

## ***BUFFALO HUNT?***

'Excuse me? When – and why – did we decide to go on a buffalo hunt?' whines the little voice in my head that I hear so frequently and generally ignore. I think of him as my personal Jiminy Cricket, although he's less the voice of conscience than that of common sense, warning me that I'm about to do one more dumb thing.

Why a buffalo hunt? The decision was an organic process rather than a sudden epiphany, not so much a bolt out of the blue as an almost subconscious evolution.

I was planning a trip back to the Midwest, through northern Arkansas and up the Branson Highway into Missouri, past Lake of the Ozarks and finally to Columbia, Missouri, a town we had seen very briefly that summer and marked down as a possible retirement destination. A fall scouting trip made sense, but I was unenthusiastic about the long drive across the plains.



Both to save money and make the trip more enjoyable, I decided to try and camp out as much as I could along the way (I hate motels). Researching possible campsites for my first night's stop, I found Foss Lake State Park, just east of the TX/OK border and close to I-40. I noted that the park had a resident buffalo herd and it occurred to me that in 40 years of tripping around the West, I had never actually seen a real, live buffalo. A photo would be a trophy of a sort (*the one above was not taken by me*).

Then the Sioux Indian Mission sent me a pretty little dreamcatcher, all feathers, leather thongs and bits of fur, as part of a fund-raising appeal. I remembered the scene in "*The Comancheros*" where Lee Marvin explains that if he had been carrying the feather-decorated Indian lance he displays, he wouldn't have been scalped by the Comanches. I decided to take the little gewgaw with me, hanging from the dashboard of my truck (I found it irritating and distracting dangling from the rear view mirror). Perhaps it would bring me luck crossing the Texas Panhandle and the long haul across Oklahoma.

Which reminded me that fall was the traditional time for the hunt. As the herds moved south, both cows and bulls fattened in preparation for the cold moons and grew the heavy winter coats that made the best robes. (Old-timers swore a well-tanned buffalo robe was cozier than a down sleeping bag on a cold night, and Indians and soldiers both relied on knee-high boots with the hair turned in to ward frostbite.)

It was then the *ciboleros* set out from the pueblos and Spanish colonial settlements in New Mexico, headed for the *Llano Estacado*. Like the Plains Indians – who considered them interlopers and poachers – the *ciboleros* hunted buffalo on horseback. It takes a bold man, armed with nothing more than a short lance or an unreliable flintlock fusil, to attack an irascible, six-foot high beast weighing a ton or more. Another risk was the notoriously unpredictable autumn weather on the Plains, which could change in the space of a few hours from mild Indian Summer to murderous "blue norther." Indian, Hispanic and Cowboy folklore is full of stories of hunters caught in a blizzard who survived only by killing and disemboweling a buffalo and crawling into the body cavity to stay warm.

But after a successful hunt, the men could ride home with packs laden with dried jerky and stacks of robes to see the people through the winter, and there would be a grand *baile* and *fiesta*, with singing and dancing in the street, a Thanksgiving Mass in the village church, and other more private ceremonies in the pueblo kivas.

The first Americans who encountered them usually confused or conflated the *ciboleros* with the *comancheros* – who pursued a similar but increasingly disreputable trade on the Plains – and dismissed them as dirty, primitive semi-barbarians. But the *ciboleros* were men – *que macho!* – who lived an adventure we can scarcely conceive of today.

## Tuesday, October 22, 2013

10:00 a.m.	6.7 gal (fillup)	\$20.05	
10:05 a.m.	Depart Albuquerque I-40 East		145586
Cottonwoods in full color in Tijeras Cyn. Also, one cop running a speed trap.			
<i>Whole Earth Quote: "Few have the opportunity to depart this life with dignity and grace, and those that do generally blow it."</i>			
12:45 Tucumcari	7.0 gal. no receipt	\$22.85	770
2:30 Amarillo			
2:45 picnic area			899
4:00 Texas/Oklahoma border			
4:45 Sayre, Oklahoma	10.0 gal	\$31.60	
5:20 Foss Lake SP, Cottonwood Campground			146055
5:35 sunset			
6:00 fire started; pork and beans,		\$18 to ranger	



6:35 Nice evening, temp down slightly but no wind. Moon rise at 9:00, to bed at 9:30

**DAY ONE;                      7 hrs 20 min,                      469 miles.**

**Wednesday, Oct. 23 --**

7:00 a.m. Sunrise Temp 50° -- restless, uncomfortable night due to slow leak in air mattress

8:30 Depart CG

146055

8:45 Pulled into park HQ to inquire re: buff and joined a half-dozen park employees gathered by the flagpole. I joined the group, jokingly asking if they were saying the Pledge of Allegiance, before I realized one of them was a state trooper. No buffalo available for viewing – park employees seem confident they actually have buffalo, but no way of telling exactly where they are in the park at any given time. I wanted more info, but left quickly, as trooper was taking some casual interest in my old pickup. It occurred to me that my *"I'm ready for Hillary"* bumper sticker might not appeal to everyone's sense of humor.



Drove north along road the park rangers said bordered the buffalo range, stopping now and again to scan with binoculars, but didn't see any bison. (The abandoned farmhouse in the background is one of many I saw driving across the Plains; I don't know whether they're relics of the Dust Bowl or of some more recent shift in the rural economy.) Rather than return to I-40, I decided to drive on in search of Washita battle site.





**I encountered my first buffalo in Cheyenne, OK. Lifesize and (judging from the hay bale) lifelike enough that some people mistake him for the real thing.**

9:45 Cheyenne, OK coffee & m&m's

\$1.78

146099

10:30 Washita battlefield.



**The ½ mile nature trail is a pleasant walk offering a quick overview of the history of the Southern Plains.**



Was what happened here in Nov. 1868 a massacre? Let's review:

Soldiers stealthily surround an apparently peaceful encampment they have cause to believe harbors robbers/murderers/kidnappers/miscreants. The soldiers attack at dawn, without any preliminary parley other than the blaring of a brass band, in a manner certain to inflict widespread casualties among noncombatants.

Destruction of the village was nearly total – and was in fact the point of the exercise. Enemy casualties were just gravy; the mission was to destroy the Indians' ability to survive the High Plains winter, leaving them no option but to surrender on the reservation or starve and freeze in the wilderness. Like Sherman

bringing the jubilo to Georgia or Sheridan scouring the Shenandoah Valley, Custer's attack on the Washita was a particularly ruthless form of economic warfare.



So, yes, that sounds like a massacre. On the other hand, unlike "Nits make lice" Chivington at Sand Creek, Sheridan explicitly ordered that women and children were to be captured and not shot down, and Custer and his men made some attempt to comply with that ROE – although a dawn charge into a sleeping village was certain to inflict significant collateral damage. There were a substantial number of Indian survivors, and the soldiers took reasonably good care of their captives – including, according to scandalous rumor, a comely Cheyenne maiden who spent the cold nights snug in the commander's own tent.

