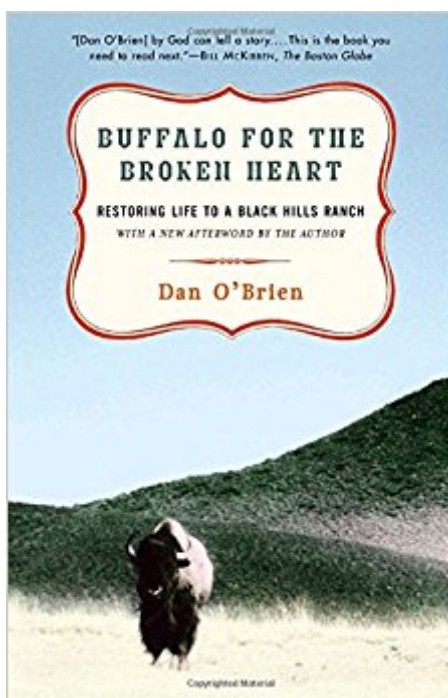


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Buffalo For The Broken Heart: Restoring Life To A Black Hills Ranch



Synopsis

For twenty years Dan O'Brien struggled to make ends meet on his cattle ranch in South Dakota. But when a neighbor invited him to lend a hand at the annual buffalo roundup, O'Brien was inspired to convert his own ranch, the Broken Heart, to buffalo. Starting with thirteen calves, "short-necked, golden balls of wool," O'Brien embarked on a journey that returned buffalo to his land for the first time in more than a century and a half. *Buffalo for the Broken Heart* is at once a tender account of the buffaloes' first seasons on the ranch and an engaging lesson in wildlife ecology. Whether he's describing the grazing pattern of the buffalo, the thrill of watching a falcon home in on its prey, or the comical spectacle of a buffalo bull wallowing in the mud, O'Brien combines a novelist's eye for detail with a naturalist's understanding to create an enriching, entertaining narrative.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Some 20 years ago, Dan O'Brien, intoxicated by the Black Hills region of South Dakota, purchased the Broken Heart Ranch and began running cattle on more than a thousand acres. Though the decision ultimately cost him his marriage and, at times, his peace of mind, he feels a connection to the land and the lifestyle that continues to justify the decision. When necessary, he has even worked as an endangered-species biologist or English teacher in order to support his ranching habit. His engaging book, *Buffalo for the Broken Heart*, details both the rebirth of his ranch as well as himself. "Desperate to rediscover purpose" in his life and disillusioned with working like a serf for

the bank while supporting cows--those lumbering, small-brained icons of the plains that O'Brien describes as "a sort of reverse beast of burden. I was carrying them!"--he made a snap decision one day in January 1998 to take in 13 orphaned buffalo calves from a fellow rancher. Later, after much soul searching and contemplation of both practical and emotional matters, he decided to jump headlong into buffalo ranching. He expected differences between the two animals, of course, but was pleasantly surprised by the buffalo's self-sufficiency. Since buffalo are native to the plains, they are much gentler on the land and are able to find most of their own food and water. Plus, their meat is healthier than beef (and delicious to boot), and buffalo do not need the heavy doses of antibiotics, steroids, and hormones that cattle require--a process O'Brien likens to "locking children in a room with ice cream and potato chips and treating the health problems that result with expensive medicine." O'Brien is a splendid storyteller, and his narrative is a skillful weave of the history of the buffalo on the Great Plains, colorful portraits of fellow ranchers, descriptions of the plains' rugged beauty, and a clear-eyed account of the harsh realities of ranching in this unforgiving landscape.

