

Big Bluestem: A Journey into the Tallgrass

Annick Smith

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#1764591 in Books Council Oak Books 1996-10-01
Ingredients: Example Ingredients
Format: Illustrated
Original language: English
PDF # 1 11.30 x 1.06 x 9.261, #File Name: 1571780319304 pages | File size: 29.Mb

Annick Smith : Big Bluestem: A Journey into the Tallgrass before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Big Bluestem: A Journey into the Tallgrass:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars
By OklahomaSunshine
Excellent book!
8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. If you love nature photography, OR Oklahoma....
By Cyndi L. Eaton....this is a book you must own. Harvey Payne is one of the greatest outdoor photographers you will ever find. If you have lived in Oklahoma or are at all interested in this area or ecosystem, you will find this book fascinating. There is so much beauty in our state that is overlooked, and this book brings it to life, along with engaging stories of the people who tamed this rough wilderness. This is a book that makes me proud to be an Okie while looking at it. If you have ever been entranced by the stoic, proud majesty of the bison who once ruled the prairie, and are now relegated to wildlife

preserves, buy this book! 10 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A Good Book About A Fine Place By Roger Sweeny Get his book if you are interested in prairies. Get this book if you are thinking of visiting a tallgrass prairie. It is a handsome book. Like just about every nature book, it is full of pretty pictures but there are also historic photos, artwork, and maps most all of which add to the text. The text is substantial. Smith begins with the biology of the tallgrass prairie, focusing on grass, bison, and fire. Later sections are a more particular history of the area: Indians, cattle, and oil. And finally, establishment of the Preserve in 1989 and re-introduction of bison in 1993. There is a lot of interesting information. (And if you've ever read *My Antonia* and been puzzled by its describing the prairie turning red in the fall, check out the photos on pages 161 and 239.) Three things kept me from giving it 5 stars. One: American environmentalism is a not completely consistent mix of science and mysticism. The author has too much of the latter for my taste. Two: The book was commissioned by the Nature Conservancy, the owners of the Preserve, and I felt like she wasn't always telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. For example, bison cows can calve every year. This would lead to the bison quickly over-populating their range if it weren't for natural controls: predators, disease, and starvation. The bears and wolves are gone from this part of Oklahoma so the Conservancy removes many of the young and old and sick. Their purpose is to mimic predator selection patterns, says the author, and that is correct as far as it goes. But the Preserves managers do more. In nature, bison males fight for dominance and the right to breed. This can be brutal. Bulls over 6 years old are especially big and ornery. Losers (and most males are losers) don't breed if they don't keep trying. The book doesn't mention that the Conservancy gets rid of most males. The sex ratio on the Preserve is about 5 to 1 female to male. All bulls over 6 years are removed. Three: The book is almost two decades old. Some of the information is no longer current. For example, the bison herd has gone from 300 to 2,500. Sadly, the hopes for increased tourism from the Preserve seem to have been dashed. We were there in the summer of 2013 and were about the only visitors. Which is a darn shame; the place is wonderful. Pawhuska, the nearest town, was, um, less than prosperous. Perhaps the establishment in 1997 of a National Park Service Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve 150 miles north in Chase County, Kansas has drawn off potential visitors. We actually found the NPS unit much inferior. This one is worth the trip. Get the book and bring it with you.

Describes the Nature Conservancy's ongoing ecological experiment to conserve, study, and recreate the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve.

From Publishers Weekly A committed conservationist, Smith (Homestead) has written a graceful history of both natural and cultural of the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve, a 37,500-acre refuge established by the Nature Conservancy in Oklahoma. When the possibility of a national prairie preserve in Oklahoma foundered on political shoals in 1987, the Nature Conservancy stepped in. The goals were to protect some of the native plants and animals of the only "substantial biome that had not been included in a system of national parks and preserves" and to allow the public to experience a taste of prairie lifestyle. "It is impossible to fully understand America without seeing the prairie," proclaimed Oklahoma Senator David Boren when bison were released onto the preserve in 1993. Smith does an admirable job of describing wildlife, nicely balancing the biological with the aesthetic. She excels in re-creating what has truly been lost—the people and cultures of the American prairie. She writes of the lives of Native Americans, ranchers, oil workers and townsfolk with sensitivity but without undue nostalgia. The almost 200 color photographs by Harvey Payne and the approximately 100 black-and-white archival pictures combine with Smith's text to make an attractive package. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Montana author Smith (Homestead, LJ 5/1/95) left her home in the high desert mountains to study the Nature Conservancy's Tallgrass Prairie Preserve project. Originally a working cattle ranch of over 37,000 acres in northern Oklahoma, the conservancy is attempting to use bison-grazing and selective burning to restore an extinct prairie ecosystem. In a profusely illustrated volume, Smith examines the natural history of the land as well as the impact humans have had on it. Perhaps most importantly, she describes what should be considered a model preservation/restoration project funded primarily by donations that uses cooperation instead of force or intimidation to win the support of local residents. Recommended for all regional, range-management, and natural history collections. [See also Richard Manning's *Grassland*, LJ 7/95, and Marcy Houle's *The Prairie Keepers*, LJ 4/1/95. Ed.] Tim J. Markus, Evergreen State Coll. Lib., Olympia, Wash.—Tim J. Markus, Evergreen State Coll. Lib., Olympia, Wash. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. Big Bluestem is a native perennial of the prairie, which is the subject of this eloquent book of praise. Annick Smith, with the help of The Nature Conservancy and photographer Harvey Payne, has put together an elegantly designed coffee-table-sized book about The Nature Conservancy's Tallgrass Prairie Preserve near Pawhuska, Oklahoma. This is the largest protected preserve (37,500 acres) in the world, established in 1989. The glorious photos attest to the natural diversity of its grasslands, oak forests, and waters. These shots are exquisite: of the grasses, white-tailed deer, purple cornflowers, spider's web, elk, and mating prairie chickens. One of the grand events on the preserve was the re-introduction of three hundred bison in 1998, recorded here. Several pages and historic photographs are devoted to Osage history and their impact in the area's ecology. Smith, who also wrote *Homestead* and co-produced (with Robert Redford) the movie *A River Runs Through It*, writes in her introduction, "You might think of this as a case study

centered around the connections and sacred stories that inspire any effort at preservation." Like Kathleen Norris, who wrote *Dakota*, Smith has written a tribute to one particular piece of our nation (Walt Whitman called it "our characteristic landscape"); it is also a plea to consider its value. "Connection to nature lies deep in our genes," writes Smith. "Humans become human in a world of biological and botanical diversity." The book will most appeal to nature-lovers, to those who love the heartland, and to photographers everywhere. -- From Independent Publisher