom break, but then you realize he might be a diamond in the rough and maybe he is interesting after-all, an he kindof is. just a little obnoxious too. you end up talking to him for the rest of the party then when you leave you hope you don't run into him again sometime soon, but a little part of you sortof hopes you do.

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### Dan Croft says

Although this book was written before "Meat Eater", I read it after I finished the former book, in large part because of how much I enjoyed meat eater. Rinella's writing style is informative, intelligent, but also engaging and humorous. In American Buffalo, Rinella chronicles a 2005 buffalo hunt he drew for the Copper River herd in Alaska. This is one of the few remaining wild herds of buffalo left in North America and drawing a tag for this hunt is extremely rare (especially since it was the first time he entered). Throughout the story, Rinella takes tangents to personal hunting anecdotes or, more frequently, historical background on the buffalo's history in North America. As can probably be expected, there is also a lot of content of the influence of buffalo on the Native American people. There are too many facts and interesting tidbits of information to include in a review, but if you are interested in animal biology, archeology, anthropology, Native American/frontier history, hunting, or the outdoors in general then this book is for you.

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### Mike says

Steven Rinella, a naturalist, outdoorsman, and hunter, brings the reader along on a buffalo hunt deep in the Alaskan wilderness, and along the journey, tells the archaeological, sociological, and physical story of the buffalo and its significance to America.

Rinella is one of the most engaging and accessible nature writers I have ever read, and his ability to help readers connect with his experiences and passions made this book a surprising treasure to read. I plan to become a Rinella completist.

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### Pat Padden says

I once saw Steven Rinella interviewed. He told a story about how, one Christmas shortly after he was married, he preceded his wife home to his parents' house for the holidays, leaving her to follow along behind, bearing the Christmas gifts for the family, and a cooler packed with game that Steven had shot on hunting trips and carefully laid aside for the holidays. When his wife got to the airport, she discovered that the flight

she was taking was overcrowded, and she had to make a decision: either to bring the meat-packed cooler or the Christmas gifts along. She chose the gifts. When she arrived at her destination and Steve found out that she'd left the meat behind, he claims he nearly divorced her. He read her the riot act about the ethics of wasting the meat after he'd taken the lives of the animals represented by those carefully-wrapped packages in the cooler. That's the kind of guy you're dealing with here - and that's the kind of book. Not for the squeamish, but if you're interested in history, ecology and the environment, the ethics of hunting, and reading a writer who's a standup, no bullshit guy, you'll enjoy it.

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### **J.K. Grice says**

This was definitely one of my favorite books of 2014. Steve Rinella does a marvelous job chronicling the natural history and near extinction of the American buffalo. Part historical reference and part hunting odyssey, this book was fascinating. I loved everything about it.

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### **Rebecca says**

It wasn't quite the book I was expecting. I had hoped for something a bit more serious and introspective, but despite all the teenage boy style quips, American Buffalo was very enjoyable. It is deeply researched and fans of trivia will find mountains of cool buffalo facts. If you have any interest in the history of the American west, the buffalo or hardcore immersion style hunting, you're likely to really enjoy this book as well.

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### **Kirsten says**

I heard an interview with the author on NPR and bought this book for my father. I have to say, he sounded a lot more articulate and focused in the interview than he does in the book. This book rambles a lot about buffalo and their place in the American psyche and little trivia bits, but it also goes on at great length about a buffalo hunt (the author drew a buffalo tag in an Alaskan hunting lottery), and that part was frankly boring to me. He also tended to insert a lot of himself into those sections, and I found myself getting pretty irritated by him. The trivia and history stuff was better, though he has a tendency to wildly speculate, which got old. I wanted to like this book a lot more than I did.

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### **Taylor Farris says**

Steven Rinella has created a masterpiece with American Buffalo: In Search of a Lost Icon. From the very beginning Steven draws you in with his personal story with buffalo. The book itself is a very well written book. At the same time Steven weaves together two stories constantly changing between the present and the harsh past that buffalo have faced.

Since the author changes back and forth between stories one would assume that this is a very hard book to follow. This is not the case. The book itself is a very well ordered and a very well told story. In the parts of the book in which Steven talks about the history of buffalo it is structured with dates. Not all of the dates are on order but this has to be so to make the story flow. The book is ordered by fascinating chapters each one beholding its own bit of interesting facts and a continuation of the intriguing story.

