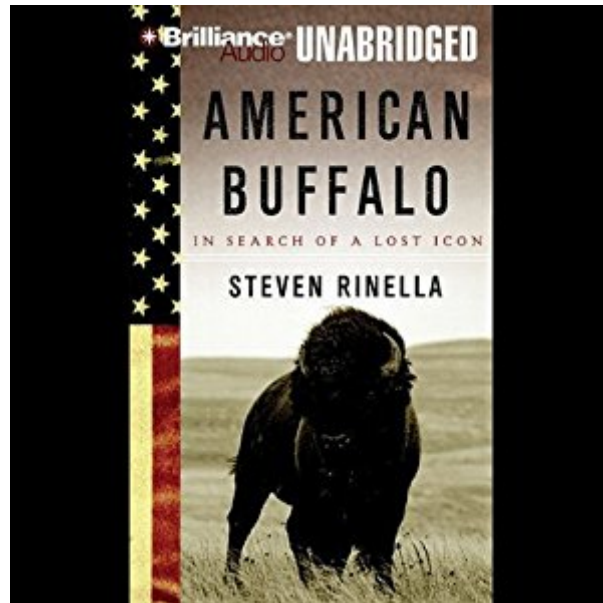


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American Buffalo: In Search Of A Lost Icon



Synopsis

In 2005, Steven Rinella won a lottery to hunt for a wild buffalo, or American bison, in the Alaskan wilderness. One of only four hunters that year who succeeded in killing a buffalo, he carried the carcass down a snow-covered mountainside and floated it four miles down a white-water canyon while being trailed by grizzly bears and suffering from hypothermia. Through this experience, Rinella found himself contemplating his own place among the 14,000 years' worth of buffalo hunters in North America and the place of the buffalo in the American consciousness. *American Buffalo* is a narrative tale of that 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 Strait Land Bridge; to buffalo jumps, where Native Americans ran buffalo over cliffs by the hundreds; even to the Bronx Zoo, where legend has it a depressed buffalo served 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 history, science, and the natural world. And yet it also tells us as much about ourselves as Americans as it does about the creature who perhaps best of all embodies the American ethos.

--This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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Customer Reviews

Like many - and like the author, Steven Rinella - I've been long fascinated by the buffalo, so when given the chance at a new book like this, I snapped it up. For anyone with such a fascination, this book will give you a fix, but be aware that a good portion of its content is written from not only a

hunter's perspective, but describes the author's actual buffalo hunt and in detail, right down to the skinning and butchering - the latter down to skinning the head and emptying the eye sockets, for that matter. As someone who has hunted in the past and may do so again, I don't mind that, but a non-hunter may find this content off-putting. Rinella's language can also be a bit explicit at times. The hunt, in fact, is a thread that runs throughout the book. Rinella starts the book with the hunt and returns to it again and again, touching on different aspects: travel to the hunt site, skinning, portaging (including his life-threatening encounter with the frigid Chetaslina and Copper rivers), etc. From chapter 11 on (about the last quarter of the book), most of the book is about the hunt. Paradoxically, the last chapter is largely about yet another hunt, this time a Nez Perce treaty rights buffalo hunt in Yellowstone, in which the author tries to weave a number of disparate threads together, from protesters to thankful indians to his own thoughts on "letting the buffalo roam." I believe his intent here is to acknowledge the mixed feelings and motives that all hunters have, but to be honest, he is only partially successful, and I'm left unsure of his message (if any). A bit on holding a weeping protester's hand comes off as particularly awkward. In the first 10 chapters, Rinella's focus is more on the buffalo itself, and on American and Indian history, on discoveries, cultural themes, and stories. It's easy reading, in the most positive sense, and backed by extensive notes and a bibliography at the back of the book. This is the content I was really looking forward to, there's a lot of it, and it is well-written in an evocative style. Rinella keeps quotes and excerpts to a minimum, re-conveying his source material in anecdotal fashion. As a result, it reads like a story telling. (His own hunt, of course, is a story in itself.) There are few photos, which left me wanting more. I give American Buffalo five stars as a hunting book, or more accurately, a book written for hunters. I do it with some reluctance, as I would prefer to be reviewing the book for general readership. It is not a book I would recommend to non-hunters, however, and the extensive hunting content will inevitably limit its appeal.