Plus, the soldiers themselves took considerable casualties in the melee, including a detachment that ventured too far from the main body and was surprised, surrounded and killed to the last man. Technically, if anybody was "massacred" that morning, it was the rash Major Joel Elliott and his command.





**Black Kettle (?)**

Certainly the Army was eager to chalk the battle up as a victory; Sheridan positively gloating over having destroyed "that worthless old cipher" Black Kettle.

But tactically the fight was a draw at best. Custer was forced to retreat (abandoning Elliott and his men in the process) as Indian reinforcements arrived from the villages down river. The 7<sup>th</sup> might well have been hurt much worse in retiring if the Indians had not been more immediately focused on succoring survivors and mourning their dead.

Revenge would wait until the next summer, when Cheyenne, Kiowa and Comanche raiders descended on the frontier with renewed fury.



The line of trees is the narrow bosque lining the Washita. The river has changed course repeatedly over the years, and nobody is sure exactly where Black Kettle's village really was, but the walk rewards the visitor with a general sense of the terrain and vegetation.

Strategically the battle can't be counted an unalloyed victory for the Army. Custer destroyed one village (of just 51 lodges), but in the process he discovered more villages beyond that, mounting more warriors than even he was willing to take on. Some of Black Kettle's people had been captured, and more would come in to the agency over the next few months, but the Southern Cheyenne were far from whipped. Tall Bull and his Dog Soldiers would fight on, as would their Kiowa, Arapahoe and Comanche allies.

Sheridan and Custer toured the site a week or so later. It would be interesting to know what they talked about as troopers gathered the scattered bones of Elliott and his men. Their public posture was triumphant, but Sheridan was no fool. His elite 7<sup>th</sup> claimed 103 Cheyenne killed (it's not clear how many of those were warriors; the Indians later said no more than 30-40) and 53 women and children captured. But 21 soldiers had been killed and another 20 or so wounded. Plus, for an Army so starved by a penurious Congress that it was issuing Civil War-era rations to the troops, the logistical costs of a winter campaign were unacceptably high.

All for one village – and there had been 12 miles of villages strung along the Washita.

U.S. Grant, newly elected President, had written enough after-action reports of his own to read between the lines of Sheridan's. And Grant was then considering the Quakers' offer to pacify the tribes with kindness. Pondering the results of the 7<sup>th</sup>'s winter campaign might have helped persuade Grant it was time to try a new approach. So if the Washita can't be judged a "massacre" or a "victory" for either side, Black Kettle's last stand may have been pivotal in initiating a significant change in government policy.

Unfortunately, the "Quaker Policy" was no more successful in bringing peace to the Plains than Chivington's genocidal assault on Sand Creek.

By the time he rode through the ashes of Black Kettle's village Sheridan, like Sherman and other astute Army officers who had studied the problem, already recognized that the only way to finally conquer the horse tribes was to destroy the buffalo herds. But they also realized that a Congress too tightfisted to provide cartridges for monthly target practice was never going to give the Army enough ammunition to kill 10 million bison. So the soldiers stubbornly soldiered on, doing what they could with the resources they were provided to round up the wild tribes, culminating in the Red River War in 1874.

What ultimately defeated the Indians of the Southern Plains was not the U.S. Cavalry, but a genuine *deus ex machina*, one of those fortunate strokes of providence that convinced so many 19<sup>th</sup> Century Americans they were in truth God's chosen people. In 1871 John Mooar, a Yankee entrepreneur transplanted to the Kansas frontier, devised a way to turn buffalo hides into a tough, serviceable leather that could be cut into the belts that drove the new machines powering the Gilded Age.