Many people will ask if a book is for them. If you enjoy a perfectly written nonfiction book, written in the

first person and enjoy hunting as well as a fascinating integration of history tied to it ten this is definitely the book for you.

The story begins with telling how the author, Steven Rinella first started his obsession with buffalo. The story talks about his first encounter when he unearthed a half of a buffalo skull which ignited his passion for the majestic animal. The book covers his back story of how he has always been a hunter and was beaming when he won a lottery permit to track, hunt for and kill a single buffalo in the Alaskan wilderness. While on his journey in Alaska Steven portrays a perfect picture of the history of buffalo and the Native Americans connection to the animal. Native Americans aren't the only people who have affected the buffalo's history. Steven does an amazing job of going into great detail of every hardship and triumph of the buffalo. Steven also goes on to talk about prehistoric buffalo and how the buffalo's shape, size and features have changed over the ages. It is fascinating to read. Overall it was a wonderful pleasure reading about Steven's journey and his amazing story and history with buffalo.

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### **Joel says**

wow, I bought this book because I like the picture of the buffalo on the cover. I always had a thing for buffalo I guess. I read the book during a beautiful day when I could have been off running or doing some exploring, but got lost in the book until I turned the last page. I think the reason for this is that you feel like you are along side the author on his adventure and he doesn't really give you a reason to step away. I will look forward to finding more books by this author.

Anyone living in San Francisco: I found this book at "dog ear books". I picked it kind of at random. This is a used book store, and it appears that they only have the best of the used books out there, or the person picking the books likes exactly what I like. This is probably the 10th book I pulled at random from that store that is on one of favroite's list.

enjoy

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### **Zach Matthews says**

I'm an outdoor writer (fly fishing magazines), so I have what you might call a professional appreciation for Rinella and his work. I've also interviewed him and I like him personally. Clearly, I am squarely in his target demographic, a hunter and fisherman as well as someone who is forced by realistic circumstances to live in a big city (Atlanta).

All that said, this is my favorite of the "microhistories" which have weighed down booksellers' shelves in recent years, in large part because Rinella is so legitimately authentic. His closest analogue is probably Mark Kurlansky, author of "Cod" and a former professional cod fisherman. Rinella is truly an elite hunter. You don't roll into the Wrangell-Elias and expect to make it a week with nothing but your wits, a rifle and a backpack. Certainly you don't expect hunting success, even though bison are notoriously stupid. The country is too big, the herd too small. Rinella if anything soft-sells his own extreme skill, inviting you in to his world and letting you piggyback on what were actually years of unacknowledged practice.

And yet the frame story, that of Rinella's hunt for a bison, truly takes a back seat to what I viewed as the most interesting part of the novel: the history of Man's entry into North America (as best we understand it now). We take things that "Science" says for granted these days, but there is no true consensus about how men and women entered North America. To Rinella's credit, he took the time to actually examine the on-the-

ground evidence. His efforts to contextualize what we do know--from Clovis points to the biology of Bison bison--are top notch, and the best in this field.

An excellent read, one of my favorite ever, and a great insight into the world of an elite big game hunter at the top of his game.

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### **John says**

We humans have little comprehension and find it difficult to make sensible decisions when we are confronted with what I will refer to as the efficacy of booms. The slaughtering of 50,000 buffalo in a single day or J. Wright Moorar personally killing 25,000 in a lifetime and their virtual disappearance and near extinction is terribly sad. Buffalo/Bison -- Rinella tells us they are genetically one and the same -- ranged from southern Alaska through the 4 western provinces of Canada and 36 states all the way to Northern Mexico. Perhaps the most numerous land mammal to ever exist on the face of the earth; somewhere in the neighborhood of thirty two million lived on the Great Plains alone. Out of our own insatiable greed we came dangerously close to eliminating all of them and killed them not even for their meat but mostly for their skins and hides. A group of Indians gathered 2,550 tons of buffalo bones near a railroad in anticipation of shipment to eastern markets. In Colorado there was a mound of bones ten feet high, twenty feet wide and a half mile long; one in Kansas had similar dimensions but was only a quarter of a mile long and another mound in Detroit was thirty feet high and hundreds of feet long. Reading about the carnage almost made me sick and if you can recall that one particular scene on the open plains in the movie "Dances with Wolves" you get the picture of the wanton slaughter.