I just finished this book yesterday. A gift from my wife for Christmas. This is a marvelous work. I reflect on this book as an American, a 50 plus year old life-long outdoorsman, poet, and a member of the medical profession. Steve has done the difficult with this book and that is to tie a perfect knot with the truth of his experience. I can say this with perfect candor as one who has walked similar trails as the one he describes. To those that have been there, this book will reverberate and feed your soul. You will put the book down and have remembered, as well as learned. He will give some words to things you have felt, but not said. To those that look from the outside, that have not experienced the connection that all men have with their fellow hunters and the prey they hunt, may it

bring light to them as well. Your life is connected to another's death, no matter how civilized or how abstract your perception. How you honor that death is important to your well being. How you guard that life, as well as take it is the full circle of the survival of all. He has honored the American Buffalo well with this book. Some connected to the buffalo's past were also honorable. Some were not. This book looks to a brighter future for both man and this amazing creature. Thanks Steve. I would walk, hunt, or share a meal with you anytime. dxr

This book, on the face of it an account of the author's successful solo buffalo hunt in Alaska, is a surprisingly good read. I expected a sort of elongated article from Field & Stream, but I got a whole lot more. Steven Rinella, a writer originally from Michigan, was a winner in a lottery to hunt buffalo in Alaska, whose herd is sizable enough to cull through hunting. Only 24 permits were issued; only 4 hunters actually bagged a buffalo. And it isn't a job for sissies; Mr Rinella's account of the trek in to where the buffalo were - to say nothing of his solo hunt, the dressing, and the load-out, deep in the wild and all alone until the very end - is nothing I would consider doing for any amount of money. Arduous, cold, wet, dangerous - there were still grizzlies around - it is the kind of hair-raising tale where you keep waiting for the other shoe to drop. Thankfully, Mr Rinella, and his companions who went with him for the first few days, are consummate outdoorsmen. I would still be sitting in the car waiting for them to come out. But "American Buffalo" is far more than an account of a gonzo hunter. Mr Rinella put a great deal of thought into the writing and content of this book, and I was fascinated. He leaves no stone unturned on the history and existence of the buffalo in America. His interest was first piqued by finding a buffalo skull during a hike in Montana years before; and he went to great lengths to determine the age and era of his buffalo skull's time on earth, even going so far as to taking it to England to consult with a geneticist specializing in buffalo. (I can't imagine the difficulties he encountered getting a buffalo skull through customs.) Along the way, he provides a concise history of the buffalo's contact with man, from earliest human hunters in America to the egregious killing sprees of the white buffalo hunters of the late 1800s, complete with some pretty amazing photos. It seems clear that his sympathies lie with both the buffalo and the Native Americans who first hunted them, while not holding back on the fact that the Native Americans could be pretty wasteful with the buffalo as well, sometimes only harvesting certain parts of the buffalo, a far cry from the picture that has been painted of their using every part of the buffalo - which I always took to mean EVERY animal they killed. As it happens, they did make use of all of it; just not all of each one, all the time. The greater part of the book deals with Mr Rinella's investigation into the age of the skull he found, with the great asides of buffalo stories and history, and he writes exceptionally well.

The final quarter of the book is almost exclusively his personal hunt, and as said before, it is a gripping and at times amusing tale of one man in the wilderness. Even with 21st Century camping equipment, it's still a tent in the woods with bears nearby, and I was on the edge of my seat reading it. The account of the successful kill, and the subsequent butchering, is not for the squeamish, nor indeed for those of tender sensibilities or anti-hunting leanings; but it was informative, and it is also clear that Mr Rinella knew what he was doing. I worried about him until he got out of the woods, and that tale too is a wild ride, but it was made very clear early on that he is a conscientious and thorough hunter who can handle himself and disturb the area as little as possible. I found I could not abandon this book for very long, and was sorry when it ended. Informative, well written, with a wry self-consciousness and an enjoyment of life that was refreshing to read, I can recommend it to anyone interested in a good yarn about hunting that incorporates all aspects of the animal hunted, along with an honest account of the huntsman's foibles along the way.

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