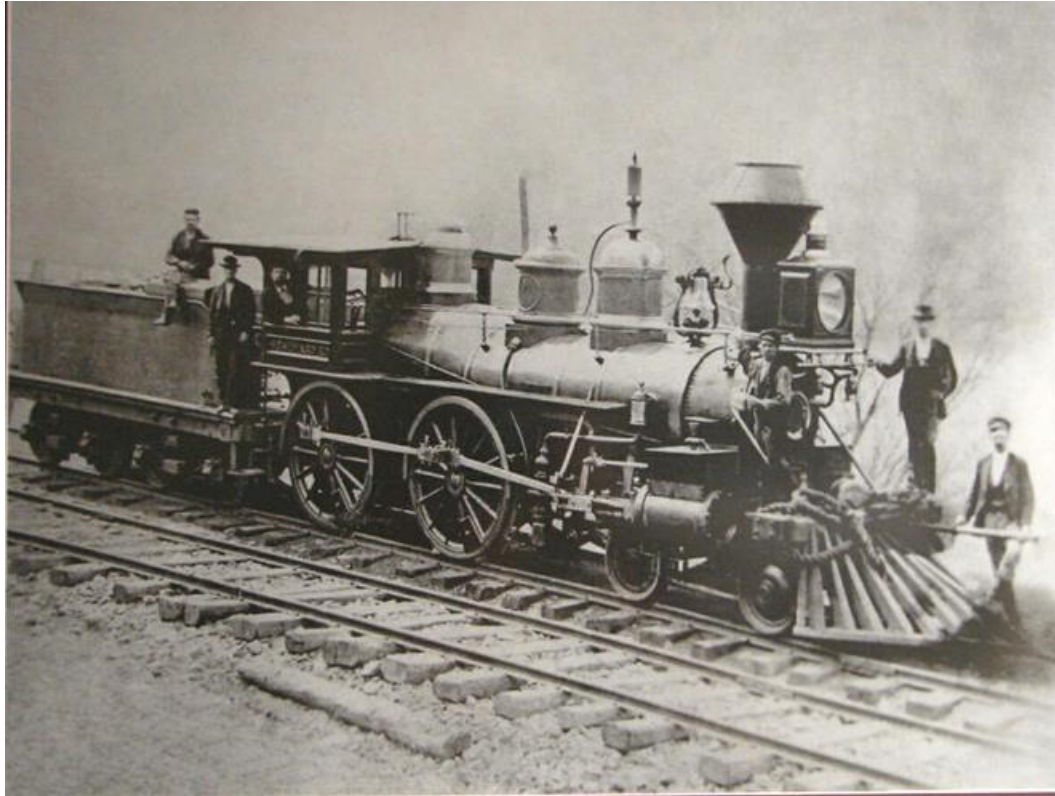


Phil Sheridan

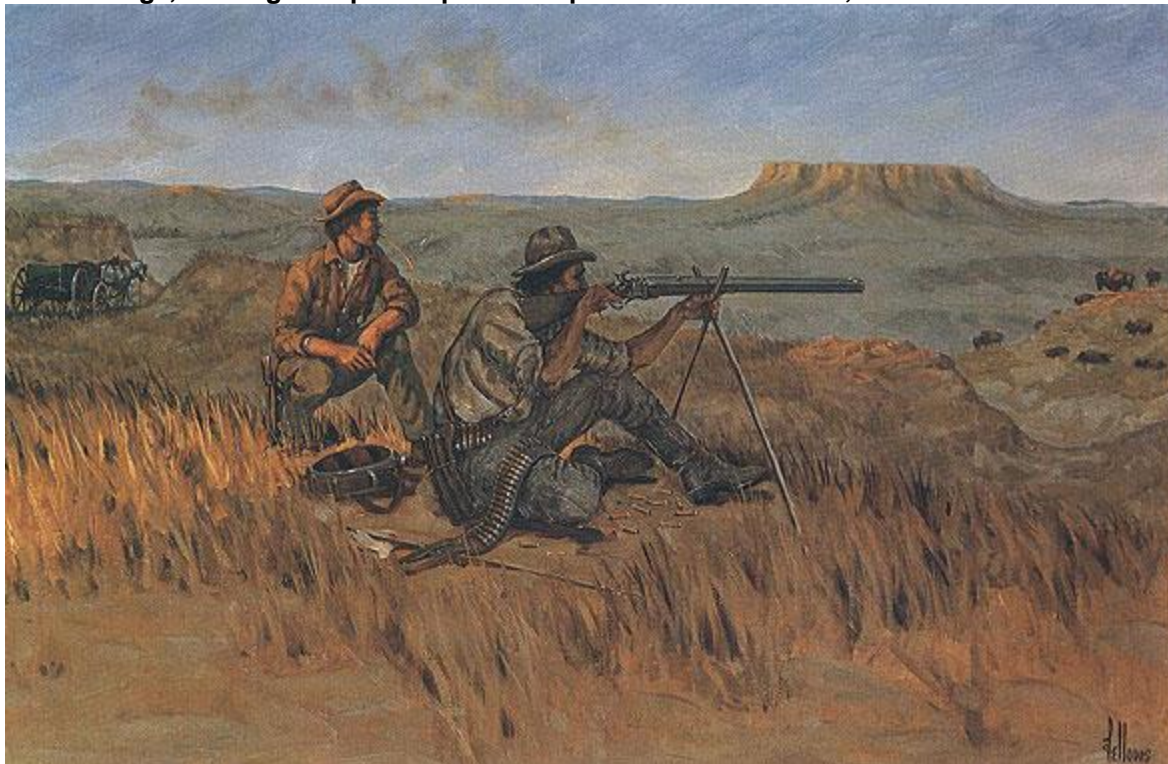


That same year the Sharps Rifle Mfg. Co. of Hartford, Connecticut, produced the first "Old Reliable," a heavy, accurate breechloader capable of bringing down a bull bison at 500 yards.





**A year later, in 1872, the railroad reached Dodge City, Kansas, in the heart of the southern buffalo range, offering cheap transport to ship the hides back East;**



**The next year the banking Panic of 1873 triggered a nationwide depression that provided thousands of jobless men willing to risk life and limb in the dirty and dangerous business of killing and skinning buffalo.**





**The whirlwind pace of the ensuing slaughter astonished everyone involved. This mound of 48,000 hides represents only a small fraction of the millions shipped East, even as the price fell from \$3.50 a hide in 1872 to less than a dollar (barely enough to cover the cost of the cartridge) two years later.**

The hunters and their gangs of skinners ate tongue and hump (the choicest cuts) until they were sick of it, and left tons of meat to rot on the prairie, but few ultimately made enough even to cover the cost of their guns and equipment. By the end of the decade the vast, uncountable herds that had roamed the Southern Plains for millennia had been utterly swept away, leaving behind nothing but acres of bones. Those in turn were ground into fertilizer for the fields of the new homesteaders rushing in to plow under the prairies.

The Plains Indians were like modern Americans suddenly deprived of electricity. Without the buffalo, they had no alternative but to go into the Agency and wait humbly for the government's handouts.

It was a classic example of Darwinian capitalism, literally red in tooth and claw.



If Custer took away any lessons from the Washita fight, they were the wrong ones. He remained careless in reconnaissance and reckless in assault, relying instead on the shock value of surprise – and “Custer’s Luck” – to win his fights. The Washita should have taught him that, while the Indians had more difficulty than white troops in keeping pickets out on a cold night, they were quick to recover when caught off guard. They might scatter like quail at the first shock, but their highly individual style of combat made them capable of recovering quickly and mounting a stubborn defense.

His decision to abandon Major Elliott and his men on the Washita split the 7<sup>th</sup> officer cadre into pro- and anti-Custer factions, contributing to the disaster on the Little Big Horn eight years later.

The wooden fence of the parking lot and the trees along the Washita are hung with brightly colored rags and bits of clothing – I saw a child’s dress among other things – left by Native Americans to mark the site. The Park Service asks you not to take photos of these memorials.

George Armstrong Custer is interred at West Point. No one now remembers where Black Kettle’s bones lie.

11:35 Depart Washita battlefield.

146101

1:10 Woodward OK

185



2:20 Buffalo, OK

146222



Buffalo, OK, is full of buffalo sculpture This small one is in front of the Harper Co. Journal





**This life-size bronze is impressive and dignified.**





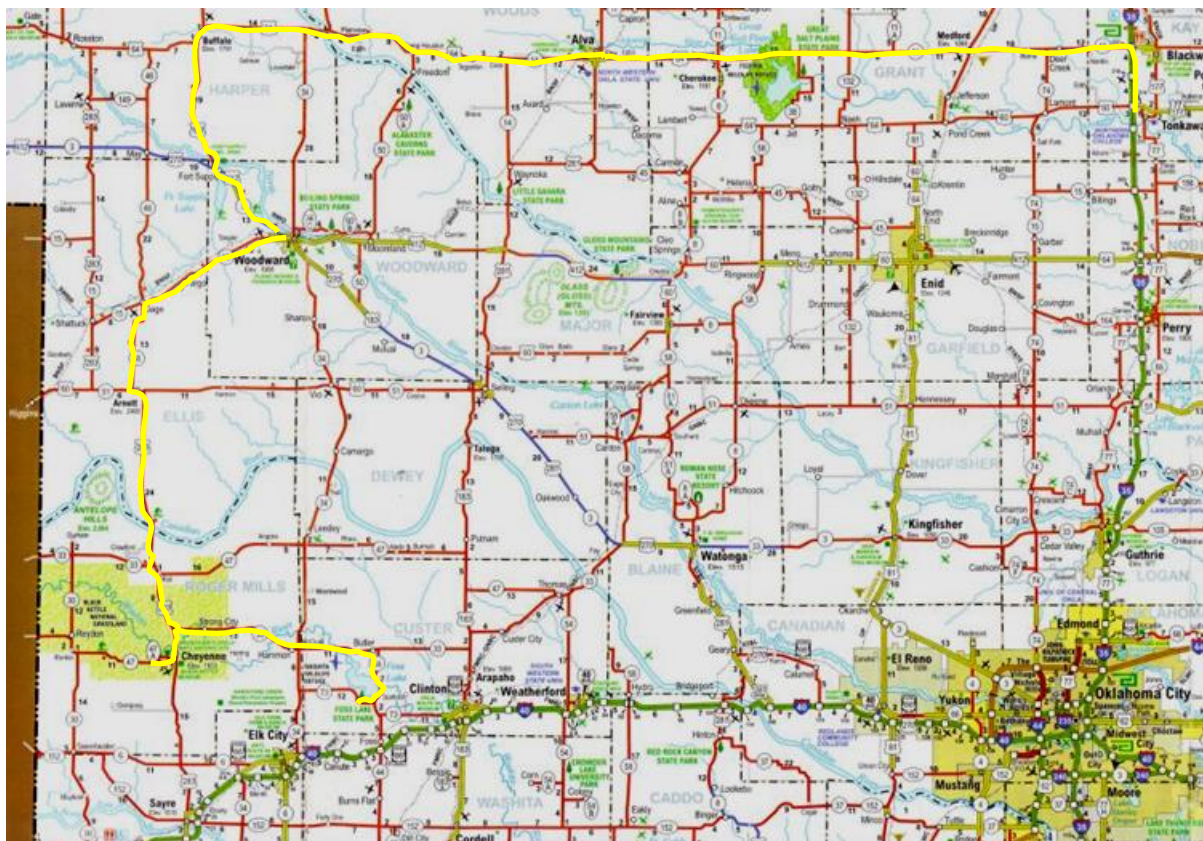
But various parodies scattered around town are less successful.