There are so many more instances where we have been incapable of handling the efficacy of booms. Throughout our history we have squandered our resources of plenty; even our current economic crises, stimulated by the same attitudes and failings, stands as a prime example.

This book was full of interesting facts and lore of the iconic buffalo but some of the details were quite graphic. Interspersed was the author's own tale of a licensed buffalo hunt on the Copper River in southern Alaska and that part was just a side story from the books main theme. Rinella concludes that the Buffalo confronts our innermost thoughts with confounding contradictions. That it is a symbol of the tenacity of wilderness and destruction of wilderness; of Indian culture and the death of Indian culture; of strength and vitality and our pettiness and greed.

"Black Diamond" was the name of the Buffalo who served as the model for the Buffalo Nickel coined in 1913 and which nickels now rest secure and treasured in our dresser drawers.

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### **Amanda says**

I wish I could mark this 3.5 stars. Rinella is a good writer and at no point in the book did I ever think to myself, "man, I wish I was done reading this book so I can read something else." Essentially, the book is about the author hunting a buffalo, but he mixes in the entire history of the buffalo and it's relationship to man. I liked the history parts, the hunting parts dragged a little (five or six chapters could be summed up by "I hiked around, shot a buffalo, was really cold, cut up the buffalo, and hauled it out.") especially where he talks about how he field dressed the animal. I never wanted to know how to skin and butcher a buffalo, but now I do, and I don't really feel enriched by the knowledge. I found the history part interesting enough to bore Tyler to tears on our hike telling him all about buffalo jumps, the history of buffalo hide usage, buffalo

wallows, and the like.

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### **Beau Smith says**

This is part adventure book, part hunting book, part history book and all wonderful. Author Steven Rinella not only takes you on his hunt for Buffalo in Alaska, but he gives you all kinds of history on the animal that should be America's national animal. Rinella does a wonderful job in making you feel as though he is sitting across the table from you sharing his story and adventure. One can only imagine a couple of cold beers sitting in front of you.

This is a book that I have already read twice within the first month of owning it. I think this book will appeal to not only historians and hunters, but just about anyone that has ever stepped foot outside.

--Beau Smith  
The Flying Fist Ranch

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### **Tripp says**

American Buffalo is such a great read that I am surprised I haven't heard of it sooner (presumptuous of me, I know). The book is part memoir, part meditation on the American relationship with nature, part social commentary and part outdoor adventure tale. It takes quite a writer to weave that many strands together in a short book without derailing the narrative, but Steven Rinella makes it look easy.

Rinella's tone is that of a self deprecating conversationalist. He hops from topic to topic with ease, which lets him bring in a number of interesting asides about the buffalo. When it really won't quite fit, he isn't afraid to break out a half page footnote (which you should read, as they are uniformly excellent.) Many writers of adventure books puff up the exploits of the author. Rinella's excursions into wildest Alaska are amazing and would probably kill me, but rather than brag, he talks about the difficulty and the mental challenge of it. This also helps bring the reader deeper into the story.

Rinella's encounter with the buffalo began when he found a buffalo skull in Montana. His research into the animals leads him to a lab in Oxford, museums in the United States and eventually to a park in Alaska where he hunts buffalo. This part may shock readers to whom hunting is completely alien, but the care he takes in the hunt and his discussion of the history should assuage everyone who lacks a PETA membership.

This is just a fabulous read which I recommend to everyone.

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### **Bill Yeadon says**

About a third of the way into the book I was disappointed. I thought it would be similar to my recent read of American Wolf. The author picked up the pace nicely when he actually set foot in the Alaskan Wilderness and began his hunt for a buffalo. It was amazing the restrictions the government placed on how you must proceed. As a matter of fact of the 20 or so permits that were given out only 4 buffalos were taken, with the author being one of them.

While I am not a hunting fan I was enthralled with his story of the hunt. He did a nice job of alternating the hunt with the history of the buffalo. I do not think you need to be a hunter to enjoy this book.

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