

Relics of the Past

By Pete Clark

After months of working seventy to ninety hours per week, with split days off, I was becoming weary. Suddenly I was presented with a weekend off, both Saturday and Sunday. I was ecstatic, but perplexed as to how I would spend two whole days with no mandates for accomplishment.

After receiving the good news, I went into the store's snack-bar to take a break and have a cup of coffee. My friend, Jerry joined me at the table. He said he was also off that weekend. We talked about things we could do during our time off and came up with nothing. He asked if I had ever been to the Sand Hills of Nebraska. I said no, but I was born in Broadwater and my grandparents lived in Bridgeport. We knew each other pretty well, so he asked me if I was interested in looking for buffalo skulls in the Sand Hills, north of Ogallala. I said, "Not yes, but hell yes!" I can't help it if I'm a weirdo.

My mother grew up in the Sand Hills, in a house that had loopholes in the walls for fighting Indians. She started high in school in Alliance, but had to drop out in the tenth grade to help support her nine brothers and sisters. She gained employment in the home of a wealthy rancher who raised cattle and Arabian horses. Her one perk was being allowed to exercise the Arabians. I had always wanted to do some wandering in the Sand Hills of Nebraska and this was my opportunity.

We left Aurora early that Saturday morning. We had a late breakfast in Ogallala and then explored the shores of Lake McConaughy. Next, we wandered through shallow valleys between the mounds of sandy hills and looked for buffalo wallows still in existence. We found several wallows, but they contained no visible traces of the animals who created them. Hair and body oils, lifted from the bodies of wallowing bison and mixed with the sandy soil, made the wallows water tight, creating natural watering holes for wild life. We trudged quite a ways through the Sand Hills and waded through hip deep water in creeks. Unfortunately, we found no skeletal remains of buffalo heads, but we had a lot of fun.

We called it a day and drove to Jerry's childhood home in the Sand Hills. We had dinner with his folks and spent the night there. After breakfast Sunday morning, we left the Sand Hills and followed US 26 to Bridgeport, where we stopped and had a visit with my grandparents. We left Bridgeport and arrived back in Aurora toward evening. He dropped me off at my house on South Wheeling Street and headed home. We both had to get psyched up and rested up for the coming of another exciting day in the wondrous world of retail.