Some are strange







## DAY TWO: Foss Lake to Tonkawa, OK, 314 miles, 8 ½ hours driving

Denigrated as cannibals, the Tonkawa were driven from their ancestral homeland despite their desperate attempts to win white friendship by scouting for the Texans against their Kiowa and Comanche enemies. Now the Tonks have a small casino and an inexpensive but well-kept motel on the Interstate. Who says there are no second acts in American life?

**Thursday, Oct.24**

8:00 Depart Tonkawa, OK

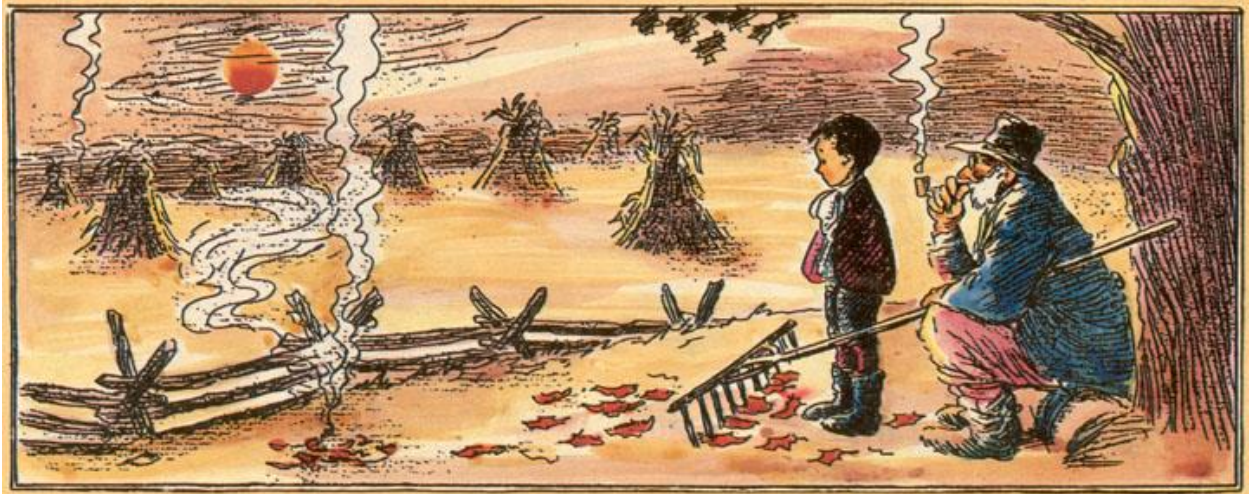
146369

*Buffalo Hunt is a distraction. Denial is the first river to cross.*

*"The fate of men and the fate of beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts; for all is vanity" - Ecclesiastes 3:19*

Trees have barely begun to change here in northeastern Oklahoma, but there's a chill wind blowing across the prairie, bearing the first promise of winter to come. What I need now is an Injun Summer.





9:15 Pawhuska "Home of America's 1<sup>st</sup> Boy Scout Troop"

429

9:45 Back to Pawhuska (wrong road)

445

11:10 Tallgrass Prairie Preserve



**Tallgrass Prairie is home to one of the largest herds of buffalo in North America, with 2,700 buff roaming 23,000 acres of free range.**

In my driving tour I saw just two, at a distance of ¼ mile or more. Volunteer lady at HQ tells me the rest are “being worked” this time of year. That doesn’t mean they’re pulling wagons or digging ditches. Buffalo aren’t cattle and won’t tolerate being herded; men drop feed pellets from a pickup tailgate to lure the beasts into vast corrals on the non-public access portion of the ranch, where the beasts are tagged, tested for disease and culled, with the surplus head sold off to private buyers. So no buff were available for viewing the day I was there. The docent was so anxious to please (despite the absence of any actual buffalo) I bought one small buffalo for \$7.00



I call him “Bob” in memory of “Buffalo Bob” Smith, a childhood friend who died of cancer in 1998 at age 80. Contrary to the cheesy “frontier” shirt, Bob earned his nickname as a disc jockey on a radio station in Buffalo, NY. As far as I know, that’s as far west as he ever ventured. I can still sing (off-key) the theme song.

*It's Howdy Doody time,  
It's Howdy Doody time,  
Bob Smith and Howdy Doo  
Say Howdy Doo to you.*





11:55 Lunch in a small clearing off county road, out of the wind. Time for a paradigm shift? The buffalo hunt has been both frustrating and intermittently entertaining, but is it really getting me anyplace I want to go?

12:30 *If I don't know where I'm going, it doesn't make much difference when I get there.*

1:15 Woodard 10.0 gal \$31.99

1:40 Bartlesville 520

3:20 Afton 9.5 gal \$30.00 cash 588

(Oops, got tangled in maze of poorly marked co./state roads; presumably OK's way of encouraging you to get on the turnpike and pay up to get out of state.)

4:25 Grove, OK "Honey Creek Motel" \$63.39 146618

Another down-at-the-heels cheap motel. Nice view of lake from parking lot. Just me and one other guest so far. Dinner at Arby's (\$5.55) – I know I'll regret that.

**DAY THREE: 8 ½ hours, 249 miles**

**Friday, Oct. 25, 2013**

7:40 temp 40° -- showered, shaved, rested and rarin' to go. I've decided to look for Dogpatch, Arkansas, and the elusive, peripatetic statue of the immortal hero of "Cornpone's Retreat," "Cornpone's Disaster" and "Cornpone's Rout."



8:30 Depart Honey Creek Motel

146618

9:15 Maysville, Arkansas. Another country cemetery.