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

Veteran writer, rancher and environmentalist O'Brien (*The Rites of Autumn*) deftly chronicles his decision to restore buffalo to his 1,000-plus-acre South Dakota ranch for the first time in more than a century. Some 20 years before this life-changing decision, O'Brien was drawn by visions of "grass swaying in the wind to infinity and a sky that takes up half the world" to purchase the Broken Heart ranch. Despite his passion for the Great Plains and "the wild things that share the place," most of the intervening years were devoted to making a going concern of his cattle operation. Then, in January 1998, a recently divorced O'Brien sold his cows and purchased 13 buffalo "runts" from a neighbor. From this initial "crew of ragamuffins" he eventually built a herd of 100, assuming considerable financial risk to acquire the animals and construct eight miles of five-foot-high, barbed wire buffalo fence around his property. O'Brien reflects on how the symbiotic relationship between the animals and the prairie helped return his land to health. In contrast, he documents the difficulties of raising cattle, "sort of ungulate tourist[s]" ill-suited to the harsh plains landscape. Relying on his natural storytelling ability and a gift for character development, O'Brien interweaves his own experiences with a history of the region and engaging portraits of his neighbors. The result is a moving story of one man's love for a place and his desire to "make the land whole again." Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I used to view buffalo ranches in the same category as llama farms, a new age fad. That changed quickly with a little history and ecology of the Great Plains. Great part is that the information spills out naturally in a personal narrative and not even aware I was getting educated (unlike too many non-fiction books). It was like sitting on top of a wooden crate listening to a cowboy's tales of his adventures, good and bad. When finished, I ordered his novel on falconry, *The Rites of Autumn*, just so he could tell me another interesting story that would broaden view appreciation for the natural world we inhabit. It was also good reminder how the American approach is often to change things to fit our values and overlooks the wisdom of how things were before we got there. Life in the Great Plains was one of those historical times. The introduction of cattle ranching was a little bit of "leap before you look" that caused many a financial ruin for early settlers. It was truly a tragic epilogue that followed the slaughter of the millions of buffaloes had successfully adapted to the ecology of the Plains.

I really enjoyed this read. It was an open and honest telling of a man learning the lessons of creating a life on a ranch in the Dakotas - from his idealized vision of how things would be to the reality of how things should be. I learned about the land, the fauna, and most of all the people who were part of this intimate tale of a man whose vision was adjusted but his principals remained steady. I really enjoyed the genuineness of learning about the struggles in cattle and buffalo ranching and the midwest.

This is an excellent book for people that care about the environment, sustainable food sources, or those that simply enjoy reading about the High Plains - a place where buffalo belong. The way the author combined his personal experience, history, and science in telling his story made it very interesting. His concern for the dignity of the animals he raised, even in death is commendable. I enjoyed learning about South Dakota, the High Plains, and buffalo. When I got to the end of the book, I wanted to buy some of the meat he raised and was happy to find his website where this could be purchased.

I had never heard of Dan O'Brien, but while browsing through a store in Sturgis, South Dakota I happened across this book. Although I'm very choosy about what I spend my time reading I decided to take a chance on this book. What a reward it was indeed! This is an excellent, excellent book. It's extremely well written, entertaining and I found myself quickly caught up in this true series of events the author experienced when converting his cattle operation to one of buffalo. It was enlightening

and I learned a lot about ranching, buffalo and cattle, and the environment in the process. Although that may sound boring or like something you may have no interest in, I ensure you the author makes this book extremely enjoyable to read. At times I laughed out loud, at other times I just sat back and pondered what I had just read. I highly recommend adding this to your reading list.

Dan has a great ability to move you into the moment as you read his book. His knowledge of the subject is top notch and helps in the understanding of what is happening in the world around. The humor and story telling is amazing. I have bought 4 of these books so far. I am from South Dakota and live in upstate New York. When people are curious about where I am from I loan this book out. A few have asked to keep the book. I even have placed a copy at the nursing home where I work, and they love the stories when we read from it. Some day maybe Dan and Jerry can make a stop in Owego for a hero's welcome. They love their cowboys out here!!

Dan O'Brien is one of the few who walk the walk, and he tells his story of that walk in an honest, compelling, humorous way. I couldn't put this book down, except to get outside to take a hike and see, really see, the nature around me. That's what Dan's words did for me. His passion, combined with his education and experience, draw you to the same conclusions, and his ability to put his feelings and educated opinions on paper simply overwhelms. I immediately went to his website and ordered bison steaks from his company because he made me believe in his vision for the Great Plains. God bless this man and his dreams.

Great account of the stories and facts that came together as a new venture took shape in the form of bison ranching, having left an old way of life and looking at the environment and world behind. I thoroughly enjoyed reading this and look forward to more from the same author as I contemplate my own future with bison.

Well written expose' on conversion of a Sourh Dakota cattle ranch to a bison ranch, with musings on life thrown in for free.

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