*"And I'm flying like a bird  
It's everything that you heard.  
"Keep your eyes up in the sky  
You might see me flying by."  
Freddy Long, RIP*

10:10 a.m. Bentonville, Arkansas

146670

WalMart airmattress, chemlites

\$27.21 (visa)

11:05 Pea Ridge Battlefield

685

The Park exhibit is excellent, providing a very clear and detailed description of the fight. Feeling (as always) pressed for time, I didn't linger to tour the battlefield.

US62 – lots of traffic, hairpin curves, minimal or non-existent shoulders. Eureka Springs is a mountain "alpine/biker" resort, with lots of cabins, rustic inns, etc., but a very slow drive.

1:20 Harrison Arkansas 10.0 gal \$32.72

146750

Each of these little towns is clogged with far more traffic than the roads were designed for. Berryville was the worst. And this is the off-season! Passed through Dogpatch, but there are very few places to pull off the narrow road. Continued south on Arkansas 7 to the Buffalo River.



2:15 Buffalo National River, Ozark Campground. Temp 74°

\$5

771





**Campsites are arranged around the perimeter of a large open space. I have three neighbors so far, including a young couple who remind me of Donna and me, car-camping across the West so many years ago. Two more SUVs pulled up a little later plus one more arrival after dark.**



**At least in this stretch Buffalo River is a placid, clear stream with a barely perceptible current.**

4:55 Sunset Dinner was Campbell's Chunky Sirloin Burger, added 1 pepper, 1 salt, dash of red wine and some crackers to thicken. Excellent!

8:25 To bed.

**DAY FOUR: 5 ¾ hrs 153 miles**

**Saturday, Oct. 26**

8:30 Coffee & energy bar for breakfast. Temp 58° overcast

9:45 Depart Buffalo River

146771



The ruins of Dogpatch USA are extensive, but not easily viewed through the undergrowth.





**Highway 7 is narrow and twisting 2-lane, with no shoulder to speak of. There are only three places passing the old park (at the lower and upper entrances and a historical marker a little farther up the road) where it's possible to pull off. Given the unhappy history of the place, I had little inclination to trespass.**





Al Capp  
**LI'L ABNER**



**Like many great humorists, Al Capp (1909-'79) was not really a very nice person. An unscrupulous, avaricious cynic, the very personification of the stereotypical Yankee/Jew, he found fame and fortune in creating an imaginary world of stereotypical hillbillies.**

The familiar Latin aphorism *De mortuis nihil nisi bonum* severely limits the casual biographer's scope, and I don't believe a quick web surfing of Al Capp's life entitles me to break that rule in these notes. Suffice to say that while he had many loyal friends (including comics icons Milt Caniff and Walt Kelly), even they frequently found him egotistical, self-centered and quarrelsome. A lifelong womanizer, he used his celebrity status to seduce Hollywood starlets – a young Goldie Hawn was one who claimed to have rebuffed his crude advances – and in late middle age he took the opportunity of his campus lecture tours to aggressively pursue young co-eds in a manner that verged on sexual assault.

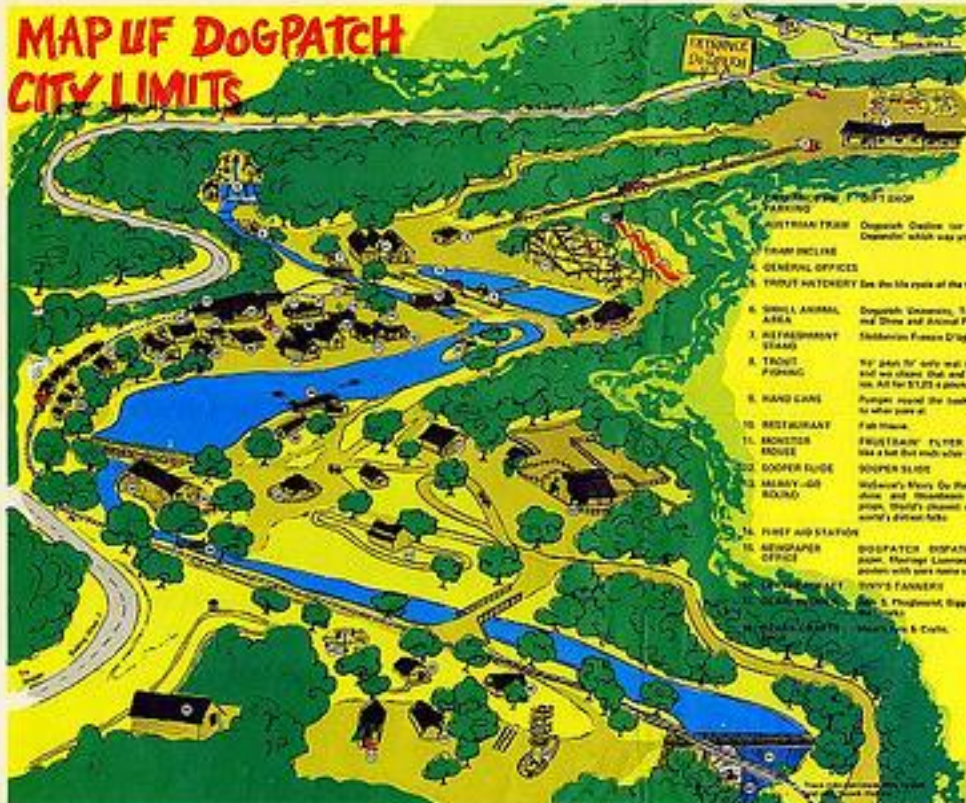
On the other hand, he brought smiles to millions of people over their morning coffee, an achievement that must weigh heavily in his final reckoning.

Born Alfred Gerald Caplin, he lost a leg in a trolley accident at age 9, a trauma that shaped the rest of his life. In the 1930s, he drew on a youthful hitchhiking adventure through the Appalachians to create a fanciful village peopled by loveable hillbillies. The citizens of Dogpatch were ignorant, cantankerous, lazy and illiterate, but they possessed abundant common sense and innate decency, qualities Capp used to mercilessly satirize the dishonesty, corruption and folly of the world he saw around him.

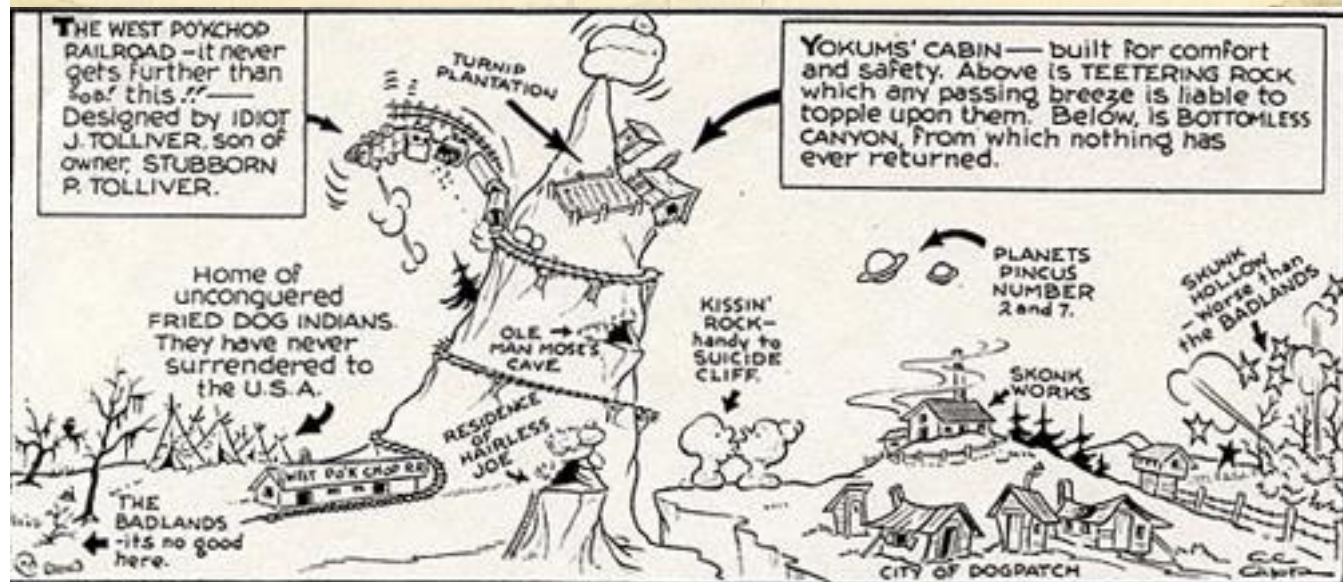
A lifelong chain smoker, Capp died in 1979 from emphysema at his home in South Hampton, New Hampshire.



# MAP OF DOGPATCH CITY LIMITS



1. DOGPATCH POSTOFFICE On a drink-up, any time!
2. LANDY SHOP Kender's
3. JEWELRY Donald's
4. HAT SHOP Hat Shop
5. TRAIN STATION The P.A.'s Cheap Speeches
6. WOODCARVER George's Wood Shop
7. PHOTO SHOP Kender's Photo Shop
8. GENERAL STORE Available from General Store
9. STATUE OF EMBLICATION CORNER
10. CONVENTION HALL Variety Entertainment
11. HONEY HOUSE J. G. Honey House
12. REST ROOMS J. G. Honey House
13. RESTAURANT J. G. Honey House
14. FARMY HOUSE
15. DOGPATCH HOUSES
16. GIFT SHOP Kender's Gift Shop
17. ROCK SHOP Kender's Rock Shop
18. BRIDGING BRIDGE The P.A.'s Cheap Speeches
19. MULE DRIVE The P.A.'s Cheap Speeches
20. MARINA SNACK The P.A.'s Cheap Speeches
21. PADDLE BOXES The P.A.'s Cheap Speeches
22. WOLF ISLAND The P.A.'s Cheap Speeches
23. INDIAN SHOP The P.A.'s Cheap Speeches
24. LIVERY STABLE The P.A.'s Cheap Speeches
25. OLD TR The P.A.'s Cheap Speeches
26. HELICOPTER RIDE The P.A.'s Cheap Speeches
27. SNACK SHOP The P.A.'s Cheap Speeches
28. ICE CREAM PARLOR The P.A.'s Cheap Speeches
29. FIRST AID STATION The P.A.'s Cheap Speeches
30. REST ROOMS The P.A.'s Cheap Speeches
31. TOMBSTONE The P.A.'s Cheap Speeches
32. ANTIQUE AUTO RIDE The P.A.'s Cheap Speeches
33. MARBLE FALLS The P.A.'s Cheap Speeches
34. TWO CAVES The P.A.'s Cheap Speeches
35. CAVE GIFT SHOP The P.A.'s Cheap Speeches
36. BOTTOMLESS CANYON The P.A.'s Cheap Speeches



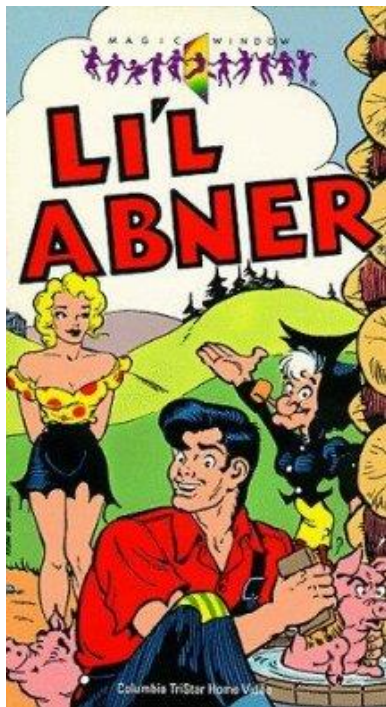
THE UNCERTAIN HAMLET OF DOGPATCH





*Li'l Abner, Daisy Mae and Murrin Sam*

Conceived as an Ozark version of Disneyland, Dogpatch USA was doomed from the start by the flawed premises of its marketing plan, combined with a series of unforeseen and unfortunate circumstances.



In retrospect, it appears obvious that a theme park based on one narrow brand is a high-risk proposition. But at the time Dogpatch was launched, the hillbilly theme was a common motif in American pop culture. *Li'l Abner* was running in more than 900 newspapers nationwide, reaching an estimated 60 million readers, while *Green Acres*, *Petticoat Junction*, and *The Beverly Hillbillies* were hits on network TV, and a similar amusement just a few miles north near Branson was already a success.

**Dogpatch USA** began well, opening May 17, 1968 to welcome 8,000 visitors its first day. Al Capp was there in person to unveil the park centerpiece, a giant statue of the fictional town's mythic hero, Civil War Gen. Jubilation T. Cornpone.

As it turned out, the hero of "Cornpone's Retreat," "Cornpone's Disaster" and "Cornpone's Rout" was to prove a more appropriate symbol for the venture than the promoters imagined.

The park reported a modest profit in its first year, but attendance never approached the wildly optimistic forecasts of the L.A. consulting firm that prepared the initial marketing plan. Unlike Branson, Dogpatch is hours away from the nearest Interstate, up a narrow country road that leads nowhere but deeper into the mountains. Where the L.A. wizards predicted 400,000 visitors the first year, growing to more than a million within 10 years, Dogpatch never attracted more than 200,000 paying

customers annually after its first year of operations.





The park went through a number of changes of management and ownership over the years. At one point developers attempted to marry the Dogpatch concept to an adjacent ski resort. The resort, with a convention center, toboggan run, ice-skating rink, motel and condos, opened in the winter of 1972-'73, just in time for the oil crisis that spiked gas prices and discouraged travel and tourism all across the country. A series of warmer than usual winters over the next few years finally collapsed the ski resort, dragging the amusement park down with it.

Then in 1977, Al Capp took his comic strip into retirement with him, and the popular enthusiasm for hillbilly culture rapidly faded away.

It was beginning to look like Dogpatch's real patron was not Gen. Cornpone but another hard-luck Capp character: Joe Btfspk, the world's worst jinx, who brought misfortune to everyone around him. (A small rain cloud perpetually hovers over his head.)

A new owner temporarily revitalized the park in the early 1980's by adding a second roller-coaster, lining up corporate sponsorships from Coca Cola, Dr. Pepper, and other heavy hitters, and bringing in stars like Reba McEntire and Ike and Tina Turner to perform at the Dogpatch amphitheater. As a result, the park ran in the black for several years. But operating and marketing costs (as calculated on a per-customer basis)

remained high compared to other amusement parks around the country, and debt service from the various rounds of refinancing ate up a large chunk of the operating profits.

Dogpatch USA closed permanently on Oct. 14, 1993.

Joe Btfspk's jinx continued to haunt the park after it closed. Ford Carr, one of the original owners, regained title in 1993 but apparently did little to restore or even effectively secure the site. In 2005 a local teen riding an ATV through the old park was nearly decapitated by a cable strung across one of the roads. The victim's family sued and eventually took the property in default of a monetary judgment.



Sometime after the park shut down, vandals tipped the general over and sawed off the old warrior's sword arm.



**This is where the fun began at Dogpatch USA. This L-shaped shed housed shops and snackbar, as well as the upper terminus of the funicular railway that transported visitors down the hill to the amusement park itself.**

The property on the hill overlooking Dogpatch, once the parking lot and main entrance to the park, has an even more tangled and colorful history than Dogpatch itself. Successively an embryo ski resort called "Marble Falls," next renamed "Serenity Mountain" as a B&B and "non denominational" church, then a bikers' hangout called "The Hub," and last repurposed as Shepherd's Fold, a ministry where "God has anointed Fred & Larisse Mullens to heal the brokenhearted and make the maimed whole," the site is now largely disused but not entirely abandoned.



The two bikers' bars and 'convention center' are boarded up and the little Marble Falls post office abandoned, but a short line of condos is still occupied. There was one car parked in front of the motel, but no indication it any longer welcomes visitors, and a couple of old pickups and a decrepit RV parked here and there. The place gives off a feral, somehow ominous vibe, and I didn't linger.

*Joe Btfsplk was my father's favorite comic character, by the way; I believe that says something about his outlook on life. Personally, even at a young age, I always favored the unwashed but curvaceous Moonbeam McSwine. Maybe it was the corncob pipe.*





But what happened to the general as he presided over this last disaster in his long career? Before Carr lost the property in a lawsuit, he loaded the statue on a flatbed trailer and hauled it away.



Cornpone's last known public appearance was an ignominious one, carelessly dumped behind a motorcycle shop in Branson. Irascible cynic that he was, Al Capp would have appreciated the irony.

11:45 Branson, MO

146833

Another miles-long traffic jam along Branson's main drag. Finally managed to find the general's last known address – 3099 Shepherd of the Hills Expressway, behind a motorcycle shop owned by C.L. Carr, who tells me he's the son of the original owners of the Dogpatch property. Carr's still bitter over the lawsuit, which he claims he would have won if it wasn't such "a crooked damn' county." The ATV victim is son of a prominent and politically connected local family, he complained. He told me the Cornpone statue has been moved out to his farm. He might have given me permission to go and look at the statue if I'd asked, but I felt like I had satisfied my curiosity enough.

Like the buffalo hunt, the Dogpatch expedition was no more than a distraction from my original mission.



12:40 Buffalo, Missouri

146912

2:00 10.0 gal

\$30.02 visa, no receipt

3:40 Scottish Inns, Lake of the Ozarks

\$45.00 cash 146966

No camping in nearby state park. Hamburger & beer in sports bar next door \$20 cash

**DAY FIVE 7 hours 380 miles**

**Sunday, Oct. 27**

6:30 a chill dawn with a dense fog. I took one look out the window and went back to sleep.

9:45 Breakfast at local convenience store (plus cigars) \$8.50 (cash)

10:35 Backtrack to Ha Ha Tonka State Park





**The picturesque Gothic ruin atop the cliff was the fantasy of a Kansas City millionaire, built in the 1920's, burned down in the 1940's, and now the centerpiece of the state park. It reminded me of Landstuhl Castle, which was across the valley from my barracks in Germany.**

It's just a short walk to the castle along a paved path – I saw one young lady making the trip in a short, tight skirt and high heels – and the view from the ruins is pretty spectacular. The park was crowded with Sunday trippers, the castle grounds decorated for Halloween with cardboard tombstones, jack o'lanterns, and bedsheets hanging from the trees.



Another short (1 mile) walk with fewer people along the “Acorn” trail, an unpaved path around a hill and across a meadow. Sunny, no wind, temp 64°.

1:00 Depart Ha Ha Tonka SP

989

3:00 Jefferson City

10.0 gal

\$29.91

Columbia, Missouri “America’s Best Value Inn” (*no, it’s not*)

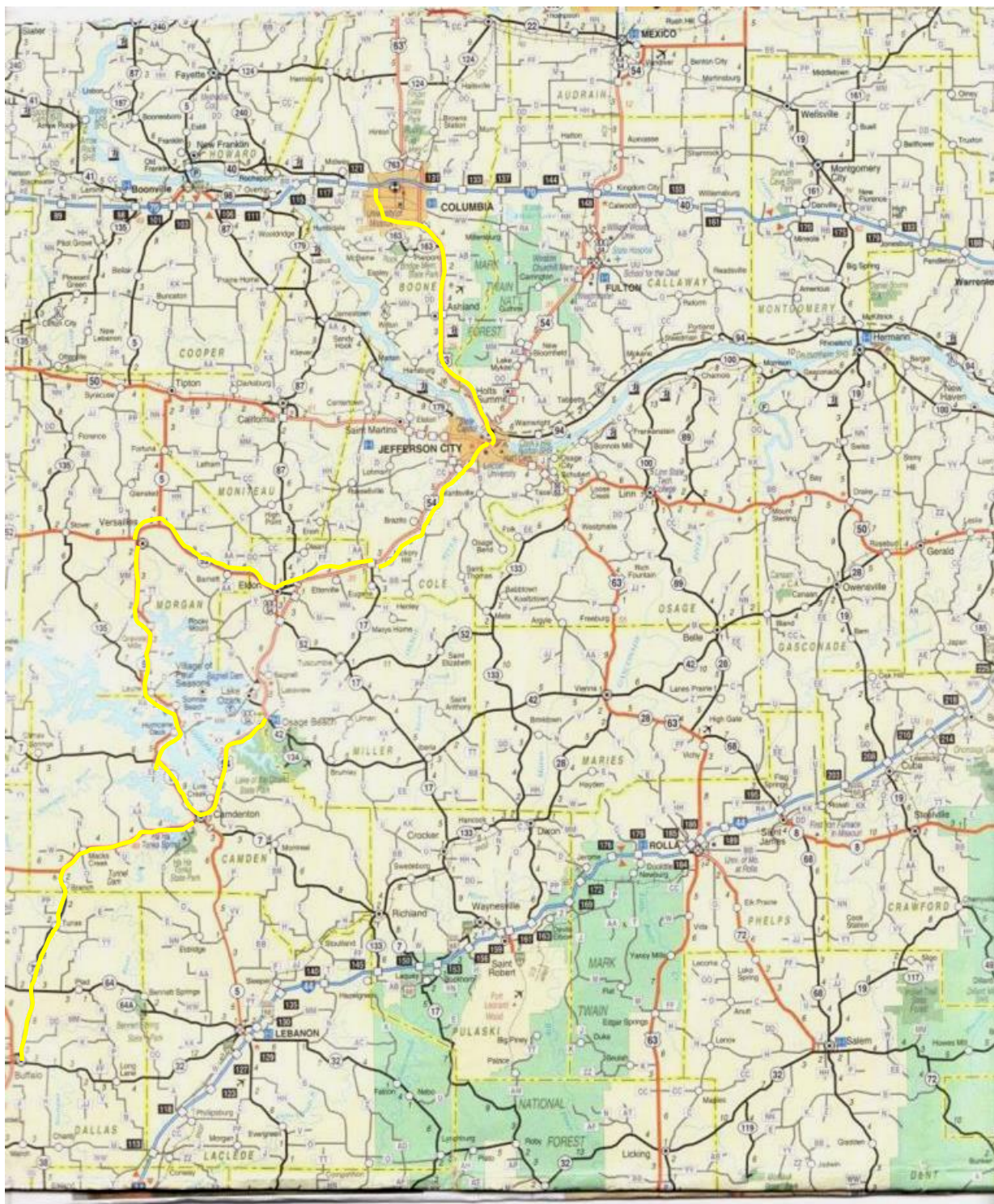
147151

**DAY SIX**

**380 miles**

**7 ½ hours**





**Monday, Oct. 28**

9:40 Explored north and west of Columbia, very rural just outside city limits – farmhouses and fields interspersed with woods, gravel roads.

3:30 15.2 gal

\$43.42

fillup 147232

**DAY SEVEN: 81 miles**



**Hagan Lake, Columbia MO**

**Tuesday, Oct. 29**

9:30 a.m. Depart motel No breakfast (natch), raining hard. Sought out a Laundromat w/wifi, (and working cable TV, which provided much needed weather report); no Starbucks to be found.



**Stephens Lake, Columbia, MO**

**DAY EIGHT: 56 miles**

**Wed. Oct 30**

8:45 Dep HoJo, Columbia

147288

Cloudy and overcast, but beautiful fall colors along I-70. Weather Channel reports heavy rains and hail moving north up I-35 from Texas, and I decided to head straight west and try to cross in front of the advancing storm and turn southwest toward NM after I'm on the other side of the front.



10:55 Kansas City

Black, threatening clouds to the south, occasional flurries of rain keep my hurrying west as I attempt to stay ahead of the storm.

12:15 Topeka, KS      10.0 gal      \$30.15      147506

3:10 Ellsworth, KS      10.0 gal      \$32.19      655

Temp has dropped and it's now very cold, so seems I'm on other side of the front.

4:00 Great Bend KS      147705

Best Western "Angus Inn" is well-named. We're apparently downwind from a cattle feedlot.

Treated myself to a steak and baked potato w/glass wine at "Montana Mike's" \$21.90 (visa)

**DAY NINE:      7¼ hours      517 miles**

**Thursday, Oct. 31**



7:15 a.m. Depart Great Bend, KS

147705

"Kansas Outdoors" (courtesy of Dept of Wildlife, Parks & Tourism) advises that the Big Basin, 15 miles south of Minneola, "is home to a free-roaming buffalo herd." Looking at my map, I note that just south of Garden City is the Sandsage Bison Range and Wildlife Area. I decide to take a couple more stabs at buffalo hunting on my way back to New Mexico.



8:10 Fort Larned

740

The old fort has been beautifully restored/rebuilt; only the graffiti carved into the lower courses of the stone walls of the officers' quarters and other buildings evidence the antiquity of what must have been a ruin before Park Service work. Hard to believe the original ever looked half as good.



Fort Larned Cemetery. Not a soul around, neither visitors nor rangers.





Noon	Sandsage Bison Range	Took a short hike, no buffalo in sight	856
	Back to Garden City	12.0 gal	\$39.60
2:15	Big Basin		971
	A highway crew sandbagging by the side of the road near Big Basin advises me that indeed there were buff here at one time, but the herd has been gone for years.		
4:10	Guymon OK	10.0 gal	\$33.01 (No receipt)
8:15	Tucumcari NM	12.1 gal	\$38.61
11:10 pm	Arrive Albuquerque		472
<b>DAY TEN:</b>	<b>13 hours</b>	<b>767 miles</b>	
<b>TRIP TOTAL:</b>	<b>10 days</b>	<b>2,886 miles</b>	



**Postscript:** Buffalo Bob and his wagon (another \$10 souvenir, this one purchased at a roadside business on the highway to Lake of the Ozarks). What else have I gained?

1. The Boston Mountains in NW Arkansas are pretty, but the little towns are choked with tourists and trippers, bad in the fall and probably much worse in the spring and summer.
2. Branson is equally congested, a redneck, family-friendly Vegas, infrastructure badly strained by its own popularity.
3. Columbia is a pleasant town of varied, old neighborhoods with affordable housing, quality health care, and – thanks to the U of Mo campus – a little more cosmopolitan than most places its size.
4. Real, live buffalo are not easy to find in 21<sup>st</sup> Century America. If God grants me another year, I intend to try again in 2014.



10/22 Tucumcari	7.0 gal.	<b>no receipt</b>	\$22.85
10/23 Afton	9.5 gal		\$30.00 cash
Western Inn, Tonkawa OK			\$51.60 visa
10/24 Arby's			\$5.55 cash
Grove, Oklahoma, Honey Creek Resort			\$63.39
10/25			
Bentonville Arkansas WalMart			\$27.21 (visa)
14:21 Harrison Arkansas	10.0 gal		\$32.72
10/26	10.0 gal	visa, no receipt	\$30.02
10/27 Jefferson City MO	10.0 gal		\$29.91
America's Best Value Inn, Columbia MO			\$55.99
Macks Creek Missouri ATM			\$200
Scottish Inns, Osage Beach MO			\$44.74 (cash)
10/28	15.2 gal		\$43.42
10/30 Howard Johnson, Columbia MO			\$55.99
1:10 Topeka Kansas	10 gal		\$30.15
4:11 p.m. Ellsworth Kansas	10.0 gal		\$32.19
Best Western Angus Great Bend KS			\$77.90
7:46 p.m. Montana Mike's Steakhouse			\$21.90
10/31			
12:01 Garden City Kansas	12.0 gal		\$39.60
4:10 Guymon OK	10.0 gal		\$33.01 no receipt
20:05 Tucumcari NM	12.1 gal		\$38.61